

Rise to Power? : The Foreign Policy of the Second Grover
Cleveland Administration, 1893-1897

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Abstract

This thesis explores the role played by the second presidential administration of Grover Cleveland on the evolution of United States foreign policy in the mid-1890s. Coming at the end of a period of rapid industrialisation and national growth for the United States – and culminating in the War of 1898 – the mid-1890s has generally been portrayed as either the end of the post-Civil War era or a precursor to American empire. The second Cleveland administration in particular has often been overlooked by foreign policy historians, but it forms an anomaly in the narrative of a nation preparing to acquire an overseas empire. At a time when much of American politics and society was increasingly in favour of an assertive and expansive foreign policy, Cleveland and his Secretaries of State, Walter Q. Gresham and Richard Olney, enacted a policy which opposed overseas expansion and sought to limit the United States' involvement in the affairs of other nations.

This thesis argues that, confronted by the same changing circumstances for the nation on the world stage which had created the public demand for a more aggressive foreign policy, Cleveland, Gresham and Olney set out a new template for how the United States should conduct itself in global affairs. This template rejected imperialist expansion and proposed a more limited interaction with other nations based upon legalist principles. It also included elements of moral duty and a belief that the United States should be an example to other nations. The template was formulated on a largely ad hoc basis through several foreign policy incidents throughout the term, but its underlying values were present throughout and Cleveland would ultimately propose it to the nation as a future direction for American foreign policy in his final Annual Message. As such, Cleveland's template for foreign policy stands as an alternative vision for the evolution of U.S. foreign policy in the 1890s.

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Introduction

For the last century the 1890s have been viewed as a crucial decade in the evolution of American foreign policy. In the three decades following the Civil War the United States underwent dramatic changes – reconstructing the South, populating the West, building a transport and communications infrastructure, and creating a nation whose industrial and financial power rivalled that of any other. All of this combined to vastly increase the United States’ influence – and also its involvement – in world affairs, a fact that was confirmed by the War of 1898: the moment when the United States conclusively took up the mantle of a global power, demonstrating its military might and acquiring overseas territory.¹ The significance of this moment in particular is undeniable, but it has also affected the way in which American foreign relations in the late 19th Century are studied. By creating a narrative in which changes taking place in the United States and its interactions with the world from the 1860s until 1898 all culminated in the Spanish-American War, historians have tended to use that event as a lens through which all of American foreign policy in the preceding years must be viewed. While explaining the origins of the war has been a vital area of historical study, this tendency to emphasise its position as the endpoint of foreign policy has led to some aspects of foreign policy during the period being ignored. One such aspect is the effect on this evolution of foreign policy of the personalities of the men who were directly responsible for its creation and implantation: the Presidents and their Secretaries of State. While the amount of attention given to these men has varied – Secretaries of State who are perceived as playing an active role in the development of U.S. foreign policy such as William Seward or James G. Blaine have been the subject of a great deal of study – some figures have undoubtedly received less than their fair share. Of these figures one of the most interesting is President Grover Cleveland, the only Democrat to occupy the Executive Mansion between the Civil War and 1912. This relative lack of interest is particularly noteworthy because Cleveland’s second term of office immediately preceded the events of 1898 and contained numerous incidents in the realm of foreign policy whose effects would continue to be felt by his successor, William McKinley. Confronted by similar conditions to those faced by his successor, Cleveland and his Secretaries of State, Walter Q. Gresham and Richard Olney, formulated a different image of how American foreign policy should be conducted.

¹ The War of 1898 has been known for most of the last century as the Spanish-American War. More recent historians have suggested that this is something of a misnomer since it ignores the vital roles played by large numbers of Cubans, Puerto Ricans and Filipinos. The two terms will be used interchangeably in this work.

This thesis will redress that balance by exploring the roles played by Cleveland, Gresham and Olney in the evolution of foreign policy in this crucial period in American history. In particular it will seek to discover the extent to which the personalities of these men affected their actions. This introduction will present an historical background essential to the understanding of the thesis itself, in particular by explaining the seismic changes that took place within the United States' economy and society in the decades following the Civil War, as well as the shifts which occurred in the field of international relations with the rise of new powers and the decline – to varying degrees – of older ones. It was these changes which profoundly altered the United States' position in global affairs and thus necessitated new approaches to foreign policy. The introduction will also provide a brief overview of Cleveland's early life and political career from his election as sheriff of Erie County to his second inauguration as President of the United States. This grounding is necessary for the understanding of Cleveland as a man and as a politician. Finally, the introduction will review the most important elements of the existing literature and discuss the sources which will provide the foundation for the thesis.

Between the Civil War and the beginning of the 20th Century the United States entered the modern age. In this period it underwent changes that fundamentally altered both domestic society and also the nation's position in global affairs. This alteration was not, for the most part, a result of military power; the Civil War had demonstrated that the United States could recruit, equip and command a military force to rival any on the globe, but the rapid decline of those forces in the years following the war bore testimony to the nation's inherent dislike of maintaining such forces either for reasons of principle or economy. Military changes would have some bearing on the United States rise to the position of a world power – and would, of course, be vital to the nation's victory in the War of 1898 – but they were generally secondary consequences of the much greater changes in American industry, agriculture, commerce, and communications. Between 1870 and 1900 wheat production rose from 254 million bushels to 599 million, and steel production exploded from 77,000 tons to 11.2 million in the same span.² Of this growth in steel manufacturing nearly half of the increase took place in the 1890s.³ Such growth was indicative of changes taking place across industry and agriculture. The consequences of these increases were numerous and far-reaching: greater food production improved health and lowered food prices at home, but it also brought the United States into greater collision

² Charles W. Calhoun, 'Introduction', *The Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Origins of Modern America*, 2nd Edition, Ed. Charles W. Calhoun, (Lanham, MD.: Rowman Littlefield Publishers Ltd., 2007), p. 2

³ Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919*, (New York: WW. Norton & Company, 1987, reprint New York: WW. Norton & Company, 2008), p. xiii

with other major agricultural producers such as Canada, Russia, and Argentina in the global marketplace. Lengthy diplomatic battles were waged between Washington and Paris and Berlin over the quality of American foodstuffs being shipped to European dinner tables. Similar confrontations occurred with Great Britain and Germany over industrial products. One result of these clashes was a change in the landscape of domestic politics: with regions the size of European nations owing their prosperity to agriculture, industry, mining or commerce, sectional divisions took on a new dimension. The issue of import and export tariffs in particular became a key subject of domestic politics throughout the 1880s and 1890s and beyond. Many of the changes were self-reciprocating with new technologies made possible by the growth in industrial output helping to facilitate further increases in production. Where in 1800 each acre had required 56 man hours of labour to produce a wheat crop, in 1900 – thanks to mechanisation – it required only 15.⁴ Changes in transport and communications infrastructure in particular had a profound effect on almost every aspect of American society. Between 1870 and 1890 the nation's railroad mileage nearly quadrupled.⁵ This increase allowed easier transportation of both agricultural and industrial produce, changing Americans' diets and lifestyles while also making it easier to export products to global markets. Much of the growth of the American steel industry was devoted to the expansion of this transport infrastructure with 2,672,000 tons of rails produced in 1900.⁶

These dramatic increases were themselves fuelled, to a large extent, by demographic changes: the population of the United States nearly doubled between 1870 and 1900, reaching nearly 76 million.⁷ Much of this growth was the result of new waves of immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe with the result that the foreign born population rose by 86%.⁸ These new arrivals fuelled the growth of American industry: in 1870 52% of workers were employed in agriculture, by 1900 60% were employed in industry.⁹ Together this rise in population, new wave of immigration, and growth of industry brought about rapid urbanisation. Where in 1870 the United States had contained 25 cities with a population of 50,000 or more, in 1900 it contained 78, with 3 having a population over one million.¹⁰

⁴ W. Bernard Carlson, 'Technology and America as a Consumer Society, 1870-1900', *The Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Origins of Modern America*, 2nd Edition, Ed. Charles W. Calhoun, (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Ltd., 2007), p. 33

⁵ Calhoun, 'Introduction', *The Gilded Age*, p. 2

⁶ Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, p. xiii

⁷ Calhoun, 'Introduction', *The Gilded Age*, p. 2

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

The growing power of the United States was not the only factor to affect global affairs in the late 19th Century. While European powers still dominated much of the globe, the balance of power within Europe itself was undergoing profound changes. The unification of Germany and the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War had marked the decline of one power and the rise of another. In the Southern Mediterranean the newly unified nation of Italy at least held the potential to be a power, while in the East the Ottoman Empire faced challenges from both within and without, raising the prospect of the Russian Navy gaining access to the Mediterranean. Great Britain remained the dominant global power, but found itself increasingly challenged by both Russia and Germany – as well as the United States – in terms of industrial output, commerce, and the control of colonies around the world. With most of Africa claimed by European powers, few areas of the globe remained outside the European sphere of influence. The independent republics of Central and South America formed a major exception to this rule, raising fears in some quarters that a new ‘Scramble for Latin America’ might follow the one which had taken place in Africa. Finally, in the Far East, Japan was undergoing its own internal changes, developing into the major local power in the region – a fact which was welcomed by many in both Britain and the United States. These changes in the global balance of power were unsettling to many, as were the potential changes to modern warfare produced by new technologies. In his 1909 novel *The War in the Air*, H.G. Wells depicted a global war in which armadas of airships fought one another for control of the sky, sinking fleets of battleships and bombing New York, London, Berlin and other great cities into submission. Tellingly the major threats depicted by Wells were German militancy and a secret alliance between Japan and China which invaded the United States.

Beyond the world of fiction, however, none of the rising powers – Germany, Japan, Russia, Italy – held the same potential as the United States. In the words of Paul Kennedy, “The United States seemed to have *all* the economic advantages which *some* of the others possessed *in part*, but *none* of their disadvantages” [his italics].¹¹ Clear evidence that this rise was recognised for what it was at the time is given by the decision by the major European powers to upgrade their representatives in Washington to full ambassadors in 1892 – a gesture which Congress agreed to return without debate a year later.¹² The rise was not always a smooth process, nor was it consciously directed or preordained – it was the result of numerous factors at both a domestic and an international level feeding one enough to produce an outcome which was nearly accidental. Blessed with abundant natural

¹¹ Paul Kennedy *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 243

¹² George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 300

resources, almost limitless space to house and feed its growing population, and the security of 3,000 miles of ocean separating it from its European rivals, the United States was uniquely well-placed to succeed in the modern age. This fact has led one historian to suggest that “Some nations achieve greatness; the United States had greatness thrust upon it.”¹³ If this is true, then it was individual policymakers such as Grover Cleveland and his Secretaries of State who were responsible for moulding how that greatness took shape.

The domestic political system which produced men such as Cleveland, Gresham and Olney was a deeply divisive one. The political landscape was divided along lines both partisan and sectional as well as by issues of wealth and race. The legacy of the Civil War still influenced events a quarter of a century after Appomattox both in the sectional divides of electoral politics and in the unresolved problems resulting from the conflict which occasionally resurfaced in Congress, such as the ownership of captured rebel battle flags and the payment of pensions to veterans.

For the Democratic Party that legacy had meant a long, slow return to power in Washington with the Party first regaining control of the House of Representatives in 1875 and of the Senate in 1879. While control of Congress remained largely equal over the following two decades – with the Democrats usually winning the House and the Republicans usually winning the Senate – Cleveland’s victories in 1884 and 1892 marked the only Democratic presidential successes of the period. Partisan divisions were among the fiercest in the nation’s history, but many of the issues at stake would be largely unrecognisable to modern voters. Two subjects which would prove crucial to Cleveland’s second term were tariff reform and the question of whether the national currency should be based on gold, silver, or some combination of the two – matters of little interest to the electorate of the 21st Century, but of immense importance to those of the late 19th. Beyond the two main parties, the period saw strong showings for third parties who fed off the sectional divisions in the country and placed a special focus on currency reform. The Greenback Labour Party sent 13 representatives to the 46th U.S. Congress in 1879 and 10 to the 47th Congress two years later and also had reasonable showings in the presidential elections of 1880 and 1884. More significantly, the People’s Party had a brief, but impressive, existence in the 1890s which saw them draw upon the dissatisfaction of farming communities of the South and the Western plains, as well as mining communities of the Rocky Mountains to win seats in both the House and the Senate as well as several State Governorships. In the presidential election of 1892 James B. Weaver won over a

¹³ Ernest R. May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), p. 270

million votes and may have helped to swing the election to Cleveland.¹⁴ Four years later, with the Democrats positioning themselves behind William Jennings Bryan as supporters of silver currency, the People's Party also nominated Bryan as their presidential nominee thus essentially destroying the Party as a separate entity, but also fundamentally altering the Democratic Party.

Sectional issues played a major role in late 19th Century politics, both nationally and within the two main parties. Presidential elections tended to show a clear North-South divide with Republicans winning the Northeast and Mid-West and Democrats sweeping the South. Elections were generally decided by swing states such as Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and Indiana while both parties saw the western states as a potential future counterweight to their opponent's heartlands. This desire to capitalise on the growing number of western states would see the Democrats repudiating their own president in 1896 in order to adopt a pro-silver platform designed to appeal to plains farmers and mining communities. Such economic divisions between sections – the industrial and mercantile Northeast, the agrarian South and plains, and the mining mountain states – also led to a variety of demands as to how the nation's foreign policy should best be directed, whether towards the industrial states of Europe, the raw materials of Central and South America, or the almost mythical potential markets of Asia.

The late 19th Century was also remarkable for the extremely high level of public interest in politics. The turnout for elections, in percentage terms, was enormous with the presidential election of 1896 seeing almost 80% of eligible white male voters cast their ballot.¹⁵ The United States' global reputation for almost pathological enthusiasm for partisan democracy is demonstrated by the French author Jules Verne's decision to make a political rally – which resembles a mass brawl – the first thing that Phileas Fogg encounters upon his arrival in San Francisco in the 1873 novel *Around the World in 80 Days*. This places politics in the United States on a par with national stereotypes such as an elephant and mystical religious ceremonies in India, and an opium den in Hong Kong. This enthusiasm went beyond mere party loyalty, however, with the late 19th Century seeing a decline in party events such as picnics, parades and bonfires, replaced by a genuine attempt

¹⁴ Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America*, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 568

¹⁵ Lewis L. Gould, 'Party Conflict: Republicans versus Democrats, 1877-1901', *The Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Origins of Modern America*, 2nd Edition, Ed. Charles W. Calhoun, (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Ltd., 2007), p. 268

to appeal to voters intellectually through speaking tours and pamphlets which were published in their millions.¹⁶

For many years this period of American political history has been portrayed as a period of corruption and nepotism, but more recent scholarship has contested this view. This scholarship argues that there has been too much emphasis placed on the concept of the ‘Gilded Age’ – a name which suggests venality, fakery and fraud – and a too ready acceptance of the exaggerations of Mark Twain and the partisan accounts of newspaper editors of the time.¹⁷ While both parties accused each other of dirty tricks – most notably attempts to bribe voters in marginal states – it is extremely difficult to verify any such accusations. Undoubtedly some late 19th Century elections saw attempted smear campaigns against the candidates – Grover Cleveland’s first election being a major instance – but they were neither as ubiquitous nor as professionally executed as in modern elections. The power of the President to distribute government jobs as patronage to his followers certainly led to a certain amount of backroom dealing and helped to support the powerbases of the political powerbrokers in major cities such as New York and Philadelphia, but it was neither illegal nor markedly different from internal party politics at any point in the nation’s history, even if it was taken to a further extreme with approximately 200,000 federal jobs at stake. That said, it is clear that many members of the public were concerned about corruption and nepotism at all levels of American politics and this concern would prove crucial in elevating Grover Cleveland to the presidency.

The distribution of patronage (the spoils system) was a major strength of the presidency at a time when the position of chief executive was still recovering from the attacks against its authority during the Reconstruction era. This low ebb for the office of the president was well-illustrated by the dilapidated state of the White House at the time.¹⁸ In the next decade Theodore Roosevelt would preside over a major repairing, refurbishment and redecoration of the Executive Mansion, but in the 1890s it was at best still reaping the benefits of President Chester A. Arthur’s refurbishment of 1881 and the introduction of electricity under the presidency of Benjamin Harrison.¹⁹ The president’s staff numbered roughly a dozen people and the vast majority of political business had to be done in person, resulting in long working days for Cleveland who was always reluctant to

¹⁶ Charles W. Calhoun, ‘The Political Culture: Public Life and the Conduct of Politics’, *The Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Origins of Modern America*, 2nd Edition, Ed. Charles W. Calhoun, (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Ltd., 2007), p. 253

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 241-242

¹⁸ In the 1890s the White House was still officially called the Executive Mansion, although both the press and the public referred to it as the White House. This thesis will use both terms.

¹⁹ Richard H. Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt, Culture, Diplomacy, and Expansion: A New View of American Imperialism*, (Baton Rouge, LA.: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), pp. 33-44; Allan Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage*, (1932, reprint New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1966), pp. 212-213

delegate tasks to others. The president was, however, still clearly recognised by the public and press of the time to be the national head of state. While the period saw numerous instances of the president and Congress clashing over a variety of issues, both foreign and domestic, the general movement was towards an increase of presidential power and authority, which would eventually culminate in Theodore Roosevelt's bully pulpit and the Imperial Presidency in the next century. Perhaps aiding in this was the ever-increasing workload being placed on Congress which forced it to become less of a forum and more of an administrative centre.²⁰

The late 19th Century was a period of change in American government. Following the assassination of President James Garfield, supposedly by a disappointed office seeker, in 1881, the campaign to reform the nation's civil service saw the passing of the Pendleton Act (1883) which sought to reduce the role of the spoils system in filling government jobs by making appointment and promotion a matter of competitive examination. Over the next decade this process placed thousands of jobs outside the patronage system – something which Cleveland himself played a major role in achieving – but did little to dent the workload of an incoming President since the size of the government was also expanding.²¹ While the federal bureaucracy was still tiny in comparison to what it would become over the next century there were distinct signs that larger and more professional government departments were developing. In 1888 the gigantic new State, War and Navy Building was opened in Washington providing new office space for three government departments. If anything these new offices outshone the departments they housed: the State Department was a relatively small affair comprising only the Secretary of State, the Assistant Secretaries and a handful of clerks, personal secretaries and assorted office workers. Second Assistant Secretary of State Alvey A. Adee served the department for over 50 years under both Republican and Democratic administrations, the majority of that time as Second Assistant Secretary, and thus became both a highly valued civil servant and also a key element of institutional memory.²² The ability of the men representing the United States overseas was also distinctly variable. While the few prestige posts were filled with relatively little difficulty, the task of recruiting consuls and commercial agents was a more difficult one, prompting Cleveland and Olney to attempt to increase the pay on offer to them in 1895.²³ The promotion, when it came, of the United States' key representatives

²⁰ Keller, *Affairs of State*, p. 300

²¹ Richard E. Welch, *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1988), p. 61

²² Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt, Culture, Diplomacy, and Expansion*, p. 102

²³ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, September 15, 1895, Reel 91, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Richard Olney to Grover Cleveland, September 17, 1895, Reel 91, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Grover

abroad from ministers to ambassadors was overdue and indicative of the nation's changing status, but the slow growth of the State Department and the difficulties encountered in recruiting people for its work was indicative of the limited vision that many in Washington still had of the United States' government and the nation's place in world affairs.

Grover Cleveland is hardly a well-known figure in United States history. Even to historians he is generally known for one of two reasons: he was the only President in American history to serve his two terms non-consecutively and he weighed, at his largest, over 300lbs. Such trivia, while of some interest (particularly in the former case), does not serve to throw much light on either the man or his policies. It seems almost obligatory for any biographer of Grover Cleveland in the last 30 years to include in their introduction some reference to the various polls that have been conducted amongst historians in order to rank the Presidents of the United States by achievement or ability. In such exercises, we are told, Cleveland has consistently scored well (a recent biographer describes how a 1966 poll placed him as 'High Average') and yet he has not survived in the public consciousness because the events he oversaw were not significant enough to excite broad interest.²⁴ Cleveland has shared the fate of almost all the Chief Executives of the late 19th Century and slipped into obscurity, but still has maintained a better reputation amongst experts than many of his peers. This obscurity does not mean that his work was insignificant.

