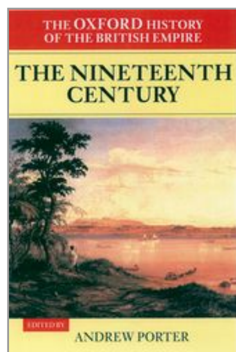

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Great Britain and the Partition of Africa, 1870–1914

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Abstract and Keywords

Africa's resources, of course, had been partitioned for millennia by dispersal, incorporation, and conquest among regional societies; and there were precedents for foreign empire in Algeria and at the Cape. However, this chapter concentrates on the meanings of 'partition' in the variety of techniques used to protect the interests of one power. The partitions in Southern Africa, Egypt, Sudan, and East, West and Central Africa to 1890 are shown. A discussion on control and conquest during 1890–1914 is described as well. Ratification of the 1898 Convention the following year and an agreement by France to stay out of the Bahr-al-Ghazal and Darfur had a significance beyond Africa. Everywhere in British Africa partition 'changed the cultural landscape' and left boundaries which testify to the results of conflict resolution between European powers and between the British and their successors.

Keywords: Great Britain, British Africa partition, Africa, European powers, Egypt, Sudan, cultural landscape

Priorities

Africa's resources, of course, had been partitioned for millennia by dispersal, incorporation, and conquest among regional societies; and there were precedents for foreign empire in Algeria and at the Cape. This chapter, however, focuses on the meanings of 'partition' in the variety of techniques used to protect the interests of one power.[1] British politicians and officials had no clear territorial agenda for the continent as a whole by the 1870s; when speaking of Africa they used the language of Viscount Palmerston or Thomas Buxton on

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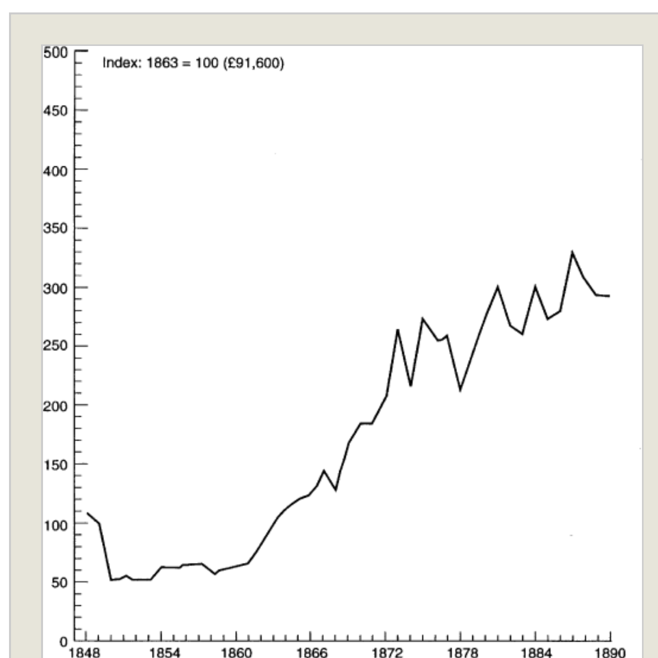
'access' and 'reform' in specific regions. These were seen as components of Imperial strategies for the maintenance of a network of overseas markets and defence commitments. Africa was a base for action against the slave trade, an entrepot for resources, a staging post to India and the East.

Differences between Liberals and Conservatives were matters of emphasis on methods of access and control at public or private cost. Annexations or abandonment were risky and unpopular. Before 1880 the details of regional policies were left to Secretaries of State and their officials, while Prime Ministers Gladstone and Disraeli concentrated on the power politics of Turkey's decline as a buffer against Russia. In Egypt, where Turkey's international weakness had African repercussions, Britain applied the diplomatic techniques used to minimize European conflict over the Ottoman Empire by internationalization of its financial problems.

Elsewhere, Britain applied two other techniques evolved from Imperial experience. One was the plan taken over from Lord Kimberley by Carnarvon, as Secretary of State for the Colonies, to consolidate the fractious colonies, republics, and African societies south of the Zambezi into a 'confederation' ruled from a **(p.625)** self-governing Cape Colony. The other was simply to continue public or private support for the work of British administrators, missionaries, merchants, and Consuls, carried on from enclaves in tropical Africa. Such an African Empire might not be cheap, as the expenditure of West African settlements demonstrated (Fig. 27.1). But in the coastal enclaves low taxes on imports and the practice of stipending chiefs and reformed slavers were all that was necessary. And costs elsewhere could be shared between settlers and the Imperial patron, as a 'regional power system' developed in South Africa.[2]

(p.626) All three policies were flawed—the South African one seriously—because of assumptions about the stability of African states over a period of increasing external contacts. But taken together they reflected British priorities in protecting a world-wide trading system through regional defence and British subjects through treaties and consuls.



Those priorities were based squarely on an evaluation of Africa's importance for British overseas trade worked out in the late 1870s by the War Office, which took into

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account local exchanges and transit values through the Suez Canal and round the Cape.[3] The two poles of British commerce emerged clearly, then and subsequently, as Egypt and the Maghrib, and Southern Africa (Fig. 27.2). In addition, most of Egypt's bonded debt was held in Britain by 1878, serviced from earnings on trade predominantly with Britain and France.[4] In Southern Africa the Cape had a public debt of £1.5m raised in London as early as 1872 and heavy military expenditure at the end of the decade funded from loans. Direct private investment rapidly followed the diamond discoveries and the British colonies' adoption of joint-stock systems of company promotion. British trade easily survived a recession to expand again in the mining-led boom of the later 1880s.[5]

Figure 27.1. British West African settlements: expenditure, 1848–1890

SOURCE : C. W. Newbury, ed., *British Policy Towards West Africa. Select Documents, 1875–1914, with Statistical Appendices, 1800–1914* (Oxford, 1971), Table VII, pp. 621–25

Note: Excluding military expenditure, but including courts and Consuls under Foreign Office for Sierra Leone, Luanda, and Lagos, and special Parliamentary grants. In addition, the West Africa Squadron cost about £170,000 a year in the late 1850s.

Elsewhere, British interests relied on public subsidies for posts in West Africa and the private enterprise of miscellaneous British subjects—missionaries, liberated Africans, traders, and merchants—justified publicly by humanitarian and commercial motives. To support these ends the four West African enclaves—the Gambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and Lagos Colony—incurred rising expenditure over the period 1860 to 1890. This was steepest in the 1860s and 1870s, when their merchants faced foreign competition, falls in commodity prices, expensive credit to African suppliers, and political conflict in African markets.

But at the outset of the accelerated partition of the 1880s considerations about trade and transit at Suez and the Cape most influenced decisions to administer Egypt's debt and to create a 'supremacy' in South Africa. The formula devised by the War Office for assessing defence costs and priorities was applied to Africa by **(p.627)** Carnarvon's Royal Commission in 1881. With an estimated £91m of British trade goods transported round the Cape and £65.6m through the Suez Canal in mind, the Commission found little comfort in any future possession of Port Said. Drawing on a confidential report on Egyptian defences, it concluded that if the eastern Mediterranean were lost to British sea-power, the Canal could only be defended from Bombay.[6] For the Cape, however, a thousand or so colonial volunteers, plus the navy, were judged sufficient to safeguard harbour

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works, releasing the main Imperial contingents of some 3,000 men and African auxiliaries to secure the hinterland.