Stephen Grover Cleveland was very much a product of the American political system of the late 19th Century. Born in Caldwell, New Jersey, in 1837, the son of a Presbyterian minister. His father's career was important in shaping Cleveland's life, first by moving the family to central New York state – with ministries in the towns of Fayetteville and Clinton – and later by forcing the young man, after his father's death when Grover was 16 years old, to abandon hopes of attending college in order to support his mother and siblings.²⁵ After a year assisting one of his older brothers who was teaching at a school for the blind in New York City, Cleveland headed west on his own, initially aiming for Cleveland, Ohio, but instead finding himself settling in Buffalo, New York. In Buffalo he began training for a career in the law and developed the habits of working diligently for long hours which would be a defining characteristic for the rest of his life. His legal career was marked by dogged hard work rather than by intellectual brilliance, but these qualities were ideally suited to the legal work of a city like Buffalo and his reputation

Cleveland to Richard Olney, September 20, 1895, Reel 91, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

²⁴ H. Paul Jeffers, *An Honest President: The Life and Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2000) p. 10

²⁵ Welch, *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, p. 22

grew. Despite identifying with the Democrats as early as 1856 – Nevins notes that not only were they the party of solidity and conservatism at the time as Cleveland himself later stated, but that his friends and superiors in Buffalo were also Democrats – Cleveland does not appear to have had political ambitions for himself, although he worked as a volunteer for the Party at grassroots level from 1858.²⁶ While he did not serve in the Civil War – justly claiming that he was obligated to support his widowed mother and hiring a substitute when drafted – he appears to have been fully in favour of the Union cause.²⁷ His first political office came during the Civil War when he was appointed assistant district attorney in 1863 and his first bid for election in his own right came in 1865 when he was defeated in the race for district attorney. In 1870 he was persuaded to run as the Democratic candidate for sheriff of Erie County, serving two years, but declining to seek re-election. In 1881, therefore, Cleveland’s experience in electoral politics was confined exclusively to legal roles, the last of which he had held 8 years previously. Under such circumstances it is surprising that he was selected by the local Democratic Party to be their nominee for the mayoralty race. Welch explains this decision as the result of increasing public concern about the city’s Republican leaders resulting from corruption and complacency and the Democrats’ wise decision to embrace this dissatisfaction by selecting a fresh face with a local reputation for hard work and honesty.²⁸ In many ways this first election would define Cleveland’s meteoric political ascent with his reputation as a political outsider of high moral probity being seized upon repeatedly by Democratic leaders seeking for a candidate capable of winning elections first for Mayor of Buffalo, then as Governor of New York, and finally as President of the United States. This reputation was only increased by his actions in office: both in Buffalo and in the State House in Albany Cleveland exercised his power of veto with a regularity bordering on enthusiasm as he struck down legislation which he believed to be corrupt, illegal or not in the public interest. His efforts at ensuring the efficient use of public funds by exposing graft within the Buffalo city government swiftly earned him the interest of state party leaders and on January 1, 1883 – exactly two years after taking the oath of office as Mayor of Buffalo – Cleveland was inaugurated as Governor of New York. The continuation of such practices at a state-wide level won him national attention as well as the support of disaffected Independent Republicans – proudly adopting the disparaging nickname of Mugwumps – who were opposed to the corruption inherent in the spoils system and who played a small role in helping Cleveland gain first the Democratic nomination and then the presidency itself. Running against James G.

²⁶ Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, pp. 44-45

²⁷ Welch, *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, p. 24

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Blaine, a man who – rightly or wrongly – had a reputation for involvement in cases of graft and corruption, Cleveland’s image as a man of great honesty and probity was a major asset in helping him to achieve victory in a close race, although one biographer has concluded that Cleveland’s victory was most likely the result of a schism within the Republican Party and thus “was perhaps less the result of his superior political morals than the result of the machinations of Roscoe Conkling, a man whose political ethics were far more suspect than those of James G. Blaine.”²⁹ Whatever the actual reason for Cleveland’s victory, he entered office in 1885 with a reputation as the champion of honesty and good governance, a reputation that had, if anything, been bolstered by his reaction to a sex scandal that had broken during his election campaign. Confronted with allegations that he had fathered a child with a woman in Buffalo, Cleveland faced the accusations head-on, accepting the possibility that he was indeed the child’s father and famously sending a telegram to his supporters instructing them to “Tell The Truth” – with proof of his developing political instincts being provided by the subsequent leaking of this telegram to the press.³⁰ By engaging with the issue openly and supporting an investigation which subsequently cleared him of any misconduct beyond the initial act of fathering the child Cleveland was able to emerge from the scandal largely unscathed.

Cleveland’s first term as President was relatively free of incident in regard to foreign policy and he himself showed little inclination to actively seek to promote an agenda. He did make his position on foreign policy matters clear soon after entering office when he withdrew the Frelinghuysen-Zavala treaty – which would have granted the USA the right to construct a trans-isthmian canal in Nicaragua – from Senate consideration on the grounds that it made Nicaragua a protectorate of the United States and threatened a clash with Great Britain over its violation of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty of 1850 which expressly forbade the independent construction of such a canal by either Britain or the United States.³¹ He also refused to submit the Berlin Convention which had been negotiated over the previous winter by the United States and several European powers and aimed to guarantee neutrality and free trade for the Congo basin on the grounds that the United States had no business involving itself in European imperialism in Africa.³² After this early assertiveness, however, the major incidents of Cleveland’s first term were a pair of long-running disputes with Great Britain over fishing rights off the coast of Canada and seal hunting in the Northern Pacific, and a standoff with Germany and Great Britain over

²⁹ Ibid, p. 41

³⁰ Ibid, p. 39

³¹ Ibid, pp. 158-159; Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, p. 205

³² Charles S. Campbell, *The Transformation of American Foreign Policy: 1865-1900*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), pp. 101-102

the independence of Samoa which resulted in an unsatisfactory tripartite protectorate over the islands which would resurface in Cleveland's second term. The first term was bookended by events relating to Latin America – a brief deployment of marines in Colombia to help restore order in the province of Panama in April 1885, and the issuing of invitations for a Pan-American conference in Washington to discuss issues of trade which was ultimately presided over by the Benjamin Harrison administration.³³ Overall, Cleveland's first term saw little action in terms of foreign policy, but it did demonstrate some important themes in terms of his personal vision on such matters: an adherence to George Washington's strictures against entangling alliances, and an instinctive dislike of colonialist expansion and foreign adventures. These themes would provide a foundation for much of his administration's conduct of foreign policy during his second term.

Before that second term, however, Cleveland had the unique experience of a four year period out of office. This time saw him living, for the most part, in New York City and this may have had a bearing on his conduct upon returning to the Executive Mansion in 1893. During his time in New York, Cleveland spent much of his time in the company of wealthy, influential men such as journalist Richard Watson Gilder and the financier E.C. Benedict, both of whom would remain friends and confidants of Cleveland after his re-election. These friendships have prompted one biographer to suggest that his second term in office saw less sensitivity to the needs of the ordinary working men who he had known in Buffalo and a greater interest in the needs of financiers.³⁴ This view is debatable on two counts: firstly because Cleveland's Buffalo friends were often members of the local legal profession like himself and so not quite the ordinary working men of America, and secondly because the accusation that Cleveland was beholden to Eastern financiers was routinely levelled at him by his opponents on the subjects of tariff and currency reform who recognised it as a means of appealing to Western and Southern farmers. That said, it is true that Cleveland's new social circle was undoubtedly loftier than his previous one and that, with his second term dominated by the financial crash of 1893 and the recession that followed, he did indeed devote more time to financial issues with most of his decisions clearly more likely to directly benefit bankers and investors than farmers and factory workers. These decisions were almost certainly motivated by a genuine belief that they were best for the nation as a whole, but with little financial expertise of his own it is not surprising that Cleveland relied upon the advice of those better informed on such matters.

Cleveland returned to the White House on March 4, 1893. He had defeated Harrison – and the Populist candidate James B. Weaver who received more than a million

³³ Welch, *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, pp. 178-179

³⁴ Matthew Algeo, *The President is a Sick Man*, (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2011), p. 50

votes – by a majority of nearly 400,000 votes out of a total of nearly 12,000,000 cast. In the Electoral College he received 277 votes to 145 for Harrison and 22 for Weaver. In Congress the Democrats followed up their crushing victory in the midterm elections of 1890 by gaining control of the Senate and maintaining a sizable majority in the House of Representatives. On paper at least Cleveland had a perfect opportunity to enact whatever agenda he saw fit. All that would change with the economic crash which struck the country shortly after the inauguration – although it is debatable whether the fractured condition of the Democratic Party would have made for smooth relations between the Executive and Congress if the crash had not occurred. In terms of foreign affairs, Cleveland returned to Washington without an agenda, but as George Herring has written about the man who would occupy the White House a century after Cleveland: “in foreign policy U.S. presidents do not have to seek trouble, it finds them.”³⁵

Grover Cleveland is not the easiest president for a historian to study. He does not appear to have ever devoted significant time to introspection and he never wrote an autobiography. The closest that he came to producing such a work was in a series of lectures given to students at Princeton University in the early years of the 20th Century having moved to Princeton, New Jersey, after leaving office for the second and final time in 1897. These lectures, subsequently compiled in a single volume entitled *Presidential Problems*, give some insight into Cleveland and his advisors’ thinking in four incidents which he considered to be of the greatest significance in his two terms as president. Even these, however, do not give a complete record of exactly what the administration did and, more significantly, exactly why they did it. Even when setting the record straight, Cleveland was somewhat reticent on the subject of motives. This problem is magnified in Cleveland’s own records. The Cleveland Papers, kept by the Library of Congress, provide a significant archive of letters and telegrams received by him over the course of his life, but is frustratingly lacking in material that he wrote himself, with letterbooks only covering his first term in office. The Index to the Papers suggests that Cleveland had a “somewhat casual attitude” towards his papers – rarely keeping copies of letters that he wrote in longhand, and subsequently scattering drafts of messages, addresses, proclamations, and executive orders by using them to comply with requests for autographs.³⁶ The Index also describes his handwriting as “neat but not easily legible” which might be considered generous. More significantly, Cleveland preferred to conduct government business with Members of Congress and his Cabinet in face-to-face discussions, and the papers are

³⁵ Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, p. 927

³⁶ *Index to Grover Cleveland Papers*, (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1965), p. v

replete with tantalising references to conversations of which no record has been kept. The surprising result of this is that it is often easier to discern the motives and reasoning behind the administration's actions for events which took place during the summer months when Cleveland – in common with all members of Washington's political community – fled the stifling heat of the city for the cooler climes (and better fishing) of Grey Gables, his home on the Massachusetts coast. During these times when Cleveland was handling governmental matters – which, with Congress out of session, were usually related to foreign affairs – at arm's length, the need for clarity of understanding meant that both Cleveland and his Secretaries of State tended to express themselves much more fully (and also more frequently) in their letters than they would when both were in Washington.

This thesis is founded upon an acceptance of the hypothesis that American foreign policy evolved in the late 19th Century as a result of the development of the nation's industry and commerce which changed its position in relation to other world powers and expanded its contact with the wider world. This thesis also seeks, however, to explore the role played by individual policymakers in that evolutionary process and, as such, argues that there are limits to the applicability of the industrial development hypothesis. A failure to acknowledge such limits has been a recurring flaw amongst the historians who have espoused it as a theory dating back to the 1920s. This has consequently resulted in an over-emphasis of the role played by American business in both the conduct of individual events and the formulation of grand policy as well as a tendency to downplay the impact of policymakers. While different historians have interpreted the impact of these economic influences on U.S. foreign policy in different ways, the basic theory is that first expounded by Charles and Mary Beard in the weighty narrative history of the United States, *The Rise of American Civilization*, first published in 1927. Beard argues that the United States provided a perfect situation (without royalty, aristocracy or ancient and wealthy clergy) for the growth of a class of industrial businessmen.³⁷ With the massive development of both industry and finance following the Civil War this group of businessmen amassed great wealth and began to invest overseas, creating for themselves a period of stability that contrasted with the fractured and disjointed politics between the 1860s and 1890s.³⁸ Thus Beard creates an image of a United States that came to be dominated by economic issues such as tariff politics.³⁹ In particular he argues that the President's power to manage foreign relations was a great aid to business and that the responses to the major issues in

³⁷ Charles A. & Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization*, Vol. II, pp. 170-171 (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1927, reprint New York: The MacMillan Company, 1954) pp. 170-171

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 176-177, 195-196, 198, 287

³⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 325-326

American foreign affairs during the period such as the Hawaiian revolution of 1892 and the Cuban revolution of 1895 were rooted in the demands of American business.⁴⁰ Thus the economic approach to explaining the evolution of American foreign policy emphasised the power of business over that of the President from the beginning.

Beard's theories fell out of favour in the 1940s, but were revived in the late 1950s and 1960s by a new generation of historians referred to as the Wisconsin School, most notably William Appleman Williams and Walter LaFeber. Probably Williams' most influential work of the period was *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, first published in 1959 and expanded in a second edition in 1962. This work, written in the aftermath of the Communist revolution in Cuba, argues that the foreign policy of the United States has been consistently based upon the desire to acquire and maintain markets for its manufactured goods as demanded by the business community. Williams traces the roots of this policy back to the 1890s when, he suggests, the United States faced a major internal crisis brought about by the closing of the frontier and increasing labour unrest and was forced to abandon Jacksonian laissez-faire government for a larger, more active government better suited to work on behalf of a new syndicalist system characterised by the rise of corporations in the business world.⁴¹ A key part of this change, Williams argues, was the widespread acceptance among the ruling elite that the best way to remove "the specter of chaos and revolution" was through an expansionist foreign policy.⁴² He even goes so far as to argue that Grover Cleveland can be seen as the President who set the tone for the United States' non-colonial imperial expansion in the twentieth century.⁴³

A decade after he first published *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, Williams published *The Roots of the Modern American Empire*, a work solely based around the late 19th Century, first published in 1969. This work takes the theories of Beard that had since been revised by Williams himself and others such as Walter LaFeber and extends them in an exhaustive study of the effect of agriculture on United States foreign policy in the late 19th Century. In particular this work focuses upon the increasing political awareness of farming communities during the period, culminating in the rise of the Populist movement during the late 1880s and the eventual merger of the Populists with the Democratic Party in 1896. As an exercise in historical research *The Roots of the Modern American Empire* is an outstanding piece of work, but it suffers severely from overstating its case. Williams produces reams of evidence to document the growth of American agricultural production

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 358, 369

⁴¹ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, (New York: Dell Publishing, 1962) p. 21

⁴² Ibid, pp.21-22

⁴³ Ibid, p. 23

after the Civil War and the importance of those products to exports during this period, but he fails to make a convincing case to show that the agricultural communities were actually able to influence policy during this time, while his insistence upon seemingly tracing every major foreign policy event of the 1890s back to the influence of the agricultural community does strain belief.⁴⁴ In particular, Williams over-emphasises the influence of the agriculturalists at the expense of marginalising other important groups including, strangely, the industrial workers that he had noted as an, admittedly inadvertent, influence on foreign policy makers in *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*. Ultimately, *The Roots of the Modern American Empire* is an excellent resource for the study of American agriculture and its place in global trade in the late 19th Century, but does not provide a convincing theory for the foundations of U.S. foreign policy during the period.

Williams' work of the 1950s was built upon by Walter LaFeber, also from the University of Wisconsin, who published *The New Empire* in 1963. Whether one agrees with its theory or not this work is still a definitive study of the period, basing itself in particular around the second Cleveland administration. The book sets out a case for an interpretation of American foreign policy as being dominated by business interests and the need for foreign markets covering successive administrations. Its main weakness is a tendency to emphasise the role of American businesses in the creation of foreign policy - a problem exemplified by its extensive use of business journals of the period for evidence - with the role of individual policymakers being consequently overlooked. It might also be argued that LaFeber is at times guilty of overstating his case and attributing events and policies to the industrial developments that were only tangentially related. Perhaps tellingly, his later work entitled *The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913* presents a rather more measured argument and in particular places a far greater emphasis on the influence of competing European powers in the Americas, the Pacific and the Far East.⁴⁵ In both *The New Empire* and *The American Search for Opportunity* LaFeber does discuss the influence of certain individuals on policy, but – with a few exceptions such as William H. Seward and James G. Blaine – these tend to be wealthy industrialists and intellectual exponents of an expansionist foreign policy rather than those politicians whose role it was to actually formulate and execute that policy.

This economic interpretation of United States foreign policy has been challenged by some historians. David M. Pletcher published an article in *Diplomatic History* in Spring, 1981, warning of the dangers of placing too much faith in politicians' rhetoric.

⁴⁴ William Appleman Williams, *The Roots of the Modern American Empire*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1970) pp. 35-41

⁴⁵ Walter LaFeber, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, Vol. II: The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 72

Pletcher argues that all the major politicians of the late 19th Century made speeches declaring the need for foreign markets for American produce, but not all of them made significant actions to achieve this goal. In particular he identifies Gresham and Olney as examples of politicians whose support for trade expansion was expressed far more in words than it was in deeds.⁴⁶ Pletcher's own view is that the late 19th Century was a time of experimentation in policy necessitated by the presence of numerous competing political groups that made consensus impossible to achieve. This view certainly merits further study.

While Beard's theories initially received broad attention they declined in influence in the 1940s before their revival by the Wisconsin School. At this time perhaps the dominant interpretation of the late 19th Century was that put forward by Julius W. Pratt. Pratt's theory suggests that the move to global power status came about because of the proliferation of new ideas of nationalism and imperialism propagated by significant individuals such as Capt. Alfred T. Mahan and the growing influence of social Darwinism and Anglo-Saxonism as argued by Josiah Strong, John Fiske and Prof. John W. Burgess.⁴⁷ Pratt also suggests that these ideas of nationalism and imperialism were enflamed by the work of the so-called 'Yellow Press' – sensationalist journalism being published by William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer – which helped create a public desire for war in 1898.⁴⁸ The difficulty with this theory is proof. It is certainly possible that the work of men such as Mahan and Frederick Jackson Turner – whose 'Frontier Thesis' argued that the USA needed to keep expanding in order to maintain its vitality – did have an effect on policymakers, but there is no way to quantify that effect, not to mention the dangers of ignoring the preconceived ideas of policymakers themselves. As with the economic theory (which Pratt acknowledges in the 1965 edition of his *A History of United States Foreign Policy*, but argues was only of importance after 1898) the argument that new ideas and their exponents were a decisive force in changing foreign policy fails for its tendency to downplay the role of those men who actually made that policy by suggesting they were merely foils for the ideas of others.⁴⁹

One of the most influential developments in the field of late 19th Century foreign policy historiography in the 1950s was Richard Hofstadter's proposition that the United States suffered from what has come to be termed a 'Psychic Crisis' in the mid-1890s. This

⁴⁶ David M. Pletcher, 'Rhetoric and Results: A Pragmatic View of American Economic Expansion, 1865-98,' *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 5, No. 2, (1981) pp. 93-105

⁴⁷ Julius W. Pratt, *A History of United States Foreign Policy*, 2nd Edition, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965) pp. 202-203

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 207

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 204

theory, first proposed in a paper entitled ‘Cuba, the Philippines, and Manifest Destiny’ in 1951 and later published in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* in 1965, argues that an abrupt change in United States foreign policy characterised by the Spanish-American War came about as a result of a variety of issues that beset the USA in the 1890s. Hofstadter highlights the depression of 1893, the fears of social disruption brought about by the rise of Populism, the growth of corporatism in business and the subsequent concerns for the future of the individual entrepreneur, civic corruption in cities, new waves of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, and the worries that the closing of the frontier heralded the end of free land in the West, the result of which was a fresh interest in reform movements such as Populism and Socialism and a new mood of national assertion, aggression and expansion.⁵⁰ He also argues that the revival of European imperialism overseas acted to make Americans question their nation’s place in the world and even demand that the United States acquire colonies in order to keep it from being overwhelmed by its rivals. Hofstadter too suggests that the ‘Yellow Press’ were influential on public opinion, theorising that the public were made more receptive to sensationalist journalism by the effects of the psychic crisis.⁵¹ Once again the difficulty with the ‘Psychic Crisis’ theory is proving it (a fact that Hofstadter himself acknowledged) and, while it was influential at the time it was produced, the theory is now generally dismissed by historians as an over-simplification at best and possibly even a complete misinterpretation of a period of increasing American confidence and assertiveness.⁵²

Another important product of the early 1960s was Ernest R. May’s *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power*, published in 1961. This work’s great strength is its willingness to examine a wide variety of potential motivations – including the influence of the ideas put forward by Mahan, Strong and Fiske, and the desire for markets – without seeking to establish a radical new theory of its own.⁵³ Indeed, May ultimately concludes that policymakers of the 1890s (particularly Cleveland and McKinley) were overwhelmingly concerned with domestic issues and that there had been no specific motivation for the growth of American imperialism, rather that imperialism had come about because events outside America had forced the United States to interact with the world.⁵⁴ May also strives to place the actions of the United States in an international context rather than attempt to study American foreign policy in isolation. To this end May

⁵⁰ Richard Hofstadter, ‘Cuba, the Philippines, and Manifest Destiny,’ *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, (London: Johnathan Cape, 1966) pp. 148-150

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 158

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 152; Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation: America and the World, 1600-1898*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2006) p. 384

⁵³ May, *Imperial Democracy*, pp. 8-9

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 269-270

begins by examining how international attitudes towards the United States changed as the nation grew in power after the 1830s and this approach is maintained with an entire chapter devoted to examining British actions during the Venezuelan Border Dispute of 1895.⁵⁵ May also presents a picture of an American people showing increasing awareness of the world around them, particularly in a humanitarian sense as displayed in the angry response to the massacre of Armenian Christians in the Ottoman Empire in 1894 and 1895.⁵⁶ This is an important theme that is still being explored nearly 50 years after *Imperial Democracy's* publication through the work of Frank Ninkovich among others.⁵⁷

While they may have expounded differing theories about the key motivating factors for American foreign policy in the 1890s, Hofstadter, Williams and LaFeber all agree that the mid-1890s – and possibly 1898 itself – marks a dramatic turning point in the United States' interaction with the world: a change from isolationism to imperialism and the start of America's move to global superpower status. This view was not universally held by 1960s scholars, however, and would come under further attack in the 1970s. In his 1962 work *The Growth of American Foreign Policy, A History*, Richard W. Leopold clearly differentiated the chapters dealing with the 1890s and the growth of American Imperialism in a section covering the years between 1889 and 1905. This choice of dates is emblematic of his approach to late-19th Century American diplomatic history, a period, he argues, when continuity was just as important as dramatic change. Leopold suggests that the United States was, in some respects at least, a world power long before the 1890s and interacted with the world politically through its ability to interfere with the European balance of power, morally through the work of its missionaries, and commercially through its produce and its merchant navy.⁵⁸ Rather than revolutionary change Leopold highlights the continuities that can be seen in American foreign policy in the 1890s which saw the desire for neutrality and a belief in the usefulness of the Monroe Doctrine maintained while even the venerable policy of isolationism continued to hold strong support.⁵⁹ Most interestingly Leopold does not see the United States' power and influence in the world changing in the 1890s so much as he sees the global definition of what was required to be considered a world power undergo a dramatic alteration as the rapid acquisition of colonies and the burgeoning system of European alliances changed the nature of international

⁵⁵ Ibid, pp. 3-6, 43-55

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 27-29

⁵⁷ Frank Ninkovich, *Global Dawn: The Cultural Foundation of American Internationalism, 1865-1890*, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2009)

⁵⁸ Richard W. Leopold, *The Growth of American Foreign Policy, A History*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962) p. 105

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 106

diplomacy.⁶⁰ Under these circumstances, Leopold suggests, the increasing assertiveness of the United States in the late 1890s was merely a natural response to changing conditions around the world. This is not to say that Leopold simply sees the Spanish-American War and its consequences as a natural progression of American policy, indeed he states that McKinley “opened a new era in American diplomacy,” but he does suggest that many of the subsequent developments would have been a matter of inevitable progression regardless of who occupied the White House.⁶¹

In relation to the aims of this work perhaps the most important book published in the 1960s was John A.S. Grenville and George Berkley Young’s *Politics, Strategy and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873-1917*, which first appeared in 1966. This book forms a notable departure from the more thematic approaches of previous historians by consciously setting out to provide a biographical study of some of the key figures in U.S. foreign policy in the late 19th Century rather than a pure narrative history. Grenville and Young acknowledge the limitations imposed by such an approach, but argue that their method provides a necessary counterweight to the natural inclination of historians to attempt to impose order upon irrational events and thus ignore the role played by the personal prejudices and idiosyncrasies of the individuals who actually created and executed foreign policy.⁶² The work itself covers a broad span beginning with the role played by Admiral Stephen B. Luce in the creation of the new Navy (and thus arguing against the heavy emphasis placed by previous historians upon the work of Alfred T. Mahan) and ending with the influence of Admiral George Dewey on the evolution of U.S. foreign policy in the first decades of the 20th Century. The book focuses upon the period between Grover Cleveland’s first inauguration in 1885 and the War of 1898 with an emphasis on Cleveland’s second term which is covered in three chapters. Considering this strong focus on Cleveland’s administrations it is perhaps surprising that Grenville and Young seem to struggle to define Cleveland’s character and motivations; their discussion of the decision not to push forward with Hawaiian annexation in 1893 declares that historians have been too ready to accept Cleveland’s explanation that considerations of justice and honour forbade him from annexing the islands only to state “Justice and honor weighed heavily with Cleveland and Gresham.”⁶³ This is perhaps overly critical of a laudable effort to examine Cleveland’s record sceptically, but it is indicative of a problem

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 105

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 107

⁶² J.A.S. Grenville and George B. Young, *Politics, Strategy and American Diplomacy: Studies in Foreign Policy, 1873-1917*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966) p. xi

⁶³ Ibid, p. 110

facing many scholars of Cleveland's presidencies: the difficulty in indentifying the true character of an enigmatic and deeply reserved man.

Ultimately, Grenville and Young define Cleveland as a pragmatist who relied heavily upon the advice of his Secretaries of State, granting these men a powerful role in the formulation of policy.⁶⁴ This being so, their definitions of these men also becomes of great importance. Walter Quintin Gresham is described as "a man of intelligence and ability", but one who was overmatched by the Hawaii controversy; his handling of the naval intervention in Brazil in 1894 receives praise as does his cautious approach to the requests for aid from Venezuela that would culminate in the Venezuelan Border Dispute under his successor.⁶⁵ By contrast Richard Olney is identified as more perceptive than Gresham - as identified by his warning to Gresham that restoring the Hawaiian Queen to her throne was a near impossibility - but also as more misguided with much of the July 20th dispatch to Great Britain that formed the heart of the Venezuelan Border Dispute dismissed as an unfortunate failure on Olney's part to comprehend the true facts of the matter.⁶⁶ All of these character definitions warrant further investigation both as to their veracity and the implications they carry for future scholarship, but it is unfortunate that *Politics, Strategy and American Diplomacy* has not been followed by similar studies.

The 1970s saw a reaction from scholars to the theorising of the 1950s and 1960s. Several historians, dissatisfied with the established story of a dramatic change in American foreign policy aims and methods brought about by economic expansion, a 'Psychic Crisis' or the growth of a racist, evangelising belief in the United States' civilising mission, began to pose a variety of alternative explanations for the events of the late-19th Century. In 1975 Robert L. Beisner produced *From the Old Diplomacy to the New, 1865-1900* in which he proposed a range of variations on the traditional themes. The first of these was to extend the experimentation previously shown by Leopold over exactly when the crucial change in United States' foreign policy took place. Beisner does not reject the theory that a dramatic change occurred in American foreign policy in the 1890s, but he argues that it occurred significantly earlier than most historians suggest. Where even scholars such as Leopold and LaFeber saw events such as the Venezuelan Border Dispute more as indicators that a profound change was imminent, Beisner argues that "by the mid-nineties at the latest, American policymakers had begun to see foreign affairs from a new perspective, to confront the international world with new assumptions and concerns, and to seek new

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 159

⁶⁵ Ibid, pp. 104, 118, 123

⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 111, 163

objectives.”⁶⁷ He argues that this change came about as a result of the economic changes in the United States which granted the nation considerably greater power and influence, but not the knowledge of how to wield that power.⁶⁸ In another break with the scholarly tradition of a dramatic change in foreign policy occurring in 1898, Beisner sees the developments of the late-19th Century as being the natural result of growing power allowing “the profoundly imperialistic implications of the American Mission” which he argues had held the disparate, immigrant-based, population of the United States together for much of the 19th Century - to emerge.⁶⁹ Beisner sees value in the theory that foreign policy was dictated by economic factors, but argues that it can only explain some small episodes, rather than the entirety of United States foreign policy at this time; in his view the business community was too divided to enact such a policy while the politicians did not have either the expertise or the will.⁷⁰ He convincingly asserts that Presidents and their Secretaries of State showed only sporadic interest in foreign markets while Congress raised tariffs and rejected reciprocity treaties, all without significant protest from the business community which was more interested in the domestic market and Europe.⁷¹

Having set out an interesting base for a new theory describing the development of American foreign policy in the 1890s it is somewhat disappointing that Beisner falls back upon the old theories of change being brought about by a social malaise (the ‘Psychic Crisis’ in a new guise), economic crisis, and new threats to American markets. This does not mean that Beisner merely parrots the words of his predecessors, addressing these old theories in new ways. His assessment of the social malaise as opening American minds to new ideas in replacement of the old ones that had failed them, in combination with the revolution in technology which saw improved communications grant greater access to the world and advancing naval technology erode the USA’s traditional defensive isolation, is of some interest even if it does still force us to rely upon the ‘Psychic Crisis’ theory.⁷² Similarly Beisner’s mention of the impact of the passing of the Civil War generation from the political scene – and thus the removal of a generation who were instinctively opposed to war and an adventurous foreign policy – raises some valuable questions.⁷³ This investigation of a variety of motivating factors is perhaps best displayed in the discussion of the impact of key figures such as Mahan, Strong and Brooks Adams. Beisner suggests

⁶⁷ Robert L. Beisner, *From the Old Diplomacy to the New, 1865-1900*, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1975) p. 2

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 4, 8, 23-24

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 9

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 22-23

⁷¹ *Ibid*, pp. 23-24

⁷² *Ibid*, pp. 70, 72

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 73

that the imperialist tendencies of all three men may have been overstated by previous historians, but that this does not mean that their rhetoric (and the related theories of social Darwinism and Anglo-Saxonism) might not have prepared American minds for accepting the realities of imperialism.⁷⁴ It is in this area that Beisner's work reaches its climax, not so much as a blueprint for precisely how and why American foreign policy developed as it did, but as an explanation of the changing opinions of the American people which itself led to new expectations of how foreign policy should be enacted. As American power expanded and popular interest in foreign affairs increased, the number of events abroad that Americans felt they had a stake in also increased. This in turn required a more formal and consistent foreign policy, orchestrated from Washington, and promoted the consistency of foreign policy between administrations that came to be seen after Grover Cleveland's second term ended in 1897.⁷⁵ In this sense Beisner identifies the 1890s not as a period leading up to a single revolutionary change, but as a longer period of transition in foreign affairs in which new ideas were tested in Latin America and Asia before being applied to Europe.⁷⁶ While this may be to overstate the case for a new paradigm in diplomacy – as David M. Pletcher argues in his review of *From the Old Diplomacy to the New* when he suggests that many of the changes that Beisner considers to be new in the 1890s had been developing since the 1860s – the arguments Beisner uses to reach this goal do help to expand the academic field.⁷⁷

Another notable work of the 1970s was Charles S. Campbell's *The Transformation of American Foreign Relations, 1865-1900*. As the title suggests, this work, published in 1976, also sets out to redefine the timeframe in which the foreign policy of the late-19th Century is viewed by examining broad trends across several decades. Campbell sees the two major issues of the period as being Anglo-American relations and the overseas expansion of the United States.⁷⁸ Like Beisner, he argues that public opinion was generally opposed to an assertive foreign policy after the Civil War (although some individuals disagreed), but that this gradually changed as the next generation came to power.⁷⁹ Campbell places greater emphasis on strategic concerns of expansion such as the need for coaling bases and the potential role of Hawaii in protecting a trans-isthmian canal and the United States' western coast, but still appreciates economic issues.⁸⁰ In relation to Williams and LaFeber he argues that business did more to promote trade than the

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 74

⁷⁵ Ibid, pp. 78-79

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 82

⁷⁷ David M. Pletcher, 'Review', *Journal of American History*, Vol. 62, No. 2, (1975) pp. 417-418

⁷⁸ Campbell, *The Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, p. 5

⁷⁹ Ibid, pp. 59, 149

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 270

government (although he suggests that this did gradually change), but does acknowledge their work by arguing that reciprocity can be seen as a form of commercial annexation.⁸¹ *The Transformation of American Foreign Policy* places a strong emphasis on the power of social Darwinism and Anglo-Saxonism and the influence of theorists such as Mahan, Henry and Brooks Adams and Frederick Jackson Turner without displaying the subtlety of analysis shown by Beisner.⁸² Once again Campbell struggles to prove that these theorists influenced the men who actually made policy for the nation.

The work of Beisner and Campbell demonstrates the growing desire among the diplomatic history community in the 1970s to reassess the preconceptions of their field. This perceived stagnation was flamboyantly addressed by James A. Field in his 1978 article ‘American Imperialism: The Worst Chapter in Almost Any Book’. As the title suggests Field’s article is a stinging critique of what he considers to be a field that had fallen into numerous bad habits. Chief among these are a tendency to suggest a logical flow to history that did not take into account the role of chance, a failure to differentiate between the actions of government, business and individuals, and an overly ethnocentric approach that ignores the influence of the outside world upon American actions.⁸³ Field also emphasises the failure on the part of historians to consider the logistics of the plans and intentions they credited to 19th Century figures, a comment that he later reinforces with his assertion that a key element in understanding the development of United States foreign policy is the development of the global telegraph cable network in the late-19th Century which strongly indicates a far greater interest in European and Latin American affairs than in the Far East.⁸⁴ Field’s main contention is that the power of economic factors to direct foreign policy and their influence upon both policymakers and the general public have been seriously overestimated. His demolition of the social Darwinists is particularly persuasive, arguing that men such as Strong and Fiske were few in number, unoriginal, “of doubtful leverage,” and have regularly been quoted selectively by historians.⁸⁵ This attack also extends to the influence granted to Mahan who, Field argues, was primarily concerned with the American hemisphere and did not set out a clear strategy beyond controlling and defending the Central American isthmus.⁸⁶

In terms of economic factors Field argues that the role of the Far East in influencing American foreign policy has been hugely exaggerated in comparison to

⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 85-86, 100

⁸² Ibid, pp. 148, 150-156

⁸³ James A. Field, Jr., ‘American Imperialism: The Worst Chapter in Almost Any Book,’ *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 3, (1978) pp. 645-646

⁸⁴ Ibid, pp. 646, 660-661

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 647

⁸⁶ Ibid, pp. 647-648

Europe, suggesting that true interest in the Far East would have seen far greater interest in acquiring and developing coaling stations in the Pacific.⁸⁷ Finally, Field points out that most of the naval incidents in which the United States was involved in the 1890s occurred in the Western Hemisphere and generally in areas of very little economic interest (with the exception of Brazil in 1894) and are far more consistent with a defence of the Monroe Doctrine or an attempt to fulfil the strategy of defending a potential isthmian canal as suggested by Mahan.⁸⁸ In Field's opinion the United States in the 1890s was still engaged in a defensive foreign policy, now centred upon an isthmian canal and enacted by cables that gave instant access to Europe and Latin America, but not to the Pacific islands or the Far East, and was only shocked into an entirely new direction by the acquisition of the Philippines.⁸⁹

Field's article is an important example of the frustration with the perceived stagnation of late 19th Century diplomatic scholarship, but it has not escaped criticism. The article was published with responses from Walter LaFeber and Robert Beisner and a subsequent reply from Field. Both Beisner and LaFeber comment that Field failed, despite his stated disappointment with the state of accepted scholarship on late 19th Century foreign policy, to set out a true reconceptualisation of the subject.⁹⁰ LaFeber's reply takes strong issue with Field's emphasis on accidents in history which LaFeber describes as an "escape hatch".⁹¹ In particular LaFeber argues that the destruction of the U.S.S. *Maine* in Havana harbour cannot be considered an accident since a conscious decision had been made by policymakers to send the ship there.⁹² Field responds to this, quite convincingly, that while the *Maine*'s presence in Havana may have been a carefully weighted move in the escalation of pressure on Spain, it is hard to argue that it was expected that she would be sunk or that placing an American naval vessel in Havana could be considered the first step towards annexing the Philippines.⁹³ The main criticism of Field's essay, from LaFeber, Beisner and Edward P. Crapol in his survey of late-19th Century diplomatic historiography is that Field ignored elements of scholarship that cast doubt on his argument and, in Crapol's words, was guilty of setting up "strawmen that he could easily knock

⁸⁷ Ibid, pp. 655, 658-659

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 660

⁸⁹ Ibid, pp. 664, 668

⁹⁰ Walter LaFeber and Robert Beisner, 'American Imperialism: The Worst Chapter in Almost Any Book: Comments,' *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 3, (1978) pp. 669, 674-675

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 669

⁹² Ibid, pp. 669-670

⁹³ James A. Field, Jr., 'American Imperialism: The Worst Chapter in Almost Any Book: Reply to Comments,' *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 3, (1978) p. 679

down.”⁹⁴ Both Beisner and Crapol do, however, praise Field’s attempt to introduce the potential relevance of cable networks in diplomacy and Beisner and Field between them elaborate some potential impacts that cable communication may have had on foreign policy.⁹⁵

Even if Field’s article was unable to do more than suggest the need for more varied approaches to the subject, the late 1970s and 1980s did produce some interesting new scholarship. V. G. Kiernan’s *America, the New Imperialism: From White Settlement to World Hegemony* suggests that overseas expansion can be seen as a logical extension of the colonisation of the frontier - as indeed it was justified at the time.⁹⁶ Kiernan also argues that the suppression of Native Americans set a precedent for the treatment of native peoples abroad, perhaps explaining the American determination to suppress the insurrection in the Philippines.⁹⁷ Showing more interest in how imperialism was preached to the public, Kiernan sees jingoism as a means of controlling the industrial populations of the North while uniting the waves of new immigrants.⁹⁸ He also casts doubt on the theory that American foreign policy was dominated by the needs of national security, suggesting that important territories were always portrayed as vital to national defence despite the fact that several other places could have been equally useful.⁹⁹ This emphasis on the continuity of American expansion from the nation’s origins until its acquisition of an overseas empire has also been put forward by Walter Nugent in his 2009 work *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion*. Like Kiernan, Nugent has argued that there was no division between the end of continental expansion and the move to acquire territories overseas. Indeed, Nugent argues that the nation’s history is largely defined by expansion which, while sometimes fortuitous, has almost always been a matter of design.¹⁰⁰

Possibly the best example of the new wave of scholarship that appeared in the 1980s is Richard H. Collin’s *Theodore Roosevelt, Culture, Diplomacy, and Expansion: A New View of American Imperialism*, which first appeared in 1985. This work breaks from the ethnocentric tradition bemoaned by James A. Field, placing the rise to power of the United States in context with that of Japan and Germany in the same period, most particularly in regard to their relationships with Great Britain who, Collin suggests, chose

⁹⁴ Edward P. Crapol, ‘Coming to Terms with Empire: The Historiography of Late Nineteenth-Century American Foreign Relations,’ in *Paths to Power: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations to 1941*, ed. Michael J. Hogan, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 85

⁹⁵ Robert Beisner, ‘The Worst Chapter: Comments,’ pp. 676-677; Field, ‘The Worst Chapter: Reply to Comments,’ p. 681

⁹⁶ V. G. Kiernan, *America, the New Imperialism: From White Settlement to World Hegemony*, (London: Zed Press, 1978) p. 77

⁹⁷ *Ibid*

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 86

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 86-87

¹⁰⁰ Walter Nugent, *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2009)

to appease the United States because Germany was the greater and more immediate threat.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile the United States was also forced to respond to the rise of Germany and Japan, in its case by discarding “its traditional stance of disinterest” and involving itself in, or at least playing closer attention to, the diplomatic balancing act in Europe.¹⁰²

Equally significant is Collin’s examination of American culture as an indication of the nation’s interest in the outside world. Collin sees the major involvement of Americans in the international art market and their enthusiastic support for the development of international sporting competition as proof that they were becoming more involved in the world around them.¹⁰³ He sees the United States in the 1890s as a nation and a people attempting to assert themselves in the world through demonstrations such as the construction of the White City in Chicago in 1893 and the redevelopment of the U.S. Navy, and in incidents such as the Venezuelan Border Dispute which Collin describes as less a diplomatic battle than a “cultural confrontation.”¹⁰⁴ For Collin the defining issue in the new American foreign policy was the revitalised Monroe Doctrine which was “much more significant as a symbolic expression of American nationalism than as a rational or intelligent diplomatic policy.”¹⁰⁵ All this is a new departure from the theories of export markets, social Darwinism and psychic crises: an America expanding into the world in almost all aspects of itself from culture to the military, leading to a new assertiveness which the rest of world was forced to respond to, but which also forced the United States to develop new methods of diplomacy and reassess its own goals and motives. In this way Collin sets out a new theoretical approach even if he tends to be conceptual in his approach and therefore risks brushing over the impact of individuals on the creation of foreign policy.

Two years after the publication of Collin’s work Michael H. Hunt demonstrated another new approach to the study of foreign policy in *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*. As the title suggests Hunt’s work explores the power of ideology to shape foreign policy from the origins of the nation to the late 20th Century. Hunt’s coverage of the late 19th Century is mostly concerned with the War of 1898 and its aftermath, but it does provide some interesting insights into the evolution of U.S. foreign policy after the Civil War. In particular Hunt readdresses late 19th Century phenomena such as social Darwinism and Anglo-Saxonism to illustrate how ideological attitudes were changing at that time while

¹⁰¹ Richard H. Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt, Culture, Diplomacy, and Expansion: A New View of American Imperialism*, (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1985) p. 96

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 99

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 108

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, pp. 156-157

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 158

focusing his explanation of why those attitudes changed on a variety of more tangible issues such as sectional reconciliation after Reconstruction, anxiety and envy at European colonialism and the increased threats to national security brought about by changing technology. He also acknowledges that a desire for new markets was a motivation towards a more activist foreign policy for some sections of the nation.¹⁰⁶ All this, Hunt argues, combined to create a more activist and assertive nation building upon old visions of national greatness and an evangelising zeal for liberty.¹⁰⁷ Hunt suggests that this return to a desire for national greatness was reinforced by ideas of social Darwinism and that by placing white Americans at the pinnacle of a racial hierarchy the elite gave credence to the idea that foreign policy could be used simply to pursue national greatness.