(p.628) This, too, was in line with British experience of how 'defence' forces were actually used and with Carnarvon's view that Britain assumed a wide sphere of action in Egypt and the Cape interior 'as far as the Zambesi'.[7] The truth was, however, that after three committees and one Royal Commission the costs of paramountcy in the south could not be resolved, as Cape ministers and Natal colonists proved unreliable and impecunious clients. With no confederation in sight, the South African colonies were 'under large and indefinite obligations' to the Imperial treasury, after a series of wars, costing some £2.5m.[8] By 1880 it was well established that in British spheres of interest the politics of influence and control were expensive, and would become more so unless Egypt's finances were reformed to bear the burden of the country's defence under a consortium of powers, and the Cape became a key piece in a regional power system.

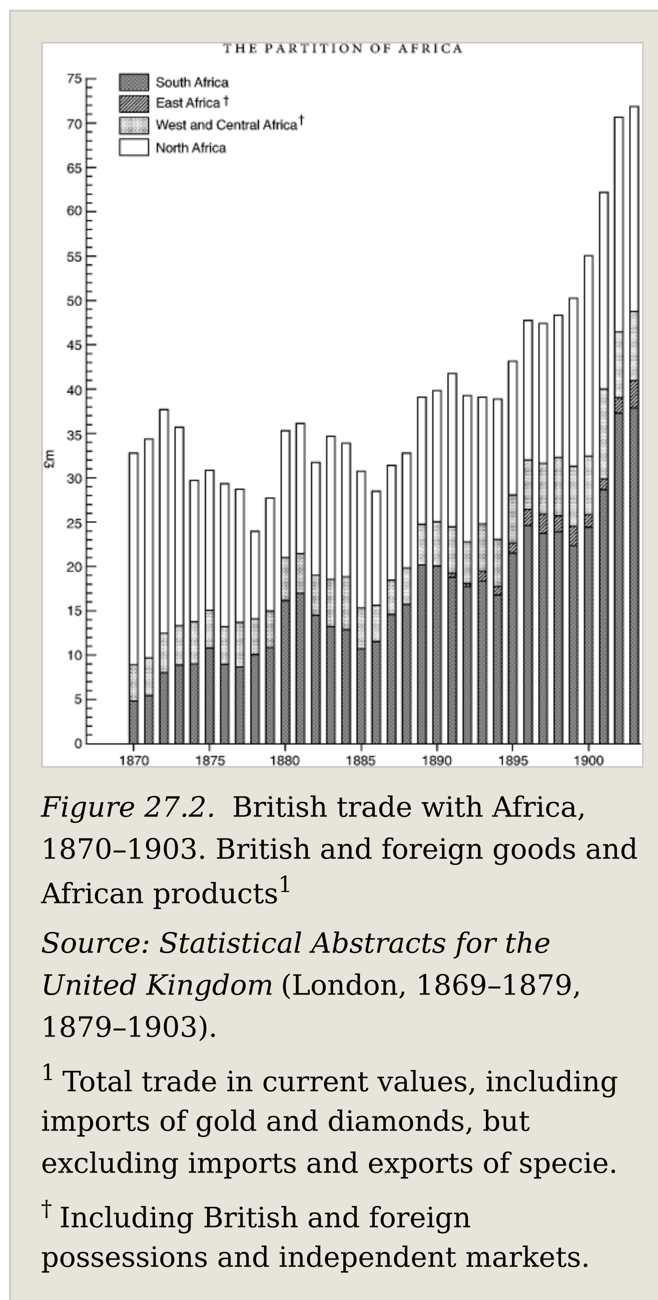

Figure 27.2. British trade with Africa, 1870–1903. British and foreign goods and African products[1]

Source: Statistical Abstracts for the United Kingdom (London, 1869–1879, 1879–1903).

[1] Total trade in current values, including imports of gold and diamonds, but excluding imports and exports of specie.

[†] Including British and foreign possessions and independent markets.

Southern Africa to 1890

The economic, social, and political aspects of partition were manifest earliest south of the Zambezi. Access to resources since the late eighteenth century was conditioned by the huge displacement of Nguni-speaking peoples and by the intrusive settlement of Europeans in competition for land and water. Annexation of Natal and recognition of two Afrikaner states in mid-century had applied a form of territorial demarcation to the politics of southern Africa along the Vaal and the Orange Rivers, but left other marches open to contest, as the brief gold

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discovery at Tati and the more momentous discovery of diamonds in Griqualand West in the late 1860s amply demonstrated.[9] Partition of mineral resources was decided at first by British annexation of Griqualand West and a boundary adjustment to the detriment of the Griquas and Free State. An award by Lieutenant-Governor Keate of Natal in 1871 held back the western Transvaal frontier from lands disputed with the Tswana, leaving open a major trade route from the Cape to territory north-west of the Limpopo River (Map 26.1).

(p.629) But Crown rule was only resorted to when other methods failed. These were of two kinds by the late 1870s: subordination and incorporation into an existing colony, used extensively in the eastern Cape; and, secondly, forms of clientage relationship under the authority of the Cape High Commissioner, used in 1868 when Basutoland came under British protection and was partitioned with the Free State. Annexed to the Cape in 1871, the Sotho retained a High Commissioner's agent, loyally fought in the Phuti rising in 1879, but rebelled against the Cape's disarmament policy. Unaware 'that they had ceased to be under the personal control of the High Commissioner',[10] the Sotho came once more under Crown patronage in 1884, as an example of political and economic adaptation and missionary lobbying which Gladstone was forced to accept as the first South African Protectorate.

Within the two British colonies and the republics other forms of partition of resources continued relentlessly. At stake was something more than demographic demarcation, namely, a fundamental innovation in exclusive 'proprietorship rights' for settlers backed by political sovereignty.[11] Where the lines were drawn on the map was a matter of diplomacy and force. One of the arguments for annexing the Transvaal in 1877 was the failure of a bankrupt settler state to exercise such sovereignty over a frontier of 1,200 miles without the backing of the Cape and Natal and the authority of the High Commissioner. A second argument, recognized in the Colonial Office, was that economic change had upset the political balance between settler and African societies through the development of agricultural and mineral resources, the spread of cash earnings, and a market in firearms.[12]

To deal with this 'danger', the Cape Governor, Sir Bartle Frere, plunged into boundary investigations in 1878 and decided to 'force the fighting', if his demands on Cetshwayo's political sovereignty in Zululand were not met by acceptance of a Resident with jurisdiction over British subjects. This plan collapsed with British defeat at Isandhlwana; to regain the upper hand Sir Garnet Wolseley was sent in with civil and military authority over the Transvaal and Natal, and the Zulu kingdom was dismembered. Zulu alliance with Natal in the mid-1870s, cemented by arms and labour brokers, turned into a partition with beacons and boundaries 'absolutely fixed' in ways that left Cetshwayo

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'speechless' during his interviews with Lord Kimberley in London in August 1882.[13]

By then, too, the Transvaal had inflicted severe defeats on the would-be patron's forces, ending in the compromise of the 1881 Pretoria Convention which defined **(p.630)** the boundaries of an autonomous state, subject to a vague British 'suzerainty' and control of external affairs. A British Resident in Pretoria without jurisdiction or sanctions signalled influence without power.