While Field may have accused scholars of American foreign relations of being too ethnocentric, historians of international foreign relations have given consideration to the rise of the United States as an aspect of global history. A fine example of this work is Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* - published in 1990 - which considers the changing status of the United States as it was viewed by the outside world. Perhaps the most striking example of the differing perspective of an international historian from his American counterparts is that Kennedy views the evolving Great Power structure of the 1890s in the light of its role in precipitating the First World War, an event that is regularly viewed as the subsequent chapter in American foreign relations after the War of 1898 and its aftermath. Kennedy compares the enormous industrial might of the United States at the end of the 19th Century to that of Great Britain and Germany and suggests that the growth of American trade that this created made a more assertive foreign policy inevitable.¹⁰⁸ Unsurprisingly given the enormity of the task of examining the history of multiple nations across five centuries Kennedy's description of American foreign policy as being dominated by Manifest Destiny, social Darwinism, and the demand for markets is somewhat derivative, but his examination of the United States' interaction with the world is of considerable interest.¹⁰⁹ In particular, his assessment of the United States as a late-19th Century Great Power which remained aloof from the Great Power system partially through choice and partially through the difficulty of negotiating alliances due to the division of powers between the President and the Senate provides an interesting context to the debate.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987) pp. 36-37

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 36

¹⁰⁸ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, p. 246

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 248

The last two decades have seen a variety of interesting perspectives on late-19th Century diplomatic history. Anders Stephanson's *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right*, published in 1995, provides an interesting discussion of how the traditional ideas of American destiny evolved in response to the United States' changing place in global affairs. Stephanson sees the growth in popularity of the concept of America's civilising mission – as seen in social Darwinism and Anglo-Saxonism – as a direct copying of European methods for legitimising their own imperial acquisitions at the end of the 19th Century rather than as a new development and as a means of maintaining America's self-perceived exceptionalism.¹¹¹ He also argues that the acquisition of an American empire may have begun as a commercial venture, but that this naturally took on strategic considerations as the United States found itself being drawn into competition with the other Great Powers.¹¹² Stephanson does grant a role to Strong, Fiske and Mahan, but as men who revised older ideas of Manifest Destiny and so helped justify imperialism after 1898, not as the architects of an American empire.¹¹³ In this sense, the work of Stephanson and Hunt could perhaps be seen as an attempt to revive the theories of Pratt and Hofstadter in the 1940s and 1950s, but in a severely altered form that seeks to explore the significance of ideology as a justification for actions and not purely as a motivating force. Overall, *Manifest Destiny* helps to refine the scholarship of late-19th Century American diplomacy, but does not attempt to redefine the boundaries of the field.

Walter Russell Mead's 2002 work, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World*, is an over-arching study of American foreign policy which grants only limited attention to the late-19th Century, but is of interest as an indicator of a more internationalist approach to the study of foreign relations. Mead's work is constructed around four foreign policy-making models: Hamiltonian, Wilsonian, Jeffersonian and Jacksonian.¹¹⁴ Mead is careful to assert that these models are only rough sketches which apply differently to different people across the span of American history. To some extent this is fortunate since elements of Grover Cleveland's personality can be seen to fit with all the models except the Wilsonian evangelists of democracy. Certainly some historians, particularly the Wisconsin school, would no doubt identify Cleveland with the Hamiltonians' desire for a strong alliance between government and business aimed at integrating the nation into the global economy, but the evidence for this is

¹¹¹ Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995) p. 67

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 72

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 79

¹¹⁴ Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World*, (New York: Routledge, 2002) p. xvii

disputable.¹¹⁵ The Jeffersonian belief in safeguarding American democracy is perhaps too parochial for Cleveland, but would coincide with his instinctive conservatism. Overall it is the Jacksonian school arguing that both foreign and domestic policy should protect the security and economic wellbeing of the nation leading to an instinctive isolationism, but an implacable determination when threatened that best encapsulates Cleveland's personality.

In relation to the period in question Mead provides some very interesting theories. In particular his assertion that the British and American financial systems were so inextricably linked as to make the United States a vital piece of the British commercial system, a fact illustrated, Mead suggests, by the triggering of the Panic of 1893 by losses suffered from British banks following the collapse of the Argentine loan market.¹¹⁶ As with the work of Kennedy and other international historians, this relates the United States to the world around it in a manner that has not traditionally been favoured by historians focussed purely on American foreign policy. Mead charts the gradual move of the United States towards independence from the British economic sphere – a fact, he argues, that both nations recognised leading to Britain showing greater tolerance to the United States in the hope of maintaining good relations, and the USA attempting to acquire naval bases in preparation for the end of Pax Britannica.¹¹⁷ Mead also suggests that there was a broader acknowledgement of the economic connections between the two powers that extended far beyond the government and led to an understanding amongst those involved with international commerce, even as far down as farmers and other producers, of the potentially disastrous costs of war with Britain.¹¹⁸ He also suggests that a more bellicose and assertive popular opinion was beginning to exert a powerful influence on policymakers who were under pressure not to allow the nation to appear weak.¹¹⁹ Thus even though *Special Providence* provides only a very general overview of policymaking in the late-19th Century period, it does create interesting foundations for a more specific study.

One writer who has clearly given considerable thought to the nuances of late-19th Century American diplomacy is Robert Kagan. In *Dangerous Nation: America and the World, 1600-1898* Kagan argues that the changes in American foreign policy can be traced to at least the 1880s and the changing attitudes of Americans towards the world after the Civil War. Kagan emphasises the consistency of American foreign policy, particularly in the case of the desire to be the leading power in the Western Hemisphere, with the

¹¹⁵ See David M. Pletcher's comments above about the difference between the words and the deeds of politicians.

¹¹⁶ Mead, *Special Providence*, pp. 5, 15

¹¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 82-83

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 20; This awareness shown by farmers of their place in the international commercial system is also suggested by William Appleman Williams in *The Roots of the Modern American Empire*.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 24

difference stemming from the increase in American power – aided by European infighting – that slowly forced the other Powers to concede U.S. hegemony in the Americas.¹²⁰ A particular example of this can be seen in the isthmian canal negotiations in which, Kagan suggests, the United States government showed considerably more interest in securing an exclusive right to control such a canal than they did in actually constructing it.¹²¹ Kagan sets out an image of the United States as a growing power seeking hemispheric peace, but struggles to define the precise reasons for this policy. While mentioning the attraction of commerce and a desire to civilise the peoples of Latin America and Asia he also argues that “[the] desire for hemispheric primacy was a stronger motive than the desire for commerce.”¹²² This may suggest a potentially fruitful line of reasoning that perhaps increasing American power meant that the original objectives of projects like the canal were being forgotten as the projects took on new aspects of their own, but Kagan does not state this explicitly.

One of Kagan’s strengths is his acknowledgement that Latin American and Asian nations were not passive recipients of American foreign policy, but played an active role in obtaining precisely what they wanted from the Americans. In the case of Latin America this is portrayed as a desire for investment and protection from European nations, tempered by a lingering suspicion of American motives, while in Asia Kagan suggests that the USA was courted by China, Japan and Korea more than it courted them since the United States was considered less of a threat to Asian sovereignty than any of the other Powers.¹²³ Kagan identifies this two-way interaction as a source of weakness in American foreign policy with the United States finding itself being dragged into conflicts in which it had little interest due to unwise commitments made in the past and subsequently exploited by foreign rulers.

In relation to Grover Cleveland, Kagan draws strong parallels between the enacting of American foreign policy under his Democratic administrations and the experiences of the strongly Democratic South during and after the Civil War.¹²⁴ He portrays Cleveland and Gresham as attempting to reduce the United States’ involvement with the world in the face of both public and political opinion which ultimately forced Cleveland to take up the Venezuelan Border Dispute as an answer to his domestic critics.¹²⁵ This had the ironic result of redefining the concept of a conservative American foreign policy from simple

¹²⁰ Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, p. 303

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p. 306

¹²² *Ibid*

¹²³ *Ibid*, pp. 316-318, 327

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 358-359

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 368-369

non-intervention to what Kagan calls “isolationist exceptionalism” in which the United States proclaimed itself above competition with the other Great Powers and altered isolationism to include hemispheric primacy.¹²⁶ Ultimately though, Kagan defines Cleveland as the last bastion of the old Democratic Party which the Populist movement fundamentally changed, leading to a desire for expanded government and hence an expanded foreign policy, leaving Cleveland isolated in his desire not to become involved in the Cuban revolution after 1895.¹²⁷ *Dangerous Nation* may not provide any definitive answer to the traditional theories surrounding late-19th Century American foreign policy, but it does advance some new lines of enquiry and suggests that the field may be ready for a reassessment.

By comparison, Frank Ninkovich’s *Global Dawn: The Cultural Foundation of American Internationalism, 1865-1890* – published in 2009 – makes little attempt to examine specific foreign policy events, but must be noted as one of the few attempts to re-examine the fundamental assumptions of the field in recent years. *Global Dawn* seeks to provide a better understanding of the minds and characters of some of the United States leading men in the late-19th Century by making a detailed study of liberal journals and magazines of the period. By exploring the periodicals from which many politicians and policymakers received their information about the world, Ninkovich is able to reshape our understanding of those men’s knowledge, interests and assumptions. While it can only ever be viewed as a non-specific guide to late-19th Century liberal culture, *Global Dawn* fundamentally questions old assumptions about American interest in the wider world – including views on specific regions – and the importance of intellectuals such as Fiske, Mahan and Strong on the opinions and actions of policymakers.

An interesting definition of the current state of scholarship in the field of late-19th Century foreign policy is to be found in George C. Herring’s 2008 narrative history *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776*. Perhaps the most striking alteration to previous narrative histories of foreign policy is Herring’s decision to divide his chapters on the period in the year 1893 with a distinct chapter for the period between 1893 and 1901. This indicates an increased awareness of the importance of the period before the War of 1898, but this awareness is not justified by the text itself which provides only the most fleeting coverage of Grover Cleveland’s second term and thus returns the focus to McKinley and the Spanish-American War.

Perhaps unsurprisingly for a survey narrative Herring describes a wide variety of theories that have been put forward to explain the evolution of U.S. foreign policy in the

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 373

¹²⁷ Ibid, pp. 383, 380

late-19th Century, drawing heavily from the work of Robert Beisner with further references to Walter LaFeber, Charles S. Campbell and Ernest R. May. It is interesting to note that while Herring states several times that the search for foreign markets was an element in U.S. foreign policy of the period he too provides scant evidence for government involvement in any such policy.¹²⁸ Herring's view of foreign policy before 1898 is an amalgamation of a variety of theories ranging from the social malaise of the mid-1890s to the affect of more activist politicians, most notably James G. Blaine who Herring credits highly for designing a blueprint for American imperialism.¹²⁹ One theory that Herring proposes repeatedly is a growing sense among a new generation of Americans, born since the Civil War and granted a broader awareness of the world by improvements in transport and communications, that their nation was a rising power and should assert itself as such.¹³⁰

Given this understanding of the potential power of individuals, particularly in the role played by Blaine, it is disappointing that Grover Cleveland is only partially covered by the narrative. While Cleveland's first presidential term might have received deeper coverage he is at least well defined as a stubborn politician who was, nevertheless, willing to make tough decisions and who injected an "element of morality into an area of endeavour and political climate where it was normally absent."¹³¹ It is in the discussion of Cleveland's second term that Herring's work is most disappointing. While he can be forgiven for simplicity in his description of Cleveland's sense of morality in reference to Hawaii and for his difficulty in pinning down Cleveland's reasons for becoming involved in the Venezuelan Border Dispute – both subjects that have provoked lively debates amongst historians for the last century and that will require considerably longer to explore in detail than a narrative history of this type would allow – it is inexplicable that Herring should make no mention of Cleveland's actions towards the Cuban insurrection of 1895, leaving the reader with the impression that the United States' involvement in that conflict began with the inauguration of William McKinley in 1897.¹³² Such an omission is surely indicative of the lowly stature that Grover Cleveland continues to hold amongst historians outside the specific field of the late-19th Century.

¹²⁸ George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 286

¹²⁹ Ibid, pp. 301, 279

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 277

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 278

¹³² Ibid, pp. 305, 307

If we conclude that a recurring weakness of the current scholarship on U.S. foreign relations in the late 19th Century is that too little attention is paid to the men who were directly responsible for formulating policy perhaps it is advisable to examine works exclusively devoted to those men. In studying Grover Cleveland's second presidential term there are three main figures that can be credited as policymakers: Cleveland himself, Walter Quintin Gresham, Secretary of State until his death in 1895, and Richard Olney, who replaced Gresham as Secretary of State having previously served as Attorney General. Of these men little has been published on either Gresham or Olney while even Cleveland, as has already been noted, has been given relatively little attention by scholars.

Biographies on Grover Cleveland have been sporadic in their publication, but have generally emerged at the rate of about one per decade. The most recent examples include Henry F. Graff's *Grover Cleveland* published in 2002, H. Paul Jeffers' *An Honest President: The Life and Presidencies of Grover Cleveland* published in 2000, and Richard E. Welch's *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland* published in 1988. These three works represent the current scholarship on the life and work of Grover Cleveland, but all three pay homage to earlier works. The most notable amongst these works is *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage* by Allan Nevins. First published in 1932, this still stands as the definitive biography of Grover Cleveland while Nevins was undoubtedly one of the foremost scholars of the man. The biography itself is a detailed study of Cleveland's life providing excellent detail on all phases of his political career. Nevins was one of the first scholars to extensively mine the Grover Cleveland papers and all subsequent scholars are indebted to him for his work which included compiling a selection of papers entitled *Letters of Grover Cleveland* published in 1933. If there is any criticism that can be levelled against Nevins' biography on a factual level it is that foreign affairs are not covered in the same detail as domestic issues. Nevertheless Nevins does theorise about Cleveland's motives in policymaking and his work has served as a foundation for a popular theme amongst biographers since: that of Grover Cleveland as a politician of principle. Nevins' contention is that Grover Cleveland was a man of staunch principle and moral courage who enacted his policies on the basis of what he considered to be best for the nation and what was morally right. It is this stubborn insistence upon doing what was right that Nevins sees as Cleveland's finest quality – and perhaps his defining attribute.

Of the more recent biographies Richard E. Welch's *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland* stands out as an excellent study of Cleveland's work as President. Welch chooses to compartmentalise the foreign policy of both Cleveland's terms into a separate section thus granting a better overview of foreign relations as a single topic. He too argues

that Cleveland's foreign policy was dictated by a desire to do what was morally correct, but he also acknowledges the scholarly debate over foreign policy by referencing the differing schools of thought that give credit to economic, political or strategic motives.¹³³

Of the remaining recent biographies H. Paul Jeffers' *An Honest President: The Life and Presidencies of Grover Cleveland* provides a reasonable account of Cleveland's life, but is ultimately derivative and does not add significantly to the scholarship. His emphasis on Grover Cleveland's use of the executive veto power which, while probably motivated by a genuine concern for governmental probity, helped him to gain both political authority and public respect is of some interest, but foreign policy is covered in scant detail: perhaps an indication of how little known the key events of Cleveland's presidencies have become.

By comparison Henry F. Graff's *Grover Cleveland*, while only a brief overview of its subject, does show signs of originality. His heavy emphasis on Cleveland's honest approach to politics is hardly new, but Graff's examination of Cleveland's motives and preconceptions does serve to provide some insight and provoke debate. As with Jeffers, Graff all but ignores foreign affairs in Cleveland's second term, limiting his comment to the Venezuela Border Dispute and the Cuban revolution.

The most recent edition to the canon of Cleveland scholarship is Matthew Algeo's *The President is a Sick Man*. This work has been produced more for the popular market than for a scholarly audience, but in its wide-ranging discussion of the United States in the late-19th Century it still provides some interesting points. It also provides a uniquely detailed study into Cleveland's battle with cancer of the mouth shortly after his second inauguration and the potential impact that the disease - and its treatment - had on Cleveland as a man and a politician. Beyond this, Algeo's work also serves as proof that Grover Cleveland has not completely slipped from the public consciousness.

Only three biographies of Walter Q. Gresham have been written of which the most recent is Charles W. Calhoun's excellent *Gilded Age Cato: The Life of Walter Q. Gresham* published in 1988. This work gives a detailed overview of Gresham's entire career and particularly emphasises the importance of Gresham's legal background – a point that is often raised by Cleveland's biographers as well. One of the foremost scholars of late-19th Century politics of the last few decades, Calhoun's work clearly benefits from the author's understanding of existing scholarship in the field, even going so far as to refute Williams and LaFeber's theories in his introduction.¹³⁴ Calhoun's work is of particular interest beyond its immediate subject matter because it also grants us an outsider's view of Grover

¹³³ Richard E. Welch, *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1988) pp. 188-190

¹³⁴ Charles W. Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato: The Life of Walter Q. Gresham*, (Lexington, Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988) p. 5

Cleveland. Gresham was a career Republican who was persuaded to join Cleveland's cabinet by a combination of frustration with his own party and admiration for Cleveland. As such his attitude toward Cleveland is of particular help in understanding the man and his policies. Calhoun's biography reveals many striking similarities between the two men that help to explain the motives behind their policies.

Similarly, Gerald G. Eggert's biography of Richard Olney titled *Richard Olney: Evolution of a Statesman* - published in 1974 - provides an excellent examination of a largely forgotten statesman. The work's great strength is its efforts to map and understand the relationship between Olney and Cleveland and the means by which decisions were made by the two men. Eggert and Calhoun's biographies provide two of the best sources for detailed analysis on foreign policy under the Cleveland administration.

From this analysis we can see that the existing scholarship of late 19th Century U.S. foreign policy contains many strengths, but also several weaknesses. Decades of lively debate have produced a variety of theories to explain the changes in American foreign policy during the period and these theories themselves have been refined under academic scrutiny. In its current form the historiography grants a broad insight into the changes that took place in American society between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the War of 1898 and examines how those changes may have influenced foreign policy. More recent studies have also explored how certain changes such as the rise of social Darwinism can be seen as attempts to justify a more assertive foreign policy. A recurring weakness in the scholarship is a failure to explain precisely how the theories that have been put forward are actually displayed in American policy. In a country as diverse politically, economically and socially as the United States of America in the 1890s it is possible to find examples to support almost any theory, but that is not to prove that that theory is a true description of what actually motivated U.S. policy.

In particular, the role of policymakers has often been neglected in favour of broad theories that can be applied to policy formulation across several Presidential terms. Even when policymakers have been recognised they are rarely covered in detail and some elements of the scholarship is contradictory. Important exceptions such as the biographically based work of Grenville and Young and the broader discussions of ideology in foreign policy set out by Michael Hunt and Anders Stephanson have demonstrated that this line of enquiry can yield sound results, but as yet such techniques have not been applied in a detailed study of the character of President Grover Cleveland and his second cabinet. This thesis seeks to address these weaknesses by examining the work of those people specifically responsible for creating and enacting United States foreign policy

between 1893 and 1897 in order to ascertain the precise reasoning behind their actions and thus establish whether larger phenomena such as social Darwinism can truly be said to have affected the formulation of policy. Beyond this the thesis explores the roles and motives of other individuals who can be declared to have had an effect on policymaking. These individuals include not just the President and his Secretaries of State, but also cabinet officers, members of Congress (particularly members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations), diplomats and military officers serving abroad. Such figures can all be considered to have had some effect on foreign policy and thus must be investigated while the reaction of the White House to resist or accept such interference must also be gauged.

In terms of primary documentation this thesis draws from three main sources. The first source is the personal papers of the major protagonists, in particular President Cleveland and Secretaries of State Gresham and Olney. The second source of primary documentation is the State Department papers compiled in the Foreign Relations of the United States series. These papers provide the official record of diplomatic interaction covering all the major incidents in foreign affairs during the period as well as a broad variety of more trivial issues. One of the secondary aims of this thesis is to attempt to establish the potential influence that could be exerted on United States policy in various foreign theatres by the diplomats that resided in those countries. The FRUS series will be invaluable in achieving this goal. The final sources of documentation are newspapers of the period. Due to constraints of time these sources are limited to a selection of newspapers that provided informed comment upon the actions of the executive rather than attempting to significantly influence public opinion – although the author recognises the extreme subjectivity of this selection process. An analysis of attempts to use newspapers to influence public opinion on foreign policy could easily form the basis of a thesis by itself and so it is imperative to simply attempt to gain an understanding of how Cleveland's actions were perceived rather than studying how they were portrayed to the public.

The fundamental question that must be asked is what was happening to United States foreign policy during the 1890s? Was the United States already set on an inexorable rise to global power or did that rise come about due to a planned political strategy? Further to this we must determine whether Cleveland proved to be a help or a hindrance to the expansion of United States foreign policy and whether he was active or passive in achieving his aims. These last two questions are of interest on numerous levels. In the former case the interest lies in the role of a natural conservative attempting to curb what he

considered to be the excesses of his predecessor, Benjamin Harrison, as well as the demands of nationalists and industrialists who hoped for a more active foreign policy to suit their interests. In this sense Cleveland was attempting to hinder the evolution of U.S. foreign policy into something more active and assertive, but whether this marks him down as simply a reactionary conservative remains to be seen. This question of Cleveland's basic motives combines with the second issue, that of his activity or passivity in pursuit of those goals, to form another fundamental question: was Grover Cleveland an active force who played an important role in guiding the development of United States foreign policy in the 1890s; did he acquiesce in an inevitable change; or did he attempt to fight forces that ultimately proved to be overwhelming? The aim of this research thesis is to establish which, if any, of these statements comes close to defining the true intent of Grover Cleveland's foreign policy.