The new High Commissioner who arrived to oversee this settlement was better versed in the art of patronage politics.[14] A Gladstonian in proconsular dress, Sir Hercules Robinson was at his best in Bechuanaland settling problems of territoriality by 'protectorate or wardship'.[15] In the face of Liberal indecisiveness and Cape ministerial opposition, the continuing need to save the Tswana from the establishment of 'robber republics' along the strategic route to the north brought about constructive co-operation between the 'imperial factor' and Cecil Rhodes as businessman and Cape politician. Collaboration was further encouraged by German imperial intervention at Angra Pequena from May 1883, which made Tswana territorial problems important in Cape and Transvaal competition for external support.

One solution was to make the High Commissioner a patron-administrator in February 1884, when southern Bechuanaland became a Protectorate and John Mackenzie was sent in as Robinson's deputy. Secondly, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Derby, struck a deal with President Kruger in the London Convention, lifting an Imperial veto on native legislation, dropping talk of suzerainty, but keeping a vestigial control on foreign relations. Police action by Sir Charles Warren, authorized by a divided Cabinet, cleared out Boer freebooters from Tswana territory and in 1885 established a Protectorate for Bechuanaland north of the Molopo and a Crown Colony to the south. The Tswana were thus partitioned between two Imperial agencies and partly incorporated into a settler state. The boundary with the Transvaal was confirmed, and an Order-in-Council for the administration of justice in Bechuanaland Protectorate set a precedent for similar extensions of Imperial authority in other British spheres of interest in Africa.

From the mid-1880s the struggle for Imperial influence turned on the same combination of official and private agencies from the Cape, as the balance of economic growth began to favour the Transvaal. In the east, when Swazi concessions to Transvaalers threatened partition of an African kingdom with access to the sea, the Colonial Office came round to Rhodes's view that the Swazi could be surrendered to the Boers, once Tongaland had been taken under British protection in 1887. High Commissioner Loch took a tougher line, demanding Transvaal accession to a customs agreement in return for a railway link to Kosi Bay. As a **(p.631)** temporary bargain Kruger agreed to a

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convention, ratified in August 1890, for joint rule over Europeans in Swaziland, but postponed the customs union.

Gradually, Rhodes's colonial and business priorities to extend British influence prevailed over Imperial reservations. While the Bechuanaland solution might seem fitting to the Liberals and the humanitarian lobby, to Cape politicians rule over the Tswana was simply a means of access to other resources, as well as a buffer zone between Germans and Transvaalers. On this point Sir Hercules agreed with the colonials, and his policy of imperialism through colonialism matched Rhodes's plans for expansion on a grand scale by a chartered company.

The joint venture of concessionaires under High Commission patronage from July 1888 in Lobengulas's sphere in Ndebeleland proved irresistible to the British government, if carried out by 'capitalists in good standing'. The duplicity of the British South Africa Company's (BSAC) application for a charter on the basis of a concession it did not own was beside the main point, for at issue was not a clash between 'imperialism' and 'colonialism', but simply a common search for an effective agency.[16] Salisbury's government decided to admit Rhodes's monopoly into the vague sphere proclaimed by Britain in April 1888 from Bechuanaland to the Zambezi and 20 degrees East longitude, as a pre-emptive move against the Transvaal, the Germans, and the Portuguese.

Another partition of resources turned on the allocation of revenue from trade between the colonies and the republics. A complex system of railway tariffs and rebates changed from 1886 into a search for fiscal co-operation as an alternative to the Transvaal's policy of seeking an outlet through Delagoa Bay. While Pretoria rejected all customs harmonization, the Cape and the Free State moved into a customs and railway union in 1889 as the battle for railway extensions continued, and Rhodes enlisted local support for a Cape Bechuanaland Railway Agreement which the BSAC would finance and build.

By the late 1880s, then, the main territorial lines of British influence and control in Southern Africa had been laid down in a series of contests, alliances, and incorporations (Map 26.2).[17] Where not absorbed into the territories of the Eastern Cape or Natal, the resources of African states and societies were defined in terms of administrative control, or circumscribed as independent polities. The techniques of alliance and clientage, as alternatives to conquest, were widespread and provided the basis of more legalistic forms of Crown Colony and Protectorate. They owed much to the expansive use of the authority of the Cape Governor, as **(p.632)** formal head of two British colonies with representative and responsible governments, or as a judicial authority and negotiator in the frontier zones of British influence. The Transvaal resisted both occupation and informal control, though the Free State was more susceptible to the mixture of financial and economic cooperation offered by the Afrikaans and English-speaking Cape. The northern republic was, therefore, contained rather

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than absorbed, although British and Afrikaner boundaries with Ndebeleland, Damaraland, and Portuguese territory were still provisional.

German and Portuguese factors were contingent to this basic competition in settler and African societies for partition of resources. That process left the Cape, Natal, and the two republics commanding land, minerals, and communications, the major ports, and sources of labour by the 1880s, though they had not agreed how to share out revenue from trade and tariffs. That the small German settlement at Angra Pequena became a 'factor' at all for the Cape is testimony to Britain's reluctance to commit Imperial resources simply to control of territory, without colonial willingness to share costs. Confrontation with Portugal was another matter, as Rhodes's pioneers moved into Mashonaland and the colonial agent threatened to become more belligerent by 1890 than the Imperial power.

Egypt and the Sudan to 1890

Britain's demarcation of Egypt in 1882 as a British sphere by unilateral naval and military action has its origins in both the internationalization of the khedivate's insolvency and the methods pursued by foreign agencies to cure that condition (Map 28.1). At one level the Khedive was right to look on his country 'as part of Europe',[18] and therefore part of the more general problem of Ottoman decline and naval strategy in the eastern Mediterranean. But at another level Egypt's weakness stemmed from the ease of access for European commerce and finance into a state with a patrimonial system of offices legitimized by the Turkish sultanate, and extensive judicial privileges reserved for foreigners in consular courts.

Although 'dual control' through financial officers was of more concern to French investors, the Conservatives before 1880 took a close interest because of the vulnerability of the Suez Canal. Britain's stake in Egypt, as Lord Salisbury emphasized, was 'largely commercial', with 'political considerations' which required intervention in partnership with France to the exclusion of other **(p. 633)** powers.[19] France could not be left to act alone; and Khedive Ismail could not be trusted to manage. Indeed, the Conservatives might well have gone further towards armed intervention in 1879, but for the military crisis in South Africa.

However, the more the controllers-general enforced debt-servicing, the more they interfered with local patronage exercised through the khedive's control of the Civil List, and offended sections of the Egyptian state's civil and military personnel. A rising, educated bureaucracy, owing appointments to the Khedive's family and court or to Turco-Circassian and Egyptian notables, resented importation of foreign officials; the corps of army officers was alienated by economies and became a focus for more general resentment; a third threat to

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European outsiders' regulation of the state debt lay in an indigenous movement for constitutional reform.

Through the late 1870s agents' reports accumulated on the operation of Egyptian administration as a gigantic tax farm, emphasizing the difficulty of influencing change in a system where public office 'from the Pashas downwards…is a tenancy at will' held by intrigue.[20] When Ismail chose to defend this system in 1879, by siding with the army corps and dismissing European controllers, he was deposed by Britain and France in favour of the more malleable Tawfiq, with the Sultan's compliance.

Dual control was reinforced in 1880 by the Law of Liquidation, which eased the situation for French investors and gave London finance a stake in the probity of the regime. From then on, with the Liberals in office, British policy was sharply divided between the necessity for a continued mandate from the powers and pressure for unilateral action from within the Foreign Office and the Cabinet. By the end of 1881 Britain and France were committed to support the new Khedive. As the protest movement headed by the Egyptian Colonel Ahmad Urabi threatened to unite reformers, army, and bureaucracy against the foreign-controlled executive, they issued their warning Note of January 1882 followed by a demand for dismissal of officers. Talk of anarchy by British agents on the spot aggravated the Liberals' desperation, and the Alexandria riots in June 1882 were used to justify the despatch of the fleet, sending tremors through the London stock market. French withdrawal from the naval demonstration left Admiral Seymour free to bombard Alexandria's forts and land 40,000 men under Wolseley, in July–August 1882. In a wave of Gladstonian justification and City satisfaction, Parliament approved the official underwriting of a 'special interest' in trade through the Canal, investment **(p.634)** of 'capital and industry', and protection of British nationals. These motives for the defeat of Urabi's forces at Tel-el-Kebir in September left Britain the task of patching up 'the great disintegration'.[21]

The dual watch on Egypt's accounts thus became a British watch on the Nile. The immediate problem for the self-appointed guarantor was to find a constitutional framework which allowed a measure of reform but kept control of finance with a supervised executive. Lord Dufferin's reports on Egypt supplied a blueprint, enacted 1 May 1883 by Tawfiq, setting up a limited representative system and a Council of State responsible to the Khedive.[22] Dufferin justified this dispensation by his analysis of the channels of authority in a patrimonial society. Egypt would have to be ruled more lightly than an Indian princely state, because Britain had no executive or judicial powers; but by nominating loyal Turco-Circassians, Copts, and imported Englishmen, efficient cadres might be built up and courts reformed. Indeed, British access to the levers of power and

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financial resources already operated in key departments where European officials numbered some 1,300 in 1882.[23]

International approval was, however, withheld, although further loans were guaranteed and a mandate was provided by Turkey in the Convention of October 1885 which, in effect, partitioned authority over the khedivate. Assurances of withdrawal within five years, in any case, divided the Liberal Cabinet on the problem of timing and Canal security. The Mahdist revolt in the Sudan and the destruction of the Egyptian army at El Obeid in 1883 removed whole provinces from Egyptian control and opened Red Sea ports to attack. A respite was secured by a British campaign up the Nile, too late to save Gordon at Khartoum, but sufficient to keep the Mahdists at bay, before Wolseley was ordered to retire from the Sudan in May 1885. Thereafter, the methods of India were applied in the field as in the secretariat: a Nile Frontier Force of retrained Egyptian troops and British regulars was formed by Sir Evelyn Wood, as Sirdar or commander-in-chief. In Drummond-Wolff's phrase, the British stayed on to exercise authority through 'management supported by material force'.[24]

By 1888–89 the Egyptian budget was managed into surplus; a plan for the issue of bonds for loans raised on public lands opened a new field for speculation, patronage, and influence by control of khedival family tenures and the Civil List.[25] Withdrawal became less likely than ever when the Conservatives returned to **(p.635)** power under Salisbury, especially after the failure of the Drummond-Wolff negotiations at Constantinople in 1887. By then, the watch on the Nile had consequences for British partition elsewhere on the continent.

East, West, and Central Africa to 1890

The resources and peoples of the rest of the sub-Saharan continent were also subject to division well before European agencies began to accelerate the pace of change. But south of the Ethiopian highlands, no African state emerged as a contender for regional power over the vast area from the White Nile and the interlacustrine kingdoms of the Great Lakes region to the Limpopo.[26] Britain herself had few interests to defend. On the Somali coast, Egypt was used as a sub-imperial agent until 1884, and the supervision of British treaty relations with Somali clans was left to a consulate. She sought no patronage of Menelik, recognized as Emperor of Ethiopia in 1882, and the Italians were encouraged to occupy the strategic centre of Massawa in 1885 to exclude France.

South of the Gulf of Aden the sultanate of Zanzibar, and the commercial networks created by shipping companies in the Indian Ocean and by Swahili Arabs on land, became the mechanisms for European agencies. The sultanate exercised commercial and financial influence over the region's slave trade and staple exports, but had little administrative control. This weakness made it an easy client state for Britain under treaties which outlawed the slave trade and initiated a rapid change in the credit structure of commerce in cloves and ivory.

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However superficial the authority of Sultan Bargash (and the influence of Sir John Kirk's Consulate, 1873–87), there was a large measure of commercial cohesion throughout East Africa imposed by the Swahili trading system. The general result for British enterprise—exploring, commercial, and philanthropic—was to create trading alliances, sources of mercenaries, and routes to the interior for Livingstone's successors.

There was potential for conflict in this mixture of philanthropy and concession-hunting, as the internal slave trade expanded to meet the need for armed expeditions throughout the interlacustrine region and along the trading networks between the east coast and the Congo basin. Farther south, the Portuguese were seen in the late 1870s as another possible client state, possessing historic influence in Angola and Mozambique but little territorial consolidation. Important to Britain's southern African strategies as possessor of Delagoa Bay, Portugal was an unpredictable factor in the Zambezi basin and at the Congo mouth.[27]

(p.636) In western Africa the major trade routes from the Hausa-Fulani emirates to the Dyula and Mandinka markets of Upper Guinea and the Senegambia rivers were known but little penetrated, although disputed at the coast between French and British exporters. The second primary location of resources lay south of the savannah in the forest belt from the Gambia and Casamance along the coastal region to the Niger Delta and the Congo basin. In this region of specialist investment and very limited control, European factors depended on African middlemen for the movement of goods between forest and savannah, until British investigation of the Niger-Benue rivers, backed by naval protection from 1876.

Thus, British interests were identified with anti-slave trade measures, steam communications, and open access to primary resources in the coastal markets. The methods for promoting these interests were: retention of existing colonial posts; treaties of friendship with interior chiefdoms, backed by 'moderate (continual) bribery';[28] and, more hesitantly, the extension of jurisdiction in the vicinity of British Settlements and in consular courts to both protect and control British subjects.

From 1879 such methods were called in question by friction between French and British enclaves north of Sierra Leone and west of Lagos over expansion of customs for revenues and by indications that the commercial and political system which required merchants to work through African brokers in the Delta and Congo markets, but excluded Africans from the export trade, was under strain. British concepts of 'free trade' were threatened by French protectionism, just when capital restructuring of Niger and Congo firms increased competition in conditions of temporary recession. If the French military advance from the Upper Senegal swept eastward, could commercial treaties with chiefs in the

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interior of Sierra Leone, the Futa Jalon, or the Niger-Benue confluence provide a political defence? Treaty-making by de Brazza on the Congo in September 1880 also indicated an expansion of French Gabon, in competition with Leopold II of the Belgians' International African Association, the vehicle since September 1876 of the king's territorial ambitions. Doors kept open by naval action or by official and unofficial activities were beginning to close.