Chapter 1 – Hawaii

One of the most important diplomatic incidents of Grover Cleveland's second term was already well under way by the time of his inauguration on March 3, 1893. The revolution that had taken place in Hawaii in January of 1893 would prove to be the subject of some of Grover Cleveland's first policy decisions in any field upon re-entering the White House and indeed had already seen him take action more than a week before taking the oath of office. It was the incident that Allan Nevins has suggested should be considered the most important of Cleveland's entire second term in regard to foreign policy and while this might be a debatable subject it certainly cannot be denied that Hawaii set the tone for much of what was to come from Cleveland in the four years after his inauguration.¹

While the roots of the Hawaiian revolution – a term that is perhaps more convenient than accurate given the nature of events that led to the deposing of Queen Liliuokalani in January 1893 – can be traced back to the arrival of the first American missionaries as early as 1819, its direct origins can be seen in the effects of the McKinley Tariff Act of 1890. The revolution was born out of the racial politics of the islands – where the native monarchy, the wealthy white elite, the native majority and an assortment of European and Asian labourers created a fractured and turbulent population – but the immediate trigger was probably economic in nature. American reciprocity treaties signed in 1876 and 1887 had seen the already American-oriented islands develop an economy dominated by the export of sugar to the United States. By 1891 – the last year before the McKinley Tariff's new measures took effect – the islands were exporting 274, 982, 295 lbs of sugar to the US mainland and only a mere 285 lbs to all other nations.² Beyond dominating Hawaii's trade, Americans – along with some whites of European origin – also owned two-thirds of the islands' sugar plantations and this granted them a wildly disproportionate share of the nation's wealth.³ This wealth was threatened by the new tariff's abolition of duties on sugar imports and provision of a subsidy of 2 cents per pound for domestic American sugar producers. Furthermore, a subsequent treaty granted Cuban

¹ Allan Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage*, (1932, reprint New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1966), p. 549

² Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898*, (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1963), p. 142

³ Walter LaFeber, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, Vol. II: The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 91; The white elite was made up of a mixture of men born in Hawaii of American or European parentage – sometimes marrying into the native ruling class – and those who had emigrated to the islands themselves. Americans and those of American descent made up the majority of this elite and were the dominant force behind the revolution.

sugar preferential entry. Practically at a stroke the Hawaiian sugar growers saw their position of strength demolished with their competitors in the United States and Cuba suddenly gaining a huge commercial advantage. The Hawaiian economy suffered terribly and the wealthy American minority saw the source of their prosperity disappear.

Running parallel to the economic calamities, the wealthy American and European minority were experiencing political setbacks. On July 1, 1887, a minor uprising against King Kalakaua had led to the creation of a new constitution granting much greater powers to the white minority that fulfilled certain property qualifications.⁴ The new white-dominated cabinet survived an abortive attempt to overturn the 1887 constitution in July, 1889, but came under increasing pressure when Kalakaua was succeeded by his sister Liliuokalani in January, 1891.⁵ Queen Liliuokalani hoped to restore Hawaii to the control of its native monarchy and remove the white control of government. The economic turmoil created by the McKinley Tariff granted her the opportunity to do so, but initial gains were undone in November, 1892, when the American-led legislature forced the creation of a new cabinet comprising some of Hawaii's wealthiest men, three of them of American descent.⁶ Queen Liliuokalani waited until January, 1893, to respond: on the 12th she removed the white cabinet and on the 14th prorogued the legislature and proclaimed a new constitution that would grant the monarchy near-absolute power.⁷ The new regime lasted for two days. On the 16th Liliuokalani took the advice of her ministers and withdrew the new constitution, but her actions were too late to stop the planter community from moving against her.

In 1892 a small group of white Hawaiian planters had established the Annexation Club, a body that sought to bring about Hawaii's annexation by the United States, by force if necessary. The club maintained a representative in Washington who consulted with senior members of Benjamin Harrison's cabinet including Secretaries of State James G. Blaine and John W. Foster and Secretary of the Navy Benjamin F. Tracy.⁸ Indeed, it appears that Foster informed the club's representative after the elections of 1892 that there would be insufficient time left for the Harrison administration to confirm annexation, although this information could not have reached the club's Hawaiian members until

⁴ Charles S. Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy: 1865-1900*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 178; LaFeber, *American Search for Opportunity*, p. 93

⁵ Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, p. 179; LaFeber, *New Empire*, p. 143

⁶ Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, p. 182

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 184

⁸ LaFeber, *New Empire*, p. 144

January 12 at the earliest.⁹ Regardless of whether the Annexation Club received this message, on January 16 they responded to Queen Liliuokalani's proroguing of the legislature by organising a Committee of Safety and requesting military protection from the U.S.S. *Boston* stationed at Honolulu. American marines landed on the afternoon of the 16th with orders to protect American lives and property and to preserve public order. Rather than do this, however, they took up positions near the government buildings in the city. On the 17th these buildings were occupied by the revolutionists who proclaimed a provisional government and asked U.S. Minister Stevens for official recognition which he provided the same day. Stevens' role in the Hawaiian revolution is open to a degree of debate, but it is certain that he was in close communication with the Annexation Club and his official dispatches to Blaine and Foster at the State Department during 1891 and 1892 demonstrate his strong support for American annexation of the islands – indeed it is very possible that he was selected for the position because he shared such views with his friend Blaine.¹⁰ Stevens would follow this recognition by declaring an American protectorate over the islands, once again at the provisional government's request, on February 1. In the meantime the provisional government had sent commissioners to Washington to negotiate a treaty of annexation, which was drawn up, signed and delivered to the Senate for approval by February 15.¹¹

It is at this point that Grover Cleveland first exerted his Presidential authority – despite the fact that such authority would not officially be his for several more weeks. On February 22, Cleveland met with Walter Q. Gresham – recently selected, after some persuading, as the new Secretary of State – and John G. Carlisle, the future Secretary of the Treasury. The meeting resulted in Carlisle travelling to Washington in order to indicate to the Senate that Cleveland wished to study the Hawaiian situation in greater detail before acting.¹² The treaty was shelved until the inauguration and Cleveland withdrew it from Senate consideration on March 9.¹³ It is unclear exactly what prompted Cleveland to intervene in this way – it may simply have been his instinctive opposition to overseas expansion – but the Grover Cleveland Papers contain a letter, apparently written by a representative of Liliuokalani and forwarded to Cleveland by Secretary of State Foster which may have played a role in convincing the President-elect to act. The letter described

⁹ Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, p. 182 – Campbell speculates that the impatient annexationists in Hawaii may have seen enough encouragement in Foster's tacit acknowledgment that the Harrison administration was open to annexation that they decided to act against the Queen regardless.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 180-181

¹¹ Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, pp. 551, 552

¹² Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, p. 186

¹³ Richard E. Welch, *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1988), p. 171

the events that had taken place and clearly stated that the events could not have taken place without the complicity of Minister Stevens and the armed force of the U.S.S. *Boston* and its marines. It is possible that reading this letter may have been sufficient to convince Cleveland to act to stop the annexation process until he entered office.¹⁴

Two days after withdrawing the treaty Cleveland named James H. Blount, a retired congressman from Georgia who had served as chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, as his special commissioner to investigate the circumstances of the revolution.¹⁵ Blount reached Hawaii on March 29 to discover American flags flying over the government buildings and American troops still deployed on the islands and immediately ordered both practices stopped.¹⁶ In an investigation lasting over three months Blount carried out interviews with a cross-section of Hawaiian society and examined a wide variety of documents.¹⁷ The final report that was received in Washington in early August was uncompromising in its conclusion that the Hawaiian revolution could not have succeeded but for the exercise of American military force and that Minister Stevens had been complicit in all that had occurred.¹⁸ It also stated Blount's belief that the majority of public opinion in Hawaii supported Queen Liliuokalani and opposed the provisional government.

It was not until October 18 that Gresham presented Cleveland and the cabinet with a plan of action. In a memorandum for a cabinet meeting Gresham proposed that, since American military forces had been complicit in the revolution, the United States should repair the wrong done that had been done to Liliuokalani and argued that the monarchy should be restored.¹⁹ Despite opposition from members of the cabinet the decision was made that the Gresham memorandum should become the basis for U.S. policy in Hawaii and the new Minister to Hawaii, Albert S. Willis, was dispatched to the islands with orders to begin negotiations with the Queen and the provisional government in order to bring such a restoration about. Perhaps unfortunately for the chances of success of the new policy, it

¹⁴ John W. Foster to Grover Cleveland, January 18, 1893, Reel 72, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. – Although subsequently dated as January 18, 1893, it seems highly improbable that the letter was in fact written on this date. Even if the original letter to Foster was sent on January 18, the length of time necessary for it to reach Washington and for Foster to forward it to Cleveland would mean he could not have received it until early February.

¹⁵ LaFeber, *New Empire*, p. 204

¹⁶ Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, p. 187; Foster had telegraphed Stevens soon after the latter declared the protectorate that the United States was not to impair Hawaiian independence, but Stevens had clearly chosen not to interpret this as an order to remove the U.S. flag from Hawaiian soil.

¹⁷ The Blount investigation is reproduced at Mr. Blount to Mr. Gresham, July 17, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, pp. 567-605. It is accompanied by a vast array of supporting documents including transcripts of interviews and affidavits.

¹⁸ Mr. Blount to Mr. Gresham, July 17, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, p. 594

¹⁹ Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, p. 556

was also decided that it was beyond the President's authority (and against the interests of the Hawaiian people) to use force to achieve its goals.

Almost immediately the flaws in the new policy were exposed. In a letter to Gresham written on October 9 the Attorney General (and future Secretary of State) Richard Olney had pointed out that if the United States held a responsibility to the Queen for deposing her then it also held a responsibility to the members of the provisional government for encouraging them to rebel – undoubtedly Olney raised this objection again in the cabinet meeting of the 18th.²⁰ The consequence was an order to Willis that he should not approach the provisional government to suggest their resignation without assurances from the Queen that she would not seek to exact revenge upon them. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when Willis met with Liliuokalani for the first time on November 13 he found that the Queen had no intention of showing clemency toward the men who had ousted her from power and, on the contrary, that she intended to follow the letter of Hawaiian law and have the rebels beheaded for treason.²¹ It took two further interviews with Liliuokalani before Willis was able to extract a written statement that the Queen would grant an amnesty to the rebels and restore the constitution of 1887. With the first half of his mission accomplished at long last Willis met with Sanford Dole, president of the provisional government, only to be told, with defiant hypocrisy, that the United States had no right to interfere in Hawaiian affairs and that Cleveland could only annex the islands or accept the provisional government as the rightful leaders of an independent state.

There has been a certain amount of scholarly debate over whether President Dole knew that Cleveland had resolved not to use force to restore the Hawaiian monarchy or whether his refusal to accede to American demands was a genuine gamble that Cleveland's conscience, the prospect of a bloody battle to overthrow the provisional government (which by then controlled the Hawaiian nation's admittedly meagre arsenal), or public opinion in the United States would compel him to back down.²² The discussion is purely academic, though, since Cleveland had already changed his government's course before Willis met with Dole. Indeed, it appears that Willis' report of his first meeting with Queen Liliuokalani was sufficient to convince the President that his plan for a restoration would not succeed and that another approach was required. It was decided that the entire matter

²⁰ Richard Olney to Walter Q. Gresham, October 9, 1893, Reel 1, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; In an unfinished memorandum regarding Cleveland's second term dictated by Olney in 1901, Olney stated that he and Carlisle had taken the position that the United States must bear some responsibility for the rebels' actions and thus must protect them. Extracts reproduced in Henry James, *Richard Olney and His Public Service*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), pp. 197-207

²¹ Albert S. Willis to Walter Quintin Gresham, November 16, 1893, Reel 80, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

²² LaFeber, *New Empire*, p. 204; Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, p. 189

(with the exception of the annexation treaty) should be placed in the hands of Congress. On December 18 Cleveland sent a special message to Congress accompanying Blount's report and all other relevant documents. The islands would not be the subject of active American foreign policy again until after Cleveland left office in 1897.

From this sequence of events it is possible to identify the men who were responsible for creating policy concerning Hawaii in the Cleveland administration in 1893 and the roles that each man played. As an international incident of great significance in American foreign relations of the period it is also an opportunity to establish a model of how Cleveland's foreign policy was to be created and enacted over the course of his term. Finally, we can clearly see three key points of policy decision – the withdrawal of the treaty of annexation in March, the instruction to Willis to attempt negotiations aimed at restoring the Hawaiian monarchy in October, and the move to abandon restoration and pass the matter to Congress in December. It is these three points that most clearly display the workings of the Cleveland cabinet.

Unsurprisingly it was Walter Q. Gresham as Secretary of State who can be seen as the man most involved in the day-to-day running of policy, most importantly as the focal point of diplomatic correspondence both from the United States' representatives in Hawaii and from the provisional government. It is also clear that Gresham was largely responsible for the formulation of policy, most notably in his cabinet memorandum of October 18, 1893. This is not to say that Gresham had a free hand in the creation of policy, however. Richard Olney's letter to Gresham of October 9 demonstrates that the Attorney General wished to have his opinion considered and it is notable that several important policy decisions were presented for discussion in cabinet meetings, although it is not always possible to be sure to what extent the decisions were open to debate rather than simply presented as a fixed intention. What is certain is that, by taking these decisions to cabinet meetings, Grover Cleveland placed himself as the final arbiter on foreign policy decisions. While in the Hawaiian matter he drew advice from at least three members of his cabinet (Gresham, Olney and Carlisle whom he had consulted about withdrawing the treaty in February) Cleveland did not simply elect to follow the advice of any one of these advisors in its entirety, but instead formulated policy based on the advice of all. This would form the basis for the handling of future major foreign policy decisions throughout the second term with the Secretary of State largely responsible for suggesting the policy direction consulting, to a greater or lesser degree, with Cleveland. Cabinet meetings would play less

of a role in policymaking as the term continued, but major decisions would usually be discussed before Cleveland gave his assent.

When discussing the relative power of Cleveland and Gresham in formulating policy relating to Hawaii in 1893 it is important to remember that this was the first problem facing Cleveland when he came to the White House. Under these circumstances it would appear certain that the Hawaiian situation would have been very much on his mind as he selected his cabinet in January and February, 1893, and particularly so in the case of his future Secretary of State. Gresham was not Cleveland's first choice for the role; he offered it to Thomas F. Bayard, who had served in that capacity during Cleveland's first term, but Bayard preferred the position of Ambassador to Great Britain.²³ Cleveland also offered the cabinet place, somewhat bizarrely, to Melville W. Fuller, whom Cleveland himself had appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in 1888; unsurprisingly Fuller declined the offer.²⁴ There may have been other offers before the President-elect settled upon Judge Walter Quintin Gresham, but it would be a mistake to suggest that Cleveland was not convinced that Gresham was the right man for the job – several factors would suggest otherwise. As a lifelong Republican – who had served as Postmaster General and Secretary of the Treasury under Chester A. Arthur – Gresham was not an obvious choice for Secretary of State in a Democratic cabinet, nor a popular one. Given that this was only the second time in three decades that the Democratic Party had been able to reward its members with government jobs, the decision to appoint a Republican – regardless of the fact that he was a moderate who had supported Cleveland over Benjamin Harrison during the election – to one of the top jobs in government was bound to be unpopular among powerful Democrats. However, Cleveland was clearly convinced that he had found the right man, demonstrated by the fact that Gresham originally – after some delay, presumably while he considered the offer – turned the job down and only agreed to accept the post after Cleveland wrote to him a second time asking him to reconsider.²⁵ Despite the cost to his political capital, Cleveland saw in Gresham a man whose views were well aligned with his – something he stated in his first letter to Gresham – and so was

²³ Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, p. 511

²⁴ Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, pp. 445-446; Welch, *Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, p. 115

²⁵ Grover Cleveland to Walter Q. Gresham, Jan. 25, 1893, Reel 1, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Walter Q. Gresham to Grover Cleveland, Feb. 3, 1893, Reel 1, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Grover Cleveland to Walter Q. Gresham, Feb. 6, 1893, Reel 1, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Walter Q. Gresham to Grover Cleveland, Feb. 7, 1893, Reel 1, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

determined to convince him.²⁶ This in itself suggests that the President-elect already had a clear vision for the course he wished his foreign policy to take – which Hawaii would inevitably lead – and was seeking for a fellow conservative who would work with him in that direction. Such logic does not necessarily have to apply with regard to other members of Cleveland’s cabinet – there was no reason for him to select his Secretary of the Interior based upon the candidates’ views regarding Hawaii – but a man of Cleveland’s character and convictions was sure to pick men who held similar views to himself on moral and ethical issues such as the ones raised in Hawaii.

The most definitive statement of Cleveland’s motives and reasoning in regard to Hawaii is his message to Congress of December 18th, 1893. In this message – which was compiled from drafts written by both Gresham and Olney (with the bulk of the argument coming from the latter) but was edited by the President – Cleveland gave his reasons for acting as he did, setting out the White House’s case for attempting to restore Queen Liliuokalani to the Hawaiian throne.²⁷ This reasoning reveals a great deal about Cleveland’s motives. Before examining the message in detail, though, it is perhaps best to consider the purpose it was designed to serve.

The message of December 18th, 1893, was, to a large extent, an admission of defeat for the Grover Cleveland administration. The message was accompanied by hundreds of pages of other documents that had been previously used by the White House and the State Department as they attempted to achieve a satisfactory conclusion to the United States’ involvement in the Hawaiian revolution. It was, in effect, Grover Cleveland’s passing of the entire matter into the hands of Congress. What is less clear is exactly what Cleveland expected Congress to do once they had control over the Hawaiian issue. It eventually transpired that Congress did very little and in hindsight it can be argued that the matter ceased to be of importance to the United States once Cleveland relinquished control, but whether Cleveland expected this to happen is open to debate. The documents passed did not include the annexation treaty which would not be resubmitted for Senate consideration and without that document decisive action was always unlikely. Similarly, Cleveland was well aware that prevailing public sentiment would rule out the invocation of the war power by Congress, a measure that he himself had shied away from. Undoubtedly Cleveland ran the risk of being presented with a Congressional resolution requiring that he act in a way that he did not wish, a request that would be hard to ignore having asked Congress to manage the affair, but this was unlikely with both the House and the Senate under the

²⁶ Gresham to Cleveland, Feb. 3, 1893, Reel 1, Gresham Papers, MD, LC

²⁷ Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, p. 560

control of the Democratic Party. Conversely, having experienced one term in the White House already, it would seem very unlikely that Cleveland truly believed that Democrats in Congress might be able to discover a method for settling the issue by themselves. Indeed, perhaps the most interesting aspect to the decision to pass the Hawaiian matter to Congress is that it represented an implied relinquishing of executive power by the President. By passing control of an issue concerning foreign relations to the legislature Cleveland was undermining one of the powers of the executive which traditionally claimed precedence in managing such affairs of state. This precedent may well have contributed to Cleveland's dispute with the Senate later in his second term over which branch of government controlled foreign relations. In 1896 and 1897 Cleveland and Olney would be steadfast in denying the right of the Senate to interfere in the executive's conduct of foreign affairs beyond its constitutional power of confirmation of treaties, but in 1894 the President was notably less ready to defend executive power. In a written statement given to the press in January, 1895, relating to accusations that a visit from a deputation of Hawaiian monarchists in the summer of 1894 had affected the administration's policy on stationing naval vessels at Hawaii Cleveland quoted a speech he had prepared for the meeting with the Queen's representatives, but had only been able to pass to them in written form due to illness.²⁸ This paper stressed the "constitutional limitations of ... executive power" in comparison to the "abundant power and authority" held by the Senate and declared that the executive – its plans having failed – was thus discharged from responsibility on the matter. It is dangerous to speculate too much based on later positions, but it seems unlikely that Cleveland – who had caused a minor controversy in his first term by citing executive privilege when refusing to release documents requested by Congress – would have ceded authority to the Senate willingly. It is possible that he was oblivious to the possibility that longer term problems might arise, but for a politician of Cleveland's experience this seems unlikely. In the context of the situation it seems clear that Cleveland recognised that he was confronted by an insolvable situation and so had reached the limits of his constitutional powers. Under these circumstances he was able to relinquish the matter to Congress without any expectation that they would be able to succeed on Hawaii where he had failed (thus not endangering the prestige of the presidency).

Whatever the extent of Cleveland's reasoning regarding the long term implications of the President passing a foreign relations matter to Congress it would certainly appear that Cleveland's message was not expected to be a rallying cry to Congressional action – if anything quite the opposite. Instead it should be viewed as a personal explanation for his

²⁸ Grover Cleveland, Statement to Press, January 6, 1895, Reel 86, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

actions, a statement of principles, and perhaps even as a warning to Congress that he would not accede to a decision that did not meet his standards. In this regard there are, in particular, two striking aspects about the message: the first is the extent to which Cleveland addresses the Hawaiian issue in moral terms and the second is the way that it is presented virtually as an argument in a court of law.