Britain responded with diplomacy and a search for additional clients. Negotiations with France in 1879–81 revealed that colonial tariffs were mutually discriminatory but were settled temporarily by territorial demarcation in the rivers north of Sierra Leone, leaving internal boundaries open, under the unratified Convention of 28 June 1882. Treaties and stipends were renewed in the interior of Sierra Leone, the Upper Gambia, and the Futa Jalon to keep trade routes open. Thought was given to using the newly formed National African Company as a political **(p.637)** agent on the Lower Niger to counter French companies.[29] French claims to the navigable Congo, north of Stanley Pool in November 1882, aroused further misgivings in the Foreign Office's African department. Accordingly, negotiations to flatter Portugal's pretensions to territory north of Angola, in return for reform of discriminatory tariffs in East and Central Africa, were revived and completed in the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty, 26 February 1884, to block both France and Leopold at the Congo mouth.[30] In only four years the British government was driven to an unwelcome revision of techniques required to defend the concept of open access in tropical Africa.

The change is detectable in the policy formulations of permanent officials in the Colonial and Foreign Offices who stiffened the resolve of successive Secretaries of State and prepared papers on African expansion which Salisbury made a Cabinet responsibility from 1880. By 1883 French pressures at Porto Novo, on the Niger, and the Congo, and the likely failure of any negotiation for a general exchange of West African posts, set the Foreign Office in search of a refurbished treaty system leading to Protectorates. The Cabinet approved on 22 November 1883, and the Consul to the Bight of Benin, E. H. Hewett, set about gathering pre-emptive agreements with chiefs as far as the Cameroons, in parallel with the National African Company's agent, David Mcintosh, as far as the Benue confluence.[31]

A second challenge came from German colonial interventions at Angra Pequena, in South Togo, and Cameroon, and from an attempted cession at St Lucia Bay, north of Durban. Bismarck's irritation at British procrastination in negotiating on South-West Africa was matched by British irritation at the reception given Afrikaner delegates in Berlin on June 1884.[32] A treaty of trade and friendship with the Transvaal smacked of German patronage in the most sensitive of British spheres. St Lucia was snatched back by raising the British flag at the end of the

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year, in the same month as Warren's expedition was sent to close off the hinterland in Bechuanaland.

Despite anxiety that Germany might become 'a South African Power',[33] the Cabinet concluded in July 1884 that Britain had no grounds to protest over South-West Africa, and was aware that Bismarck's annoyance was linked with the Congo and his objections to the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty. The chorus of international disapproval of that device was amplified by French opposition to the occupation **(p.638)** of Egypt; by a temporary German entente with France; and by a general mistrust of Portuguese administration of trade and taxes. Britain miscalculated in seeking a bilateral solution to the problem of international access to the Congo, leaving the way open for Leopold's intricate diplomacy which gained him the recognition of France in return for right of pre-emption over the Association's territories in April 1884, and Bismarck's acceptance of his sweeping territorial claims in August 1884. But if British tactics were questionable, her objectives remained the same: defence of preponderant commerce in Africa by the use of surrogates, with or without formal control through extended jurisdiction. Appreciating the larger danger implied by the Congo-French agreement, the Foreign Office accepted Bismarck's mediation, but reserved Britain's position 'as *the Niger Power*' through treaties and a chartered company, when agreeing to the Berlin West Africa Conference in October 1884.[34]

In the event, the conference conceded this claim, and Bismarck moved closer to the British representatives on the second question of a free trade zone across Central Africa including the lower Zambezi, in the teeth of French and Portuguese reservations. The price was British recognition of Leopold's Association, extracted by Bismarck for co-operation over Egypt (and the failure of the Foreign Office to question Leopold's self-proclaimed boundaries). On the final basis for the Conference protocols, Britain agreed to notification procedures for occupation of coastal territory, and went further than Bismarck required in the exercise of jurisdiction on behalf of foreigners in Protectorates. This was reviewed at length by Crown Law Officers, and provided a basis for an expanded system of consular courts in West Africa from 1885, administration of justice by chartered companies, and consolidation of the British Foreign Jurisdiction Acts in 1890.[35] There was less enthusiasm for the Brussels Conference and its humanitarian aims, 1889–90, when Salisbury's support for international controls was restricted to the maritime slave trade and spirits traffic.[36]

For the rest of the initial phase of the 'scramble' in West and East Africa, Britain relied on the agency of travelling commissioners, consular authority in the Niger Coast Protectorate from 1885, the commercial and political monopoly of the Royal Niger Company (RNC), from 1886, the expanded Political Agency and

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Consulate-General at Zanzibar, and Mackinnon's Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEA), from 1887.

(p.639) None of this provided defence against the activities of Carl Peters on the Zanzibari mainland or French military advance in the western Sudan. At best, an Anglo-German agreement in November 1886 demarcated spheres in German and British East Africa, leaving the interior open and reducing Zanzibari claims on the coast. Similarly, in West Africa a boundary between Togo and the Gold Coast was arranged in 1887 as far as 'neutral ground' at ten degrees north; and a provisional agreement of 1888 settled the Lagos and Porto Novo boundary at the coast. Within that sphere behind Lagos Colony officials arranged treaties excluding other powers from Yoruba states, and arbitrated in local wars. But treaties with Mende and Temne and contact with the Almamy Samori Ture in the Guinea interior counted for little in Anglo-French negotiations during 1889; these confirmed the Gambia Protectorate's boundaries, the Dahomey boundary short of the Niger, ratified Gold Coast and Ivory Coast boundaries, and agreed some equalization of tariffs between Assinie and the Gold Coast and at Porto Novo. Foreign Office and French attention was focused on wider issues of revision of the Anglo-Tunisian Convention, Zanzibar, Madagascar, and the emerging French ambition for a zone from the Mediterranean to Lake Chad.

That expansive aim brought to a head Britain's relations with Germany on African issues. With Salisbury back in office, the period after the Berlin Conference witnessed Anglo-German accommodation at the highest level and hostility among officials in the Foreign Office and agents in the field. But by 1888 Salisbury's view of the importance of the interlacustrine region began to change, as the Congo State and the Germans launched expeditions to 'rescue' Emin Pasha from Equatoria, and the Italians moved into Ethiopia. The possibility that some power might control the Nile sources seemed to threaten Egypt's agricultural surplus, finances, and debt servicing.[37] Moreover, the alliance of Leopold, Stanley, and Mackinnon to carve out a concession in the guise of a rescue operation brought to a head the need for a territorial settlement in the marches south of the Sudan and in Uganda. 'Equatoria' took on a strategic significance for Salisbury, made more acute by his reliance on Liberal Unionists at home and the fall of Bismarck abroad. The relief of Emin in 1888 by Stanley and Peter's continued activity in Uganda in March 1890 in competition with the IBEA, therefore, precipitated a more general diplomatic settlement.

This was prefaced by informal partition between Leopold, Mackinnon, Stanley, and Salisbury in April–May 1890 (the Mackinnon Agreement, 24 May 1890), which gave Leopold access to the Nile valley in return for a strip of territory from Uganda to Lake Tanganyika. But in the bargain with Germany made in 1890, Salisbury sacrificed the corridor and the dream of 'Cape to Cairo' that went with it, and **(p.640)** ceded Heligoland in return for recognition of a British sphere from the coast to the Congo State and to Italian Somaliland. Conceding

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German access through Damaraland to the headwaters of the Zambezi settled problems over Togo-Gold Coast and Rio del Rey boundaries and transit rights on the Benue. Britain's Zanzibar Protectorate was recognized, the German protectorate over Witu withdrawn. The effect was to eliminate challenges to British influence, according to Salisbury, from the Equator to the borders of Egypt.[38]

There was, however, a Portuguese claim to be fended off in Nyasaland, where the humanitarian and commercial work of Scottish and Universities missions and the African Lakes Company had come into conflict with Swahili Arabs along the Zambezi, Shiré, Nyasa trade routes leading to Livingstonia and Karonga. An anti-slavery campaign led by Captain E D. Lugard rallied the missions and attracted the speculative attention of Cecil Rhodes and the Imperial initiative of Consul H. H. Johnston at Blantyre. Treaty-making (funded by Rhodes's BSAC) among the Shire and Nyasa chiefs preserved for Britain the highlands to the west of the lake by the Anglo-Portuguese Convention of August 1890.

French reactions to these settlements were sharpened by differences over conversion of the Egyptian debt which brought evacuation no nearer, by British commercial advantage in Tunisia, residual rights in Zanzibar, and an accumulation of objections to the monopoly exercised by the Royal Niger Company. Of these however, only Zanzibar influenced Niger-Chad negotiations.[39] Salisbury agreed in July 1890 to the Say-Barruwa line, leaving Sokoto within the RNC sphere, and recognized French Madagascar in return for recognition of the British Zanzibar Protectorate.

Control and Conquest, 1890–1914

The 1890s thus opened with spheres of influence on the African continent outlined but imperfectly occupied. The Upper Nile was hardly demarcated at all outside the Mahdist Sudan. In East Africa, as in the West, Consuls, Commissioners, and unofficial agencies were still the principal pathfinders for British influence. If pre-emptive claims meant anything, then contested 'hinterlands' would have to be administered, so as to safeguard the interests of other nationals. From 1890 both the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office, secure in the legal basis provided by the Foreign Jurisdiction Acts, took a more relaxed attitude to exercising 'power to protect'.[40]

(p.641) The cartography of control, as recognized by European states, therefore, implied a measure of government, as well as access to resources; and both these aspects of partition provoked African resistance. From the early 1890s there was greater use of locally raised militias, 'frontier' forces, and Imperial troops, on the South African pattern, both as a response to French military expeditions and as a major commitment to securing territory and communications.

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The assumption, then, that territory could be held by means of clients and informal agencies was steadily revised, to remedy the exposed position of Anglo-Egyptian administration, to repair the damage left by Rhodes's attempted coup against the Transvaal in 1895, and to rescue the Royal Niger Company and the Imperial British East African Company. Thereafter, revolts in West Africa, Company conquest of the Ndebele, occupation of the Sudan, and a civil war in South Africa put diplomatic partition in the shade. Compared with the results of contests for power over African states, Anglo-French 'confrontations' at Fashoda or on the Upper Niger diminish in significance. In the end, the problems of keeping a European peace through diplomacy were overtaken by the problems of Imperial control of African subjects.

Southern Africa

In 1890, with the Transvaal contained and Rhodes in office as Premier of the Cape, British interests looked secure, as Company pioneers moved into Mashonaland and the great 'amalgamator' worked to extend the Cape–Free State Customs Union of 1889. Railways from the south and patronage of Afrikaner Bondsmen in Parliament through shares and land grants would enable the Cape to undermine Kruger, restore the balance upset by the precocious development of the Rand, and leave the British South Africa Company free to expand into 'Zambesia' and beyond.

To the extent that the chartered agency was able to finance territorial imperialism, this strategy had a measure of success. A preliminary partition with Portugal along the line of the Zambezi and Sabi Rivers divided Barotseland, but drove Rhodes to buccaneering.[41] In this way most of Manicaland in Mozambique was taken over under an Anglo-Portuguese Convention of 1891. A concession of Barotseland in the same year created a sphere with land and mineral rights. Rhodes's patronage of Consul Johnston and purchase of African Lakes Company interests turned the Nyasa Districts into a Company protectorate. When this arrangement broke down in 1894 over the costs of Johnston's conquests and failure to endorse BSAC claims, there was a partition into the Central African Protectorate of Nyasaland and a Company sphere north of the Zambezi—Northern **(p.642)** Rhodesia. Revolt and conquest in Ndebeleland led to a further division of authority in 1898 with the Cape High Commissioner, Alfred Milner, which subordinated Company administration in Southern Rhodesia to a Deputy-Commissioner, in return for settler control of a legislature and all resources.

By then, Imperial confrontation with the Transvaal had reached breaking-point. As in other Imperial and African contests, the origins of that conflict can be understood in terms of the Republic's refusal of political subordination and economic integration. The difference lies in the scale of the interests contested by the British settler colonies and the republics, and in divisions between both Dutch and British at the Cape and Afrikaners, foreign workers (Uitlanders), and

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foreign companies on the Rand. At stake were the commercial and fiscal returns from trade, customs, and railways in a gold-dominated economy; and secondly, the rights of Uitlanders to representation. For both economic and political reasons, then, the game involved, first, accommodating the Transvaal with partition agreements in the early 1890s, followed later by intimidation and the deployment of force.

In 1890 and 1893 Swaziland became a pawn in this game, and was offered to the Transvaal in return for a customs union which did not eventuate. Cape annexation of territories between Swaziland and the sea, accordingly, cut off independent outlets except through Delagoa Bay. At the same time, railway strategies and provision of a loan in 1891 enabled the Cape to operate lines to Johannesburg and fix rates until 1894. A line through Bechuanaland reached Bulawayo in 1897. But the termination of the 1891 Agreement led to a tariff war in 1894, as German trade with the Transvaal and diplomatic support increased.[42]

The fiasco of Jameson's Raid (a result of Rhodes's scheme to remove the uncooperative Transvaal government), therefore, not merely polarized politics in ways that aligned Chamberlain, Selborne, and Milner with the partisans of political representation in the Transvaal, but aggravated the strain on Cape and Natal finances from loss of railway receipts. Trade and investment were diverted to Free State lines and to Delagoa Bay, which gained some 40 per cent of Transvaal's transit trade. This change lay behind the exaggerated prediction of the Selborne Memorandum in 1896 that the self-governing colonies would become satellites of the Transvaal, and raised doubts about the political loyalty of the Cape under Schreiner's pro-Bond ministry in 1898. If no agreement on the partition of political power and fiscal resources could be reached, deployment of military power became the final option.