The moral aspect of Cleveland's message appears early in the text and thereafter provides a running theme throughout. After a brief reference to his recent annual message to Congress (in which he had promised imminent developments on Hawaii) and a short paragraph making clear his intention to pass the matter to Congress, Cleveland launched into the main body of his message with a declaration that he believed "that right and justice should determine the path to be followed in treating this subject."²⁹ Such an unequivocal statement that morality must overrule all other considerations in regard to Hawaii provides a potentially powerful insight into the character and thinking of Grover Cleveland. It must, though, be treated cautiously since we can assume that in this very public piece of rhetoric Cleveland was seeking to justify his decisions to the broader public; such a motive could be well served by appealing to the public's sense of decency and honour. Similarly open to interpretation is Cleveland's subsequent move to place the issue in distinctively American terms by referring to "the mission and character of our Government" arguing that the United States did not seek territorial expansion or the removal of monarchies at the expense of its national honour.³⁰ Such a statement, combined with Cleveland's assertion that the conscience of the public would demand better of their politicians, might be viewed today as old-fashioned or idealistic for the 1890s – particularly in the light of the events of 1898 – raising questions as to its sincerity. It is tempting to view the entire message – which highlighted President Harrison's enthusiastic haste in endorsing annexation in the face of Queen Liliuokalani's protest – as political posturing with the Congressional elections of 1894 in mind. With Cleveland himself suffering criticism for his handling of the economic troubles besetting the nation it would not be particularly surprising for him to engage in some party-political jousting. Any such electioneering would appear unlikely, though, since Hawaii was an issue which divided the nation on lines which went beyond mere partisan politics and thus could not be relied upon as means of winning votes.³¹

One reason why we may be well advised to accept Cleveland's statements at face value is the second interesting aspect of the message: its legalistic style. It is by no means

²⁹ Grover Cleveland, Message to Congress, December 18, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, p. 445

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Felix A. Reeve to Grover Cleveland, December 20, 1893, Reel 81, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

insignificant that the three men who had, by December 1893, become the major creators of U.S. policy in Hawaii (and who would continue to dominate foreign policymaking for the rest of Cleveland's term of office) all had legal backgrounds. Grover Cleveland himself and Richard Olney, the Attorney General and future Secretary of State, were both lawyers by trade before entering politics and Walter Q. Gresham was not just a trained lawyer but also a Judge of almost a decade's experience on the United States circuit court for the Seventh Circuit. This legal background for the three main figures in foreign policy formulation during Grover Cleveland's second term is vital to the understanding of the way that foreign affairs were conducted by the administration. In the case of Hawaii its influence is immediately displayed in the main body of Cleveland's message to Congress which is set forth in the clear, methodical and reasoned manner of a barrister arguing for his client in front of a jury – a role played by Cleveland many times in the courtrooms of Buffalo.

This legal background may explain the style of the message, but it could also have a greater importance in understanding the policies put forward by the Cleveland administration. Frank Ninkovich has demonstrated that the liberal elite in the United States in the late 19th Century, of whom Cleveland can be seen as a member, took great interest in the development and codification of international law that was occurring at the time.³² With this in mind it would hardly be surprising if such legally-minded men as Cleveland, Gresham and Olney chose to enact U.S. foreign policy with a view to not just what they deemed to be morally justified, but also what they considered to be legally proper. In the case of Hawaii this is clearly shown in the message to Congress of December 18, 1893, to be overturning the policies of the previous administration.

Briefly stated, the charge levelled by Cleveland at the Benjamin Harrison administration is the use of American force to depose the lawful ruler of Hawaii and replace her with a new government whose sole purpose was to bring about the annexation of the islands to the United States. The charge is mollified somewhat by Cleveland's decision to abstain from criticising (or even examining) the actions of President Harrison or his Secretaries of State beyond the early reference to Harrison's endorsement of the treaty of annexation despite the protest from Queen Liliuokalani: a document that Cleveland declares warranted a full investigation of the events surrounding the revolution in Hawaii.³³ Subsequently Cleveland's attention is focussed purely on the actions of the United States' Minister to Hawaii John Stevens although whether this was an attempt to

³² Frank Ninkovich, *Global Dawn: The Cultural Foundation of American Internationalism, 1865-1890*, (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 302-305

³³ Grover Cleveland, Message to Congress, December 18, 1893, *FRUS, 1894, App. II*, pp. 445-447

save the reputation of his predecessor (and thus perhaps avoid upsetting the Republicans in Congress), preserve the dignity of the Presidency, or simply a result of lack of evidence against Harrison or his administration is unclear.

The indictment against Stevens is long and detailed and it is of interest because it demonstrates both Cleveland's personal view on the matter and his belief as to how the United States should interact with the world. It is particularly telling that Cleveland was not overly interested in the precise reasons for the revolution against Queen Liliuokalani's government; he was concerned with how American force was used to expedite that revolution. The suspected use of American force had been the underlying factor behind his decision to launch an investigation, but it would appear that his focus on that use of force in his message to Congress indicates an ideological opposition to annexation. After all, with Blount's final report categorically stating that the Provisional Government could not claim the support of the majority of the Hawaiian people, it would have been easily justifiable to simply discard the treaty of annexation. Cleveland's message to Congress was an attempt to justify his decision to go beyond withdrawing the treaty and to interfere with Hawaiian political affairs. His reasoning was that if the United States was pivotal in the overthrow of the Queen it would be justifiable (and perhaps even necessary) for the United States to repair the damage. Such reasoning might simply be the result of Cleveland's sense of justice and desire for international law, but it could also be argued to be the result of his innate anti-imperialism. In reality the two factors can be seen to be inextricably intertwined for Cleveland and his advisors for whom imperialism was itself a violation of the moral principles upon which they desired international law to be based.

For Cleveland the argument also held a historical element drawing upon what he believed to be the traditional American ideology of anti-imperialism and isolationism. In his opening paragraphs he described the proposed annexation treaty as being "a departure from unbroken American tradition" while later he cited the example of President Andrew Jackson's refusal to accept the new republic of Texas' application to join the Union in 1837 due to a fear that it might be suggested that the USA had supported the revolution against Mexican rule in Texas in order to acquire the territory for itself. Such an example weighed heavily with Cleveland as a Democrat president who undoubtedly saw Andrew Jackson as an exemplar to be followed.³⁴ Thus Cleveland set out a case in which American force had been used to accomplish an un-American act and he placed the blame for this action squarely at the feet of "American and other foreign merchants and traders residing in Honolulu" and Minister Stevens who "zealously promoted" the project and "was not

³⁴ Welch, *Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, p. 16

inconveniently scrupulous as to the means employed to that end.”³⁵ The victims were, of course, the rightful ruler Queen Liliuokalani and the Hawaiian people. The motive was greed for the planters – revealed as such in a letter from Stevens to the Secretary of State in November, 1892, which highlighted the effects of the McKinley tariff on the islands’ sugar growers – but Stevens’ motives were not spelled out so clearly, with letters quoted implying a desire for American empire in the Pacific (perhaps even a belief in the necessity of such an empire) and strong hints from Cleveland that personal aggrandizement also played a part. The process of scapegoating Stevens reached its peak with the declaration “But for the notorious predilections of the United States Minister for annexation, the Committee of Safety, which should be called the Committee of Annexation, would never have existed.” This statement was followed by repeated assertions that the Committee would not have acted without the support of U.S. forces and that the Queen would not have yielded her authority to the Provisional Government had it not been backed by those forces. The strength of feeling within the cabinet about this issue is further demonstrated by the repeated references to the Hawaiian Provisional Government as “the Stevens government” in Olney’s letter to Gresham of October 9 – a fact that would also suggest that, whatever reason Cleveland had for demonising Stevens, it was not overtly party-political.³⁶

The true meaning of Cleveland’s December 18th message to Congress is stated in the concluding paragraphs to his indictment of Stevens and bears quoting at length.

By an act of war, committed with the participation of a diplomatic representative of the United States and without authority of Congress, the Government of a feeble but friendly and confiding people has been overthrown. A substantial wrong has thus been done which a due regard for our national character as well as the rights of the injured people requires we should endeavour to repair. The provisional government has not assumed a republican or other constitutional form, but has remained a mere council or oligarchy, set up without the assent of the people. It has not sought to find a permanent basis of popular support and has given no evidence of an intention to do so.³⁷

Thus we see Cleveland summarising his case: the revolution in Hawaii in January, 1893, was in fact an act of war, perpetrated by a lone agent of the United States acting without authorisation and even against the constitution – a very great wrong. This wrong was committed not just against an innocent people on behalf of a corrupt and two-faced oligarchy, but also against the very character of the United States and must therefore be repaired. The decision to attempt to restore the Hawaiian monarchy was not a matter of

³⁵ Cleveland, Message to Congress, December 18, 1893, *FRUS, 1894, App. II*, p. 448

³⁶ Olney to Gresham, October 9, 1893, Reel 1, Gresham Papers, MD, LC

³⁷ Grover Cleveland, Message to Congress, December 18, 1893, *FRUS, 1894, App. II*, p. 456

partisan politics or diplomatic niceties, it was a battle for the nation's standing overseas and perhaps even its soul. Cleveland then proceeded to set out his vision for how foreign policy (and American foreign policy in particular) should be conducted:

The law of nations is founded upon reason and justice, and the rules of conduct governing individual relations between citizens or subjects of a civilized state are equally applicable as between enlightened nations. The considerations that international law is without a court for its enforcement, and that obedience to its commands practically depends upon good faith, instead of upon the mandate of a superior tribunal, only give added sanction to the law itself and brand any deliberate infraction of it not merely as a wrong but as a disgrace. A man of true honor protects the unwritten word which binds his conscience more scrupulously, if possible, than he does the bond a breach of which subjects him to legal liabilities; and the United States in aiming to maintain itself as one of the most enlightened of nations would do its citizens gross injustice if it applied to its international relations any other than a high standard of honor and morality.³⁸

As a lawyer and a liberal Cleveland placed his faith in the ability of nations to conduct their affairs in good faith and with regard for the rights of the weak as well as the strong. The repeated stress of honour and justice placed foreign policy in a moral context which superseded other factors. In the case of Hawaii Cleveland saw it as a matter of national honour and decency to repair the damage to its government and institutions that had been done in the name of the United States and through its power. This argument of moral and legal duties would become a recurring factor in Cleveland's foreign policy with the two aspects being inextricably linked. Cleveland's policies would generally focus around the nation's rights under its treaties, but there would be occasions when they were based upon a legal foundation that was itself often as much to do with concepts of fundamental morality as legal precedent. In this respect – as exemplified in Hawaii – Cleveland blended the still somewhat diffuse concept of international law with a personal belief in a natural, moral justice. This single paragraph of Cleveland's message potentially carries three important themes for a study of the foreign policy of his second term. The first is the extent to which this moral, ethical and legal approach can be seen to be dictating foreign policy during the period. The second is the question of how broadly Cleveland's opinion was shared both by other American politicians and by the American public, and also by foreign powers. The final theme is drawn directly from the text and is perhaps linked to the second; it is the implication in the statement that "the United States in aiming to maintain itself as one of the most enlightened of nations" that there was a danger that the United States might be losing its claim to a superior enlightenment or morality and thus perhaps a recognition that America's place in the world was changing.

³⁸ Ibid

The Cleveland administration's response to the revolution in Hawaii saw three moments of decision in 1893. The first of these moments was the decision in February, 1893, to withdraw the annexation treaty from the Senate upon entering office and to commission an investigation into the role played by representatives of the United States in the revolution. The second, prompted by the findings of that investigation, came in October when it was decided that an attempt should be made to restore Queen Liliuokalani to power peacefully. Finally, in December, 1893, the decision was made to pass the matter to Congress. Undoubtedly the affair was under constant review throughout this period, particularly between April and July when Blount was sending regular reports of his progress to Gresham, but it is these three moments that can be viewed as pivotal in the progress of the Cleveland administration's Hawaiian policy.

While often disagreeing about Cleveland's exact motivations for withdrawing the annexation treaty from the Senate, scholarly opinion has proved largely united in arguing that the incoming President approached the problem with an open mind. Supporting this viewpoint is the testimony of James H. Blount himself, as highlighted by Allan Nevins, who declared that the President held no preconceived ideas on the matter and only wished to ascertain the true facts relating to the revolution.³⁹ Similarly, Walter LaFeber declares that Cleveland "told close friends that he had not decided for or against annexation, but that 'we ought to stop, look and think.'"⁴⁰ Such words would suggest in particular that Cleveland was disconcerted by the speed with which the Harrison administration had brought the matter to the point of decision and it appears certain that he was indeed deeply concerned by this haste. Undoubtedly, it would be very much in Cleveland's nature to approach the Hawaiian question cautiously and in such a way as to avoid closing off any course of action unnecessarily. However, given the new President's ideological instinct against imperialist expansionism, it might be argued that his open-mindedness may have been overstated. The fundamental question is whether, if Blount's investigation had revealed annexation by the United States to be the will of the Hawaiian people, Cleveland would have still opposed annexation on principle.

To answer this question it is necessary to stray a little beyond the immediate boundaries of the Hawaiian revolution and examine a few comparable situations in Cleveland's service as President. This was not the first time that Cleveland had chosen to alter the direction of American foreign policy by withdrawing a treaty from the Senate. A similar, if somewhat less dramatic, situation had occurred in 1885 when he had been

³⁹ Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, pp. 552-553

⁴⁰ LaFeber, *New Empire*, p. 204

inaugurated as President for the first time. On that occasion Cleveland had reversed American policy on two issues by halting the progress of treaty legislation through the Congressional process. The treaties in question were the general act of the Berlin Conference on international trade in the Congo and the Frelinghuysen-Zavala treaty aimed at bringing about the construction of a trans-isthmian canal in Nicaragua. Cleveland reversed government policy on both treaties with little or no concern for public opinion and on the grounds of what he believed to be the best foreign policy for the United States: a rejection of imperialism – be it physically expansionist or economic – and a limited isolationism. His actions were based upon his understanding of the advice and precedents left by George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe, as he himself set out in his first inaugural address in March, 1885 when he declared:

Maintaining, as I do, the tenets of a line of precedents from Washington's day, which proscribe entangling alliances with foreign states, I do not favor a policy of acquisition of new and distant territory or the incorporation of remote interests with our own.⁴¹

With this in mind, there is every reason to believe that Cleveland was acting according to his ideological instinct once again in relation to Hawaii in March, 1893.

All this is purely circumstantial; as has already been stated, the changing nature of American foreign relations in the late 19th Century and Cleveland's own broadened experience since his first inauguration mean direct comparisons should only be made cautiously. Certainly there are other signs that Cleveland was hostile to annexation such as his letter of introduction for Blount to President Dole of the provisional government which makes no reference whatsoever to annexation, instead speaking of cultivating friendship between the two nations, but this could simply be an example of Cleveland maintaining a diplomatic neutrality.⁴² Rather more solid evidence is provided by a statement that Cleveland made to the Associated Press in January, 1898, after he had left the White House. In this statement – given to pass grudging comment on the new treaty of annexation

⁴¹ Grover Cleveland, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1885; It is interesting to observe at this stage that Cleveland's inaugural address of March 4, 1893, made no reference to foreign policy and offered no comment upon the situation in Hawaii. This might indicate his genuine desire to learn more before commenting, but a more likely explanation is a desire to avoid commenting on any specific matters of policy in his inaugural address, preferring to use the document to set out broader concepts of government. Why the President did not seek to once again define his position on how foreign affairs should be conducted as he had in 1885 is open to speculation.

⁴² Mr. Gresham to Mr. Blount, March 11, 1893, [Insert 1, President Cleveland to President Dole], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, p. 469; It should be noted that Gresham's letters to Minister Stevens and consul-general Severance – the U.S. official representatives in Hawaii – also make no reference to annexation, simply stating that Blount's investigation is designed to obtain "the fullest possible information" about the condition of affairs in Hawaii – Mr. Gresham to Mr. Stevens, March 11, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, pp. 469-470, Mr. Gresham to Mr. Severance, March 11, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, p. 470

proposed by his successor, William McKinley – Cleveland declared “I regarded [in 1893], and still regard, the proposed annexation of these islands as not only opposed to our national policy, but as a perversion of our national mission. The mission of our nation is to build up and make a greater country out of what we have, instead of annexing islands.”⁴³ This clear statement, shorn of any caveats, would appear to undermine the argument that Cleveland approached the matter of Hawaiian annexation with a truly open mind. Once again, however, we must approach this statement with an element of caution. Having left office – and with little prospect of returning to the national stage – Cleveland was free to speak his mind, but he was also in the position of acting with the benefit of hindsight, knowing that Blount’s investigation uncovered all the worst signs of American complicity in the revolution that he might have feared in March of 1893. That said, however, the statement to the Associated Press can be seen as nicely complementing Cleveland’s statement in his first inaugural address that it was the President’s duty to enact a foreign policy that sought to aid “the settlement and development of the resources of our vast territory”, a statement that implicitly rejected overseas expansionism as unnecessary, and perhaps even un-American.⁴⁴ Further support can be found in his dismissal of theories that he was dissatisfied with the treaty itself, not the concept of annexation: “I was opposed to annexation as such.”⁴⁵ Interestingly, Cleveland’s own explanation for his decision to launch an investigation stresses that it had nothing to do with annexation, but was simply an attempt to discover the involvement, if any, of the United States in the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy. It is here that he declares that he acted “without holding any previous designs of restoring the monarchy” suggesting that it was not his position on annexation that was open to persuasion, but his position on how best to approach the new provisional government in Hawaii.⁴⁶ For Cleveland, annexation was non-negotiable as a point of principle.

The statement to the Associated Press would appear to render meaningless the question of Cleveland’s actions if Blount’s investigation had proven annexation to be the will of the Hawaiian people. Certainly the fact that Blount, quite predictably, discovered that the opinion of the native Hawaiian majority was anything but favourable to the concept of annexation means that the question is purely a hypothetical exercise. This does not mean though that the exercise cannot prove instructive since the opinions of Cleveland

⁴³ Grover Cleveland, ‘Statement to Associated Press’, Jan. 24, 1898, in Allan Nevins Ed., *Letters of Grover Cleveland, 1850-1908*, (Cambridge, Ma.: The Riverside Press, 1933) pp. 491-492

⁴⁴ Grover Cleveland, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1885

⁴⁵ Cleveland, ‘Statement to Associated Press’, Jan. 24, 1898, *Letters of Grover Cleveland*, p. 492

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

and Gresham relating to the native Hawaiians can tell us a great deal about their anti-imperialism.

As with so much else in foreign policy, Grover Cleveland's views on popular sovereignty were founded in tradition. In his message to Congress of December 18, 1893, he declared that he sympathised with the establishment of a new republic in Hawaii, but that it was the "settled policy of the United States to concede to people of foreign countries the same freedom and independence in the management of their domestic affairs that we have always claimed for ourselves".⁴⁷ Tellingly, Cleveland also stated that it had been American practice to recognise new republican governments "as soon as it became apparent that they were supported by the people." It was this support which Cleveland clearly believed the provisional government in Hawaii was lacking when he described the provisional government as an "oligarchy" stating that it had "not sought to find a permanent basis of popular support and [had] given no evidence of an intention to do so."⁴⁸ What is particularly striking about these statements, besides the obvious dislike for the provisional government and its members, is that Cleveland's support for popular sovereignty was apparently not subject to racial discrimination. He took some pleasure in reminding his audience that the provisional government had asserted that "the people of Hawaii are unfit for popular government" and "can be best ruled by arbitrary or despotic power" but did not pass any judgement on this assertion beyond using it to highlight the unrepresentative nature of the government.⁴⁹ This is not to say that Cleveland believed that the Hawaiian people were ready to form a democracy of their own, but it is clear that he preferred a native Hawaiian monarchy to a white oligarchy which claimed to be republican in nature. It is this latter point which is most important: Cleveland was determined from the beginning to ascertain the wishes of the majority of the Hawaiian population. This is why he told the Associated Press that he kept an open mind on whether to restore the monarchy.

At this stage it is interesting to observe Gresham's instructions to Blount on how he was to conduct his investigation. Here the will of the Hawaiian people received third billing behind the current condition of affairs in the islands and the true facts of the revolution while all other aspects are simply covered in a general request for information that can "fully enlighten the President".⁵⁰ This would certainly suggest that the will of the Hawaiian people was of interest to Cleveland and his cabinet while, for his part, Blount was clearly keen to provide his masters in Washington with as much information on that

⁴⁷ Cleveland, Message to Congress, December 18, 1893, *FRUS, 1894, App. II*, p. 455

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 456

⁴⁹ *Ibid*

⁵⁰ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Blount, March 11, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, pp. 467-468

subject as possible. Blount's first report on his progress after arriving in Hawaii offers a marked contrast between his favourable impression of representatives of the pro-monarchy Hawaiian Patriotic League and his statement that "The American minister and consul-general seem to be very intense partisans for annexation."⁵¹ Subsequently, Blount's second dispatch to Gresham contained a variety of documents that the investigator deemed important for the understanding of Hawaii, chief amongst them being a government immigration report from 1892. Clearly the ethnic and racial demographics of the islands were considered important by Blount.⁵² Hereafter Blount's dispatches consistently displayed his interest in the views of the native majority in Hawaii, as well as in the racial mix in the islands. It is unnecessary to go into great detail, but it is important to note that as early as May 4 Blount saw fit to report that "At this time the indications are unmistakable that a large majority of the people of the Islands are utterly opposed to annexation."⁵³

It seems clear that Cleveland's concerns in Hawaii were not simply limited to fears for American honour, but also included a genuine desire to see justice served to the Hawaiian people through a respect for popular sovereignty. This much is demonstrated by his instructions to Blount to both probe the causes of the revolution – a clear sign of Cleveland's suspicions about American actions – and ascertain the opinion of the majority of the Hawaiian population. Does this concern for the people of Hawaii also, however, indicate another factor of Cleveland's personality: a streak of paternalism for weaker nations and their inhabitants? Certainly Cleveland's attitude towards Hawaii, perhaps unwittingly, was very much an imperialist one; his position from the start was that of an arbiter deciding the fate of a wronged people, a position that would only become more apparent after the delivery of Blount's final report. In many respects this can be seen as a natural response for any late 19th Century American president – confirmed in the beliefs of a racist age that the Anglo-Saxon race was inherently superior to all others and well-used to a paternal role by decades of experience in ruling the United States' Native American population. Cleveland himself advocated policies of education toward Native Americans with an ultimate goal of independent citizenship, but he also described them as "responsibilities we cannot escape".⁵⁴ Outside of the territorial jurisdiction of the United States, he saw no such responsibility to educate and civilise others and the first two years

⁵¹ Mr. Blount to Mr. Gresham, April 6, 1893, [No. 1], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, pp. 473-474

⁵² Mr. Blount to Mr. Gresham, April 8, 1893, [No. 2], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, p. 475; The documents enclosed by Blount are not reproduced in the *Foreign Relations* collection. It should be noted that a significant portion of Blount's final report was also given over to establishing the demographics of the islands in terms of race, national origin and class.

⁵³ Mr. Blount to Mr. Gresham, May 4, 1893, [No. 4], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, p. 502

⁵⁴ Grover Cleveland, First Annual Message (second term), December 4, 1893

of his second term would see determined efforts on his part to ensure that the nation did not acquire further responsibilities overseas - firstly in Hawaii and then in Samoa.

The United States' involvement in Samoa dated back to the Presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes, but came to a head during Cleveland's first term when German interference in the islands' intricate tribal politics saw the invoking of American good offices by the Samoan king Malietoa. Trapped by the treaty guarantees of earlier administrations, Cleveland his Secretary of State Thomas F. Bayard had attempted to negotiate a compromise that would have maintained Samoan independence, but without success. American warships faced off with their German counterparts with tensions only finally defused by a catastrophic hurricane in March 1889 which destroyed the ships and killed many of their crewmen. The result had been a new treaty, negotiated and ratified during Cleveland's period out of office which granted a tri-partite protectorate over the islands to Germany, Great Britain and the United States.⁵⁵ Upon his return to the White House Cleveland seized upon unrest in the islands to make clear his disapproval of this protectorate arrangement. In his annual message of 1893 he used an abortive revolution against King Malietoa, now supported by the western powers, as an example of "the impolicy of entangling alliances with foreign powers."⁵⁶ He also took care to state that the insurrection had demonstrated that the protectorate was failing in its aim of preventing such unrest. One year later, and with a lasting peace in the islands still not apparent, Cleveland railed against the failures of the western-backed government in Samoa:

Our participation in its establishment against the wishes of the natives was in plain defiance of the conservative teachings and warnings of the wise and patriotic men who laid the foundations of our free institutions...⁵⁷

Here we have still more evidence of Cleveland's instinctive opposition to imperialist adventures as being counter to the central tenets of American government as he perceived it, but also a clear statement of his belief that the will of the native majority had been ignored, with disastrous consequences. Clearly Cleveland was not a believer in the racial philosophies that argued that it was the duty of the white races to provide leadership for their less civilised neighbours. Indeed, it may even be that the situation in Samoa played some role in Cleveland's later decision making over Hawaii, or at the very least confirmed him in his instinctive beliefs. It is not possible to draw a conclusive link between the two events, but the fact that Cleveland was weighing up his options in Hawaii at the same time

⁵⁵ For the most authoritative single account of the Samoan crises see Paul Kennedy, *The Samoan Tangle: A Study in Anglo-German-American Relations, 1878-1900*, (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1974)

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

⁵⁷ Grover Cleveland, Second Annual Message (second term), December 3, 1894

as a previous white protectorate in another Pacific island nation was experiencing difficulties with unrest in the native population will have done nothing to improve his disposition towards a protectorate. In these sentiments he was undoubtedly joined by Gresham who wrote to Carl Schurz in July 1893 about the situation in Samoa stating that “Our government should not undertake to maintain a protectorate, either alone or in conjunction with other Powers, in the South Sea Islands, or elsewhere.”⁵⁸ This is a categorical statement of Gresham’s beliefs, written only weeks before the arrival in Washington of Blount’s report. Fundamentally, it would appear that almost nothing could have occurred that would have altered Cleveland and Gresham’s stance on the relationship between the United States and Hawaii. Cleveland may have held some paternalistic and racist views with regards to those peoples already under his jurisdiction, but he did not believe that the United States had a duty to act as a white father to others. Cleveland clearly believed that Samoa and Hawaii had demonstrated themselves to be quite capable of self-rule without outside interference. All of this is entirely consistent with a policy based upon doing what was legally and morally right. For a Jacksonian Democrat like Cleveland, government had to be a product of popular will if it was to have legitimacy and so the oligarchic rule of the white minority in Hawaii was equally as wrong as the illegal interference of the United States which had created it.

The second point of decision relating to Hawaii took place in the cabinet meeting of October 18, 1893. This is not to say that the matter had been left unattended between March and October; undoubtedly, Cleveland and his cabinet gave the matter a great deal of thought in the intervening period. Certainly Gresham was receiving regular updates from Blount and the latter’s report was finally prepared on July 17, although it did not reach Washington for several weeks.⁵⁹ While the summer recess – during which anyone who could took the earliest possible opportunity to escape the heat and humidity of Washington D.C. – delayed the Cleveland administration’s action on Blount’s report, the return to work in October saw a revival of interest from several members of the cabinet, particularly

⁵⁸ Walter Q. Gresham to Carl Schurz, Jul. 11, 1893, Reel 1, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁵⁹ Blount himself, having originally agreed only to conduct the investigation and prepare his report, found himself obliged to take over the post of Minister to Hawaii at Cleveland and Gresham’s request in May 1893. He clearly did not do so enthusiastically – even going so far as to enclose his letter of resignation in the official dispatch confirming he had officially taken up the office – but rather by necessity of replacing the unpredictable Minister Stevens as swiftly as possible. Blount’s lack of desire to remain in Hawaii was demonstrated by his decision to leave the islands at the end of July for unstated personal reasons without asking the permission of the State Department. Mr. Blount to Mr. Gresham, May 24, 1893, [No. 1], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, p. 421; Mr. Blount to Mr. Gresham, July 31, 1893, [Personal], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, p. 630

Gresham and Olney. Regarding our exploration of the role played by factors such as justice, national honour, anti-imperialism, and colonialism there are four major documents that informed the decision taken at the cabinet meeting: Blount's final report, Richard Olney's letter to Gresham of October 9, Gresham's memorandum prepared for the cabinet meeting of October 18, and Gresham's instructions to Albert S. Willis, the new Minister to Hawaii, also dated October 18.

Blount's report can be dealt with briefly, but it is important because it provides the context upon which all three of the other documents were based. The report itself is an extensive document that ranges over a broad range of information from interviews to census reports to trade statistics. Such things all carry a scholarly interest, but it is the conclusions that the report draws that are of greatest significance. Those conclusions have already been discussed, but they can be restated simply in three phases. Firstly, the revolution can be regarded as a criminal act. This crime was committed primarily against Queen Liliuokalani and thus also against the Hawaiian people who are shown to be generally in favour of the monarchy. Finally, the United States was demonstrably complicit in the revolution, which would have failed without the assistance of American military might. These are the facts as presented to Cleveland and his cabinet thus forming the basis for the administration's actions.

The letter from Olney to Gresham and Gresham's memorandum are complementary documents. While Olney's letter is dated October 9 and the memorandum October 18 it seems clear that the letter was a response to either an early viewing of a draft of the final memorandum or at least some discussion of the problem between the two men. With this in mind we can view the Olney letter as a pragmatic response to the somewhat idealist vision presented by Gresham. Specifically, Gresham's memorandum opens by setting out a thorough grounding on the findings of Blount's investigation, presumably for any cabinet members who were not completely aware of the facts prior to the meeting. The memorandum shows Gresham to be in no doubt that the revolution was the action of a minority aided by Minister Stevens who was both complicit in the plans and vital to their success. It also demonstrates his scorn for any suggestion that the Provisional Government might hold any legitimacy. His final verdict was damning:

The Government of Hawaii surrendered its authority under a threat of war, until such time only as the Government of the United States, upon the facts being present to it, should reinstate the constitutional sovereign, and the Provisional Government was created 'to exist until terms of union with the United States of America have been negotiated and agreed upon.'⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Walter Q. Gresham, Memorandum, October 18, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, pp. 462-463

His proposal of how the Cleveland administration should proceed was phrased in equally powerful and emotive language:

Should not the wrong done to a feeble but independent State by an abuse of the authority of the United States be undone by restoring the legitimate government? Anything short of that will not, I respectfully submit, satisfy the demands of justice.⁶¹

Thus we can see the Hawaiian matter being couched in precisely the same terms which Cleveland would employ when sending the matter to Congress: the “demands of justice” and the threat to the national honour of the United States. Gresham’s memorandum also presents the matter in precisely the same imperialist terms evident in Cleveland’s earlier decision to reject annexation, speaking of a “feeble but independent State” which requires American justice, but not American leadership.

It is here that the Olney letter presents a contrast. While Gresham presents the matter as a simple question of right and wrong Olney is the first to inject a note of pragmatism that can be seen to play a significant role in the latter stages of the Cleveland administration’s handling of the Hawaiian revolution. Before examining Olney’s letter in more detail it is firstly important to note that Olney was included in the discussions of the Hawaiian problem at all - clear evidence of the stress which Cleveland and Gresham would place on the role of the law in formulating foreign policy. In this case, it is the issue of future plans that is of greatest interest in the Olney letter. The Attorney General himself agreed wholeheartedly with Gresham’s interpretation “that a great wrong was done under the auspices of United States Minister Stevens when the regular constitutional government of the Queen was supplanted and the present, so-called, provisional government installed in its stead.”⁶² He also praised “the good sense, the statesmanship and the sound morality” of the Secretary of State’s proposal to attempt to rectify matters by returning them to the situation before the revolution took place. Further, Olney declared that the threat of force was justified to overthrow the provisional government - since that government came to power by the exact same threat and thus could not complain - despite the possibility that it might constitute an act of war. It is here, though, that Olney’s view of the matter differed sharply from Gresham’s. His concern was that the provisional government had been in power for so long, apparently with American acquiescence, that any action to displace it would require the use of actual force and not just threats. The use of this force, against a body that has exercised all the functions of legitimate government for months was, in

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 463

⁶² Olney to Gresham, October 9, 1893, Reel 1, Gresham Papers, MD, LC

Olney's opinion, an act of war and thus outside the President's powers.⁶³ Moving on from questions of the feasibility and logistics of removing the provisional government, Olney came to the crux of the problem facing Cleveland and his cabinet: with American force having toppled one government to install another, the United States government now found itself responsible for the fortunes of both parties. Here we see the ramifications of an imperialist mindset as the actions of a previous administration in interfering with the affairs of a weaker nation led to an inherited responsibility towards both the deposed government and the provisional government for the Cleveland administration due to that administration's paternalist sense of responsibility towards the wronged party. The practical result of this was Olney's suggestion that any offer of aid in restoring Queen Liliuokalani to power must include a proviso that she would both uphold the commitments entered into by the provisional government and, more problematically, agree to grant an amnesty to the members of the provisional government who had overthrown her. Throughout this discussion the matter of Liliuokalani's involvement is presented in largely paternal terms, with Olney stating that "the United States should require of the Queen ... full power and authority to negotiate and bring about the restoration of her government on such reasonable terms and conditions as the United States may approve and find to be practicable."⁶⁴ Whether for reasons of racial prejudice, the national interest or simply practical considerations of negotiating with the Queen's inveterate enemies Olney was effectively demanding that the United States be granted complete control over the Queen's future and thus the future of the Hawaiian government. Ultimately, Olney expressed confidence that these terms would be agreeable to both parties, but it may be that the difficulties he had anticipated in obtaining the provisional government's agreement to step aside peacefully were already weighing on Cleveland's decisions at the cabinet meeting on October 18.

The instructions given to Albert S. Willis, Cleveland's choice to replace Blount as United States Minister to Hawaii, can be seen as the result of the deliberations that culminated in the cabinet meeting of October 18. On the same day as that meeting took place Gresham wrote to Willis with special instructions to supplement those regarding his new post. In a brief description of the history of the case Gresham emphasised that Queen Liliuokalani had only yielded to the revolutionaries when it became clear that they had the

⁶³ Olney also expressed concern that the use of military power was likely, if it encountered resistance from the provisional government, to devastate Hawaii thus restoring to the Queen a nation very different to the one that she had relinquished. He also, perhaps over-cautiously given Blount's findings, questioned what would happen if it was discovered that the Hawaiian population had come to support the provisional government over the monarchy.

⁶⁴ Olney to Gresham, October 9, 1893, Reel 1, Gresham Papers, MD, LC

backing of American forces and on the understanding “that if she surrendered under protest her case would afterwards be fairly considered by the President of the United States.”⁶⁵ Describing the decision to yield as wise, Gresham declared that the Queen was “relying upon the good faith and honor of the President, when informed of what had occurred, to undo the action of the minister and reinstate her and the authority which she claimed as the constitutional sovereign of the Hawaiian Islands.”⁶⁶ The Secretary of State also ordered Willis to inform the Queen of the President’s “sincere regret” over the actions of Minister Stevens. Clearly, for Gresham at least, the cabinet meeting had not seen a noticeable change in the belief that it was the duty of the Cleveland administration to right a wrong in Hawaii. By contrast to this effusive concern for the rights of the Queen, the actual instructions to Willis are relatively brief with almost equal billing being granted to the need to apologise for American actions during the revolution and the real aim of Willis’ mission: securing a negotiated restoration of the Hawaiian monarchy.

It is in this regard that we see a return to a paternalist attitude by the Cleveland administration. Just as Olney recommended in his letter of October 9, Willis was ordered to “inform the Queen that, when reinstated, the President expects that she will pursue a magnanimous course by granting full amnesty to all who participated in the movement against her,” as well as assuming any obligations entered into by the provisional government.⁶⁷ Her acquiescence in allowing Willis to negotiate her future for her was clearly assumed. Indeed, Gresham informed Willis that Liliuokalani’s agreement to the American terms was expected to be speedily obtained allowing him to move on to the second phase of his instructions. Here we find a perfectly formed example of the imperialist mindset that appears to have rapidly come to dominate the Cleveland administration’s deliberations on Hawaii. Willis was instructed that, having obtained the Queen’s agreement to the proposed plan of action, he should “advise the executive of the Provisional Government and his ministers of the President’s determination of the question which their action and that of the Queen devolved upon him, and that they are expected to promptly relinquish to her her constitutional authority.” There could hardly be a better statement of how Gresham – and, perhaps to a lesser extent, Cleveland and the other cabinet members – had come to view the Hawaiian matter in October 1893. While Allan Nevins’ claim that Gresham “seems to have felt ... a romantic throb for the defenceless queen” is perhaps stretching the evidence somewhat, it is clear that the Secretary of State now perceived the entire issue as an American prerogative whereby the defenceless

⁶⁵ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Willis, October 18, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, p. 463

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 463-464

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 464

Hawaiians and the greedy planters would calmly accept the wisdom and justice dispensed from Washington.⁶⁸ The only indication that Willis' mission might not be as simple as it appeared on paper came from a brief final instruction that "Should the Queen decline to pursue the liberal course suggested, or should the Provisional Government refuse to abide by the President's decision, you will report the facts and await further instructions."⁶⁹ Once again we can note the implication that either action would be little short of insanity, but it is telling both that a rejection was anticipated to some extent – and clearly Olney, despite his expressions of confidence, had already played the role of devil's advocate in this regard – and that there was no immediate plan for how to respond in such a scenario. This could be the ultimate expression of confidence in the plan's success, but it is equally likely – especially when we consider the events of the following months – that there were no further options available to the President for Gresham to pass on to Willis. The legalist context within which Cleveland and Gresham were framing the Hawaiian situation had served them as a guide, but it also imposed limits on their actions. Thus we see the overriding imperialism that dominated the second point of decision on Hawaii being undermined by occasional hints of concern at the prospect of failure and by calls, led by Richard Olney, for a more pragmatic approach. It would appear that Olney's voice came to have an increasing influence on Cleveland's thinking during the months leading up to the third point of decision.

This final key point of decision is somewhat confused and is therefore hard to pin down exactly. The decision in question was whether to pass control of the Hawaiian issue to Congress and it culminated in Cleveland's special message to Congress on December 18, 1893. It has been claimed that the decision was taken at a cabinet meeting on December 7, but there is evidence to suggest that the move had been under consideration long before that meeting.⁷⁰

Albert S. Willis arrived in Honolulu on November 4, 1893, and immediately found himself immersed in a far more delicate situation than Gresham appears to have believed he would encounter. His first despatch, informing the State Department of his arrival, noted the arrival in the islands of shipments of rifles and ammunition while also reporting that the capital was a hotbed of political rumours.⁷¹ In a despatch of November 11, Willis reported his first meeting with President Dole of the provisional government and explained

⁶⁸ Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, p. 553

⁶⁹ Gresham to Willis, October 18, 1893, *FRUS, 1894, App II*, p. 463

⁷⁰ Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, p. 559; Nevins describes a perplexed Cleveland pacing the White House library in the days before December 7, but unfortunately fails to elaborate on his sources.

⁷¹ Mr. Willis to Mr. Gresham, November 6, 1893, [No. 1], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, pp. 430-431

that he would meet with the Queen in the next few days, but had not believed faster action was advisable given the excitement surrounding his arrival.⁷² Hawaii did not exist in an information vacuum and the events there were widely reported, whether from rumours or official sources, in both the Hawaiian and American press. While Willis' mission may not have been officially declared it certainly was a matter of rumour and gossip with Cleveland's intention to restore the Queen apparently becoming public knowledge in mid-November.⁷³ It was in this highly charged atmosphere and not the calm of the State Department or the White House that Willis met Queen Liliuokalani; a meeting that resulted in a one line telegram:

Views of first party so extreme as to require further instructions.⁷⁴

This telegram arrived in Washington eight days later and provoked an angry response from Gresham who replied "The brevity and uncertainty of your telegrams are embarrassing. You will insist upon amnesty and recognition of obligations of the Provisional Government as essential conditions of restoration."⁷⁵ A subsequent telegram of December 3 gave fuller instructions of how Willis should handle the Queen's intransigence, but provided little advice beyond the original instructions given to Willis before his departure.⁷⁶ Ultimately, Willis did convince the Queen to acquiesce in Cleveland's demands, only to be met by a flat rejection by the provisional government. By this time, however, events in Washington demonstrated that Cleveland had long since abandoned hope in the plan.

The day after Gresham sent his telegram advising Willis on how to respond to the Queen's rejection of his offer Cleveland sent his annual message to Congress. In this message Cleveland declared the affair to be a matter of national honour which could only be assuaged by restoring the status of the islands to the condition existing when the original American intervention took place.⁷⁷ He reported that no definitive information had yet been received on the results of Willis' mission – perhaps being somewhat economical with the truth given that, even considering the brevity of Willis' telegram, it was clear that the first meeting with the Queen had not gone well. Most interestingly, Cleveland ended his report on Hawaii with a brief paragraph setting out his intentions for the future:

⁷² Mr. Willis to Mr. Gresham, November 11, 1893, [No. 2], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, pp. 432-433

⁷³ Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, p. 558

⁷⁴ Mr. Willis to Mr. Gresham, November 16, 1893, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, p. 434

⁷⁵ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Willis, November 24, 1893, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, p. 437

⁷⁶ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Willis, December 3, 1893, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, p. 437

⁷⁷ Grover Cleveland, First Annual Message (second term), December 4, 1893

Additional advices are soon expected. When received they will be promptly sent to the Congress, together with all other information at hand, accompanied by a special Executive message fully detailing all the facts necessary to a complete understanding of the case and presenting a history of all the material events leading up to the present situation.

Three days before the cabinet meeting of December 7 – and two weeks before the message of December 18 – Cleveland had stated to Congress and the nation that he would be presenting the matter to them in full. This is not to say that he knew on December 4 that he would be effectively abandoning the Hawaiian matter – it is very possible that he still hoped that Willis’ mission might prove a success – but it appears very likely that in the interval between Willis’ departure and the annual message Cleveland had come to doubt his ability to broker a settlement in Hawaii within the bounds of his constitutional power. In this period the Blount report had been released to the public following a government leak and Willis’ initial reports had shown both that the situation in Hawaii was potentially volatile and that the Queen was not immediately amenable to American proposals. Furthermore, while there is no direct evidence to prove it, it is likely that Olney’s urge to follow a pragmatic course was influencing Cleveland’s judgement. It was Olney who had warned that the use of military force might be necessary to unseat the provisional government and for an administration that had already shown itself to be strongly influenced by the limitations of the law this would necessitate the involvement of Congress. Since Congressional support for military action was highly unlikely given the divisive nature of the problem the logical next step was to pass the entire matter to them. Whether the cabinet meeting of December 7 was motivated by the passing the day before of a fiercely partisan Senate resolution demanding that Cleveland submit all documents on the matter to Congress is impossible to know, but it is quite clear that the plan had been in Cleveland’s thoughts for some time before either the resolution or the meeting.⁷⁸ Ultimately, the Cleveland administration’s combination of respect for the law – both international law and constitutional law – and their paternalist sense of obligation towards all parties had dictated large elements of their response to the Hawaiian revolution and eventually forced them into a cul-de-sac whereby their only recourse was to pass the matter to Congress. Their chosen solution to the problem was no doubt noble and honourable, but was not realistic. In the end a more pragmatic approach prevailed, accepting the situation as it was, but still refusing to submit to the demands for annexation.