(p.643) In preparation, Salisbury was obliged by Chamberlain and Balfour to take advantage of German insistence on a future share-out of Portuguese territories, in return for abstention from interference in Transvaal affairs, under an Agreement of 30 August 1898.[43] Diplomatic isolation of the Transvaal coincided with German mining capital's misgivings over Kruger's policies in a British 'sphere' about to be reclaimed by force.

Egypt, the Sudan, and East Africa

British policy in Cairo after 1890 presented the two dominant trends of the 1880s and 1890s: reliance on methods of clientage in the relationship between the Consul-General and the khedivate; and an acceptance by 1895 that the defence of this position required military and diplomatic action in the Sudan and neighbouring territory. Both policies stemmed from Salisbury's conviction that security in the eastern Mediterranean depended as much on Cairo as on

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Constantinople, which made Egypt and the Nile prime factors in British African diplomacy for reasons of prestige and power.

Under Baring (Lord Cromer), reserves were built up, taxes were restrained, and Britons, Armenians, and Syrians replaced Egyptians. True, there was resistance in 1892 by the new Khedive Abbas, better educated and with a following from within a nationalist movement. But displays of pride and French competition for khedival loyalty were not a threat. Power lay with Sir Edwin Palmer, as financial adviser, and in Cromer's command of the civil service and the Egyptian Frontier Force. The Khedive ruled, but Cromer controlled the state 'as a sort of unrecognised Prime Minister'.[44]

Although this position came to be tolerated by European powers except France, the stalemate with the Mahdist Sudan and creation of a British sphere between the Congo state and East Africa entailed a partition of interests around the Upper Nile. The hollo wness of the claim to the 'western Nile Basin—as a British interpretation of the Anglo-German Agreement of 1890—was exposed when Rosebery and Anderson in the Foreign Office tried to use Leopold's Congo state as a buffer on the western Nile under the Agreement of April-May 1894, and were frustrated by France and Germany. What could not be achieved in bilateral negotiation was claimed unilaterally in the Grey Declaration of March 1895, as French pre-emptive rights to the Congo state were renewed and reinforced by military missions.

Two other precautions were taken to defend the Upper Nile, by agency work in Uganda, and diplomatic work in Somaliland and Ethiopia. Profiting from the Anglo-German Agreement, the Imperial British East Africa Company sent in F. D. **(p.644)** Lugard to hoist the Company flag at Kampala and make a treaty with Kabaka Mwanga in December 1890, in order to collect revenue and campaign against Muslims in north-west Buganda. In fact, the Company was too weak for such a programme, and the position was saved only by missionary propaganda at home and religious partition in the field to avoid civil war in 1892, when a new Agreement divided territory between Catholics and Protestants. Gladstone and Harcourt favoured evacuation; Rosebery inherited Salisbury's view of the strategic importance of Buganda, reprieved the IBEA temporarily, and arranged in 1893 for a suitable report from the Consul-General at Zanzibar, recommending retention. As the Company moved out, a deputy for the administrator of British East Africa moved in and used a new treaty as a basis for a colonial Protectorate. As a final security, Salisbury's railway from Mombasa to Kisumu, rejected by Parliament in 1891, was begun in 1895.

On the eastern flank in Somaliland, British encouragement of Italian aspirations in Africa, in return for the Mediterranean Agreement of 1887 and support in Egypt, was confirmed by demarcation of spheres from the mouth of the Juba to the Blue Nile and between Eritrea and the Sudan. This left military use of

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Kassala open to Italy; and Rosebery countered French moves inland from Jibouti by delimitation of Somaliland, 5 May 1894, opening Harar to Italian occupation. This cooperation survived Italian defeat by Ethiopia at Adowa, 1 March 1896. But twelve days after Adowa Salisbury set in motion a British reconquest of the northern Sudan, while actively contesting French influence with Menelik and arranging a treaty, of 14 May 1897, to divide Ethiopians from Mahdists in the coming struggle between Abdallahi and Sir Herbert Kitchener, Sirdar of Egypt's army since 1889.

Behind that initiative, which sent Kitchener's army to Dongola and Berber, lay Salisbury's concern at French penetration of a British 'sphere' by Marchand's expedition from the Congo; and behind that episode and others in West Africa was 'the relative status of Britain and France as Powers'.[45] Destruction of the Mahdists at Omdurman in 1898 enabled Kitchener to face down Marchand at Fashoda and obtain his withdrawal. More importantly, Salisbury was able from June 1898 to assert a claim to the Sudan as a joint Anglo-Egyptian sphere of occupation and lift the incubus of international intervention under a Condominium Agreement of January 1899. Thus, both the deployment of force, including naval mobilization, and the use of a client state put an end to French claims to the Bahr al-Ghazal and Darfur by the Agreement of 21 March 1899 and saved Salisbury's political reputation, before a greater conflagration absorbed British Imperial energies in South Africa.

(p.645) Western Africa

From 1890 the practice of extending British influence and control north of the coastal enclaves by treaties and jurisdiction worked well enough, as long as claims were not challenged by African resistance or by French expansion. In Gambia and Sierra Leone, administrative patronage of chieftaincies in the interior was formalized by Protectorates in 1893 and 1895 on the models of Bechuanaland and Zululand. In the Gold Coast, Asante refused such patronage and was taken under a Resident at Kumasi.[46] In the Lagos hinterland administrators extended clientage by treaty with Yoruba states, after minor annexations and a display of force against Ijebu in 1892. To the north-east, Lagos Colony contested influence with the Royal Niger Company in Ilorin; and to the east the Niger Coast Protectorate was forced into a boundary demarcation at Forcados, in return for assurances the Company would not operate in the Lagos hinterland (Map 27.1).[47]

The African challenge to this elementary partition for jurisdiction and control arose from changes in the credit structure and the monopolies of trading systems in the Niger Delta markets under consular authority and Company rule, or from taxation and legislation for concessions in Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast. Eviction of prominent African merchants, suppression of a rising by middlemen at Akassa in 1894, and reform of the Oil Rivers' courts at Old Calabar, removed political leaders and turned more pliant Igbo, Ibibio, and Efik

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traders into ‘consul men’.[48] While European firms declined to move inland, these agents operated networks which rivalled German trade at the Cross River, and challenged the RNC, prompting a formal enquiry into its methods in 1895. For the rest of the decade the Company was on trial, as it tried to extend its control by armed intervention in Nupe and Ilorin and contested the French advance to Bussa. In Sierra Leone the Hut Tax revolt of 1898 warned against imposing the costs of administrative partition on to chieftaincies; and Gold Coast resistance to the Lands Bill, 1894–97, warned that concessions in West Africa might have to be treated on a different basis from those in East Africa.

While treaties and use of force could be adapted to deal with problems of control, the unresolved contest with France over tariffs and frontiers left vague in the 1890 Agreement sharpened after French conquest of Dahomey. Protectionism in French treaties worried British exporters and was taken sufficiently seriously by Salisbury and Rosebery to obtain informal concessions to British trade in Guinea and the French Sudan in Anglo-French boundary negotiations for Sierra Leone, 22 January 1895. But trade rights remained an issue for both sides as diplomacy concentrated on reconciling territorial claims in Gwandu and Borgu with French claims to a port on the Niger.

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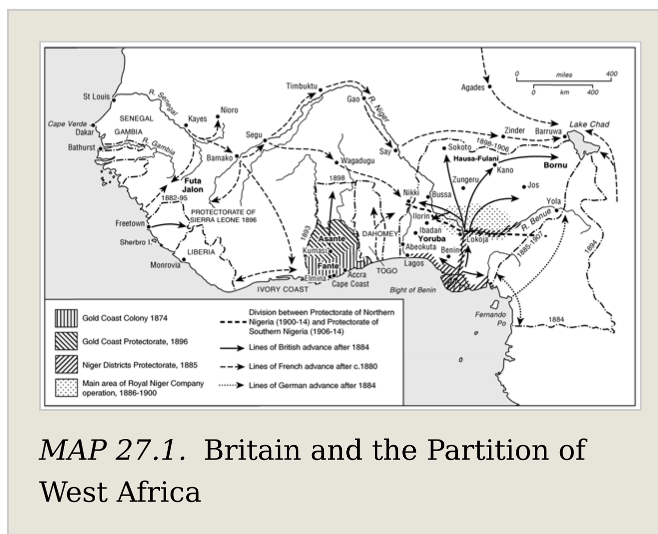
(p.647)



MAP 27.1. Britain and the Partition of West Africa

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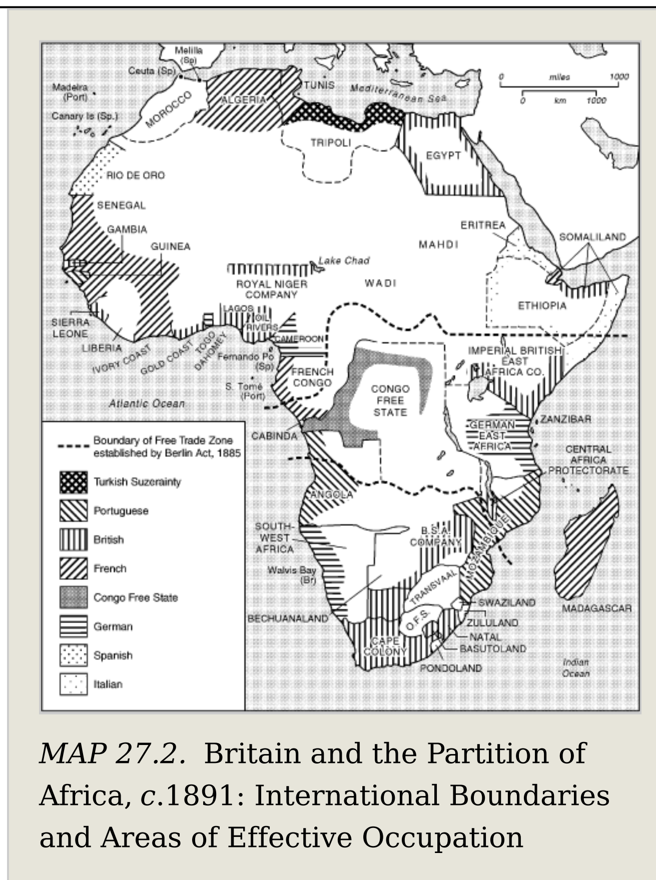
(p.648) Behind this contest in the west lay, too, the problem of Egypt. Kimberley might well have linked Niger territory to the Nile, after the collapse of the Anglo-Congolese agreement in 1894, but not to the extent of withdrawal from Borgu and self-denial in the Sudan.[49] The march on Dongola ruled out any such tradeoff; and the evidence is that while Egypt continued to sour relations, the Nile provinces were excluded from negotiations over West Africa. At most the impending crisis over Marchand's advance to Fashoda served to concentrate diplomatic minds, before public rhetoric became too strident.



MAP 27.2. Britain and the Partition of Africa, *c.*1891: International Boundaries and Areas of Effective Occupation

On the British side Joseph Chamberlain's arrival at the Colonial Office stiffened Salisbury and British representatives on the Anglo-French Niger Commission in Paris and allowed time to build up 'a small West African army' and back doubtful treaty claims by force.[50] Use of force against French patrols was sanctioned in 1897 for the region west of Sokoto, and advances from Lagos into Borgu were military precautions against diplomatic failure. The stakes were raised from February 1898, when partition and freedom of trade on the Niger were linked with wider tariff harmonization. Once this bargain was accepted in Paris, the last arguments about a port of access and the division of Borgu and Mossi were settled, leaving the most populous emirates to the British sphere.

The Anglo-French Convention of 14 June 1898 demarcated the frontiers of the Gold Coast and Northern Nigeria contiguous to French territories, and was complemented by an agreement on the neutral zone boundary with German Togo. It spelled the end of the RNC as a political agency; its tortuous background negotiations over a region of exaggerated worth risked political reputations and national prestige. As such, the Convention marked a climax in British official and unofficial chauvinism represented by Chamberlain and Goldie, as much as British moves to consolidate a hold on Egypt and advance on the Upper Nile marked the high point of a more subtle Imperial resolve in the style of Salisbury and Cromer.

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Ratification of the 1898 Convention the following year and agreement by France to stay out of the Bahr-al-Ghazal and Darfur had a significance beyond Africa. In combination with increasing naval and industrial competition with Germany, **(p. 649)** these settlements unblocked the way to an accommodation with France and an approach to Russia to settle contests in Asia.

Before that could happen British policy survived international vulnerability during the South African War, because of naval command of the approaches to South Africa. By 1900 the isolation which Salisbury had used to advantage was recognized as dangerous in terms of continental naval combinations. Chamberlain and Balfour were willing to seek an approach to Russia through France, rejecting further overtures to Germany. The occasion for a rapproachement offered in North Africa, where France still refused recognition of the occupation of Egypt, exercising a veto over funds administered by the Debt Commission, and where both powers sought patronage over the sultan of Morocco. British influence weakened in Rabat and French leverage weakened in Cairo as Egypt’s finances improved, resulting in Agreements (1903–04), which included toleration of British occupation in return for withdrawal from Moroccan customs control.[51] Diplomatically the Anglo-French Entente of 1904 led to support for France against Germany during the two Moroccan crises of 1904–06 and 1911. Acceptance of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium by Menelik in 1902, and abandonment of claims to the Sudan provinces by Leopold in 1906, rounded off two decades of British intervention by diplomacy and force on the Nile.

Partition did not stop there with lines on maps. The map was redrawn, of course, for some German territories after 1914. But cartography was only one aspect of the partition of peoples and resources. Reallocation of territory continued as access to land and minerals featured in provincial and district demarcations and concessions.[52] African revolts, 1900–06, in Asante and Zululand, and the conquest of Northern Nigeria, resulted in division of authority in both hierarchical and geopolitical terms, as major ethnic units were incorporated into colonial units. The clearest cases of resource allocation through internal partition were those favouring white settlers, which took place in Rhodesia in the 1890s, in Kenya’s highlands from 1902, and continuously in South Africa over a longer period. Everywhere in British Africa partition ‘changed the cultural landscape’,[53] and left boundaries which testify to the results of conflict resolution between European powers and between the British and their successors.

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