⁷⁸ *New York Times*, December 7, 1893, p. 1

Both the House and the Senate considered the evidence provided by Cleveland and in the subsequent months adopted resolutions on the matter. The House censured Minister Stevens and approved a policy of non-interference which rejected both restoring the monarchy and annexation. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee issued a report which exonerated Stevens, but saw deep partisan divisions over Cleveland's actions. Like the House, the Senate adopted a resolution against American interference in Hawaiian affairs, but unlike their counterparts' the Senate resolution also warned that similar interference from other governments would be considered an act unfriendly to the United States.⁷⁹ With Congress predictably not sharing the administration's qualms about the American role in unseating the Hawaiian monarchy there was nothing more for Cleveland and Gresham to do but accept the resolutions. In May, 1894, a constitutional convention was organised by the Hawaiian provisional government consisting of the 19 members of the provisional government itself and 18 elected representatives. If the apportioning of delegates suggested a desire to overrule the native majority it was unnecessary – a requirement that voters sign an oath of loyalty restricted the electorate to only 4,000, most of whom were foreigners. The resultant constitution saw the creation of a new government on July 4, 1894, an act which drew protests from Queen Liliuokalani, a mass meeting of 5,000-7,000 Hawaiians, and the native groups such as the Women's Hawaiian Patriotic Association who protested to foreign representatives in Honolulu that the new constitution was designed to disenfranchise native Hawaiians and Asian immigrants using tactics similar to those used by the American deep South to disenfranchise African-Americans.⁸⁰ While Gresham would maintain a scathing opinion of the Hawaiian government until his death, Cleveland accepted that his hands were tied and extended official recognition in August.⁸¹ An abortive counter-coup in the winter of 1894-95 was detected and easily brushed aside by the new government and, despite the continued efforts of pro-monarchy groups to petition Cleveland for assistance, the United States played little part in Hawaiian affairs until the McKinley administration resurrected plans for annexation in 1897.⁸²

⁷⁹ Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, pp. 191-192

⁸⁰ For a definitive account of Hawaiian protest against the establishment of the Hawaiian Republic see Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonization*, (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 136-137, 170-171

⁸¹ Charles W. Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato: The Life of Walter Q. Gresham*, (Lexington, KY.: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988), p. 156

⁸² Silva, *Aloha Betrayed*, pp. 138-139; J. Campbell to Grover Cleveland, Dec. 8, 1896, Reel 96, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; David Kalauokalani to Grover Cleveland, Dec. 8, 1896, Reel 96, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; James Keauluna Kaulia to Grover Cleveland, Dec. 8, 1896, Reel 96, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

The Cleveland administration's response to the Hawaiian revolution demonstrates a determination from the returning President and his advisors to enact American foreign policy upon lines fixed by ideological factors. These factors were delivered to the public as an interest in legality and national honour, but these were also expressions of an overarching opposition to imperialist expansion (even if they were tempered by a profoundly paternalist attitude). The negotiations with the Senate to delay ratification of the treaty, the treaty's swift withdrawal, the interest shown in Blount's investigation into both the actions of American representatives and the sentiment of the local population, and the attempt to resolve the problem by restoring the Hawaiian monarchy to power all demonstrate this desire to enact a policy founded upon a legal and ethical basis that would actively attempt to change the course of American foreign relations. In time these concepts of legality and morality would come to define Cleveland's foreign policy during his second term and, while being primarily employed reactively, would eventually be put forward as a template for the United States' interaction with a changing world. This would come later, however, and there is an undeniable pragmatic element to Cleveland's handling of the Hawaiian revolution. This is first demonstrated by his decision to pass the matter to Congress once it became clear that the problem was unsolvable under the constitutional powers of the President. This may be a debatable point since it can be argued that Cleveland placed himself in an untenable position by proposing a course of action that was largely unrealistic and thus was forced to retreat by the course of events. Under this interpretation the decision to pass the matter to Congress is less an act of pragmatism than it is a capitulation. There are other incidents, though, which demonstrate that Cleveland was not so wedded to his ideological principles as to ignore the national interest entirely. Indeed, it is possible to argue that this concern for the national interest formed an underlying factor for almost all of Cleveland's decisions.

It is clear that Cleveland's interpretation of what comprised the national interest was rather different from many other American politicians of the period – such as Minister Stevens – not least because he was a staunch believer that overseas expansion itself was against the national interest. This is not to say, though, that he did not hold certain beliefs in common with his more expansionist opponents. Among these commonalities was concern at the aggressive imperialism of the European powers and a determination to ensure that the United States was not placed at a disadvantage either economically or strategically because of it. In the case of Hawaii this was demonstrated by the decision to balance the rejection of annexation or even a protectorate for the islands with an uncompromising stance in opposition to interference from other powers. Blount's

instructions from Gresham on how to conduct his investigation include a statement to the commissioner (obviously intended to succeed Stevens as the United States' main representative in the islands) setting out the United States' position in relation to Hawaiian sovereignty:

While the United States claim no right to interfere in the political or domestic affairs or in the internal conflicts of the Hawaiian Islands ... this Government will adhere to its consistent and established policy in relation to them, and it will not acquiesce in domestic interference by other powers.⁸³

Clearly there was some concern that other powers might perceive the United States' rejection of annexation as an invitation to attempt to increase their own influence in the islands. This concern could only have been exacerbated by the repeated warnings received from Minister Stevens throughout March and April that the diplomatic and military representatives of both Great Britain and Japan, supported by private citizens of both nations, were considering precisely that interference that Gresham had warned Blount about.⁸⁴ While it is unlikely that Gresham and Cleveland were, even at this early stage, placing any great faith in the impartiality of Stevens' reports it may be telling that copies of his despatches can be found in the Grover Cleveland Papers. The President might have distrusted the Minister, but it would have been extreme negligence on his part to ignore the warnings. It is possible then that Stevens' despatches added to the concern displayed by Gresham in Blount's instructions to prompt a series of private meetings between Gresham and the British, Japanese and Russian representatives in Washington in which the Secretary of State made it clear that the United States would not tolerate outside interference in Hawaii.⁸⁵ Similarly, Walter LaFeber describes how Gresham and the Secretary of the Navy, Hilary Herbert, were careful to assure London that American warships would protect British lives and property and thus kept British forces away from the islands.⁸⁶ Here we see a clear demonstration of the Cleveland administration's stance on imperialism in general and Hawaii in particular: the nation could receive all the economic benefits of close relations with Hawaii without the burdens of annexation or a protectorate simply through careful diplomacy.

So does this mean that Cleveland's rhetoric of a foreign policy governed by honour and justice was simply posturing that would ultimately be consumed by the greater needs of pragmatism and the larger national interest? Not necessarily. While in the case of

⁸³ Gresham to Blount, March 11, 1893, *FRUS App. II*, p. 468

⁸⁴ Mr. Stevens to Mr. Gresham, March 15, 1893, [No. 92], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, pp. 415-416; Mr. Stevens to Mr. Gresham, March 24, 1893, [No. 93], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, pp. 416-418

⁸⁵ LaFeber, *New Empire*, p. 207

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 203-204

Hawaii Cleveland was forced to withdraw from his preferred strategy he had nonetheless achieved a significant change in American policy between returning to office and the decision to pass the matter to Congress in December 1893. Gresham's efforts to ensure that the United States retained its position of commercial superiority in Hawaii can perhaps be seen as a betrayal of principle, but those efforts were not inconsistent with an honourable and legal approach to foreign affairs. After all, what would be the use of such a stance in Hawaii if, by showing restraint itself, the United States simply allowed other powers to move in and declare a protectorate in its place? If the increasing power of the United States of America was one of the most significant of the many changes that were taking place in the sphere of foreign relations in the late 19th Century then the events surrounding Hawaii could perhaps be a demonstration of how that power might be used: not as a means for acquiring empire physically, but as a means of asserting principles of a distinctive American ideology overseas. In this regard the response to the Hawaiian revolution – and potentially much else of late 19th Century foreign policy – ceases to be merely a clash between imperialists and anti-imperialists and instead can be seen as a debate over the directions in which the growing strength of the United States should be applied.

Specifically we see a clash between the enthusiastic expansionism of Minister Stevens and the cautious conservatism of President Cleveland and Secretary of State Gresham, but the debate is not limited simply to the question of whether the United States should annex an island chain in the Pacific Ocean, it is a debate over the nature of global politics and the way America should conduct itself in that environment. One of the most striking aspects of Stevens' official despatches from Hawaii is that, for all that they can be accused of embellishment, rumour-mongering and even outright paranoia, the reader is never left with a sense that Stevens did not believe in the truth of what he was saying: that the United States was involved in a power struggle in Hawaii and that if America did not annex the islands then another nation would undoubtedly do so, with potentially disastrous consequences for American commerce and security. In particular Stevens' despatches regularly expressed concern at what he perceived to be the machinations of the British Minister, sometimes in conjunction with his Japanese counterpart, in an attempt to place Hawaii under a dual or even tripartite protectorate.⁸⁷ Indeed, his despatch of March 15 1893 even goes so far as to end with a warning "that there is occasion for keeping a sharp eye on Tokyo and British and perhaps other foreign intrigues there against our plans of predominance in the North Pacific."⁸⁸ This final statement perhaps explains the difference

⁸⁷ Mr. Stevens to Mr. Foster, March 1, 1893, [No. 88], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, pp. 411-412

⁸⁸ Stevens to Gresham, March 15, 1893, *FRUS, 1894, App. II*, p. 416

in opinion between Stevens and the Cleveland administration. While Cleveland and his advisors were concerned about the potential for foreign interference in Hawaii they did not harbour plans for American predominance in the region (at least beyond the position that the United States already held) while Stevens clearly viewed the situation in much more active terms and thus perceived a much greater threat. In much the same way Stevens' wrote enthusiastically of the benefits of the protectorate both to Hawaiian peace and security and to the annexationist sentiment in the islands – something that Blount would later cast great doubt on – a stark contrast to Cleveland and Gresham's vision of protectorates as entangling alliances which simply burdened the United States with obligations.⁸⁹ Cleveland's lack of worry about the threats perceived by Stevens is, of course, amply demonstrated by his refusal to countenance annexation, but we have already seen that there was sufficient concern about the issue within the administration for Gresham to specifically warn Britain, Japan and Russia not to interfere with Hawaii's sovereignty. The aim of the Cleveland administration was to use such diplomacy to advance their interests, something which Gresham believed could best be achieved by employing the moral high ground granted to them by restraining any colonialist tendencies:

Can the United States consistently insist that other nations shall respect the independence of Hawaii while not respecting it themselves? Our Government was the first to recognize the independence of the Islands and it should be the last to acquire sovereignty over them by force and fraud.⁹⁰

While it is doubtful that any European power would have protested the imposition of an American protectorate in Hawaii – or even outright annexation – this statement can be viewed as consistent with a new policy of employing American power to enforce American ideology - or at least that of Cleveland and Gresham - overseas.

There is a final point that should be made regarding the role of Minister Stevens in the Hawaiian revolution of 1893. In a period of telegraphic communication and steamships the independence of diplomatic representatives in foreign capitals was rapidly shrinking as the State Department was able to exercise more immediate control. Stevens' actions in Hawaii, however, prove that, for all the powers of the presidency, the actions of men on the ground such as Minister Stevens and Captain Wiltse of the *U.S.S. Boston* could still exert a greater effect on foreign policy than the President, at least in a limited area. This spirit of independence in diplomatic representatives would prove to be a persistent problem for the Cleveland administration.

⁸⁹ Mr. Stevens to Mr. Foster, February 27, 1893, [No. 86], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, p. 409

⁹⁰ Gresham, Memorandum, October 18, 1893, *FRUS, 1894, App. II*, p. 463

The contradictions within the actions of the Cleveland administration demonstrate the complexity of the situation and the competing factors weighing on their decisions. This complexity was reflected in the reaction of American public opinion toward events in Hawaii and the administration's actions. The Grover Cleveland Papers contain numerous letters received by the President illustrating both the range of public opinion on the issue and a variety of motives behind such feelings. The San Francisco Chamber of Commerce supported annexation on the somewhat loose grounds that it was "of vital importance to the general interests of the Pacific Coast and will be to the political and commercial advantage of this whole country".⁹¹ Others feared that if the United States did not act while it had the chance then Great Britain, or even Japan, would seize the opportunity to impose a protectorate of their own with potentially dire consequences for the security of the Pacific coast.⁹² When the intention to restore the Queen became clear one writer predicted that the original wrong could not be put right, denounced the plan as "un American [sic]", and urged the President to request Gresham's resignation.⁹³ As would become a regular occurrence whenever the president seemed likely to find himself in possession of new jobs to be dispensed to his supporters one woman attempted to put herself at the head of the queue by requesting a position as a teacher should the federal government decide to create a new school system in the islands after annexation.⁹⁴ Such letters were often the result of the wild speculation taking place in newspapers across the nation and in Hawaii itself, occasionally leading to misunderstandings such as the case of one unfortunate US-raised Hawaiian who named his son Grover Cleveland after the chief magistrate of the nation that he loved in honour of the forthcoming annexation.⁹⁵ Some correspondents sought to advise the president on alternative courses of action with one resident of San Francisco - who claimed that the residents of California, if polled on the issue, would oppose annexation - suggesting that the islands' neutrality be guaranteed so that they became "the Switzerland of the seas", an idea which would be repeated nearly two years later by another

⁹¹ E.B. Pond to Grover Cleveland, June 1, 1893, Reel 76, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁹² T.F. Bourne to Grover Cleveland, April 25, 1893, Reel 75, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Willis D. Paine to Grover Cleveland, July 8, 1893, Reel 77, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁹³ Jon H. Reall to Grover Cleveland, November 12, 1893, Reel 80, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁹⁴ Mary Ida Eldredge to Grover Cleveland, June 7, 1893, Reel 76, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁹⁵ John Stuppelheew to Grover Cleveland, April 19, 1893, Reel 75, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

correspondent who suggested making Hawaii a neutral coaling station for all powers.⁹⁶ Interestingly the letter likening Hawaii's situation to that of Switzerland based its proposal on a recognition of the United States changing position in world affairs, stating:

We have the power to compel the rest of the world to let them alone to work out their own destiny.⁹⁷

Undoubtedly Cleveland also received some support in his stand against annexation - several speakers toured the country speaking out against the revolution and the United States' complicity in it while Charles Francis Adams praised the President's courage and reminded him that the United States could not protest the actions of others if it was guilty itself.⁹⁸ It is apparent from the correspondence, however, that there was a growing awareness amongst the President's supporters that public opinion was turning against them. Gresham himself declared

I think the American people will respond to a frank appeal to their sense of right and justice, but whether they do or not, I have done my duty. When feeling that I am right I am not sensitive to abuse.⁹⁹

Sensitive or not, he shortly sought comfort in the thought that "the thoughtful and patriotic men of the country are with us in the position we have taken, and in the end they control public opinion."¹⁰⁰ The truth of either assertion is debatable and the winter of 1893 saw the administration's supporters resorting to hope that public opinion would eventually come around.¹⁰¹ Most worrying of all, the opposition to the policy spanned the partisan divide raising troubling questions as to the extent to which expansionist sentiment had permeated the population as a whole.¹⁰² It is these last points which are most significant. There is no evidence to suggest that the correspondence received by Cleveland - which, as has been established, presented a broad array of opinion anyway - played a material role in altering his stance on Hawaii and the evidence suggests that neither he nor Gresham were unduly

⁹⁶ John P. Rush to Grover Cleveland, April 15, 1893, Reel 75, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Edward Atkinson memorandum 'In re Sandwich Islands', February 15, 1895, Reel 89, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁹⁷ Rush to Cleveland, April 15, 1893, Reel 75, Cleveland Papers, MD, LC

⁹⁸ J. Snare Detwiler to Grover Cleveland, April 28, 1893, Reel 75, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Charles Francis Adams to Grover Cleveland, November 18, 1893, Reel 80, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁹⁹ Walter Q. Gresham to Carl Schurz, November 21, 1893, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁰⁰ Walter Q. Gresham to Carl Schurz, December 17, 1893, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁰¹ A.B. Farquhar to Grover Cleveland, November 13, 1893, Reel 80, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Thomas M. Rogers to Grover Cleveland, February 8, 1894, Reel 82, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁰² Felix A. Reeve to Grover Cleveland, December 20, 1893, Reel 81, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

troubled by public opinion on the matter. However, the failure to unite the Democratic Party behind his policy was a worrying indicator of problems ahead for Cleveland as he sought to lead the Party through a difficult period of domestic government while his inability to command the support of the public for his foreign policy would be a political liability and, more significantly, would eventually mean the failure of his legalist approach.

Ultimately Grover Cleveland experienced a rebuke in Hawaii: his preferred course of action proved to be unworkable in the domestic politics of the islands and this reality check forced him to adopt a more pragmatic approach. Similarly the constraints of an era of rampant imperialism and highly competitive commerce forced Cleveland and Gresham to alter their stance on imperialism somewhat in order to protect the national interest. In this case the creeping commercial empire of the United States had become the status quo and Cleveland, while opposed to physical acquisitions of territory, was not prepared to undermine America's commercial position by attacking that status quo. The Hawaiian revolution of 1893 presents us with numerous elements that made up Cleveland's policy: a desire to act honourably and in conjunction with international law, a pragmatic approach to insurmountable problems, a paternalist and even imperialist attitude that nevertheless abhorred outright expansionism, a determination to defend the national interest as Cleveland himself saw it, and the possibility of a new assertiveness in using America's increasing power to enact American ideological principles overseas. All these factors can be seen in the evolution of Cleveland's foreign policy across his second term of office.

Chapter 2 – Walter Q. Gresham, 1893-95

Walter Quintin Gresham served as Grover Cleveland's Secretary of State from the inauguration in March 1893 until his death on May 28th, 1895. During this period he never encountered another problem to match the complexity, magnitude and lasting significance of the Hawaiian revolution which confronted him when he entered office. He did, though, manage a variety of incidents which, while of less importance in the long term, are nevertheless of historical interest for what they can tell us about the role played by the second Grover Cleveland administration in the evolution of United States foreign policy. Two incidents in particular shed light on the legalistic approach to foreign policy and the inherent difficulties encountered by a growing power attempting to maintain its traditional posture of neutrality and friendly relations with all. These two incidents were the Brazilian Naval Revolt that occurred over the winter of 1893-94 and the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. Many of the themes that can be identified in Cleveland and Gresham's management of the Hawaiian revolution can also be seen to be at work in these smaller incidents from which it is possible to establish an understanding of not just how the men perceived the role of foreign policy, but also how they perceived the world and the United States' position in it. In particular the desire for a foreign policy founded upon legal and moral values manifested itself repeatedly while the determination to refrain from expansionist imperialism remained a constant. There were, though, significant differences in how these incidents were handled in comparison to the Hawaiian revolution. Not least among these changes was a greater autonomy experienced by the State Department. The discussion of key decisions in cabinet meetings that had characterised the administration's Hawaiian policy was not repeated for incidents of less direct importance to the United States.¹ Furthermore, with President Cleveland increasingly distracted by the need to tackle the depression that struck the United States in May, 1893, and the domestic unrest that followed it – most notably the Pullman Strike that came to a head in the summer of 1894 – he had less time to directly supervise all aspects of his Secretary of State's work. Undoubtedly Cleveland still maintained the role of final arbiter in foreign policy, but with domestic concerns of far greater importance for the future of the nation Gresham naturally assumed a greater responsibility for directing policy.

¹ This relative lack of importance also meant that the events do feature prominently in the personal papers of either Cleveland or Gresham. For this reason the majority of the sources for this chapter will be drawn from the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series.

It is important to be aware of the events taking place in domestic politics during Cleveland's second term since they would eventually have a strong bearing on the fate of his foreign policy initiatives as well. The first two years of Cleveland's second term in office were notable for a series of skirmishes with Congress which, while successful to varying degrees in themselves, caused immense damage to the administration's relationship with Democrats in Congress and did not achieve the ultimate goal of curing the economic troubles that resulted from the crash of 1893. In just over twelve months from August, 1893, to August, 1894, Cleveland forced two measures designed to rally the struggling American economy past a divided and reluctant Congress. In the summer of 1893 he called a special session to repeal the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890. This act provided for the mandatory purchasing of silver from American mines by the government and had been opposed by Cleveland from its beginning. Blaming the Act for draining the treasury's gold reserves and thus reducing investors' confidence in the government, Cleveland threatened to withhold patronage appointments until both the House and the Senate had passed the repeal bill.² These strong arm tactics did not endear Cleveland to members of Congress and undoubtedly built up considerable ill-will toward the administration, but considerably more alarming was the number of Democrats who openly opposed their President's plans in both houses. The disaffection of these men, who came largely from the South and the West - regions which either mined the silver or hoped to benefit from inflation brought about by a switch to a bimetallic or all silver currency base - and Cleveland's absolute refusal to compromise raised fears of a split in the party and angered moderates. This legacy undoubtedly played a role in Cleveland's second major battle - tariff reform.

Tariff reform had been a favourite policy of Cleveland's for even longer than his opposition to the Silver Purchase law. In December, 1887, he had devoted his entire Annual Message to a call for lower tariff rates, and his re-election campaign had pledged to replace the McKinley Tariff Act of 1890. While recognising the utility of tariffs to benefit American industry, Cleveland argued that the Republican system of high tariffs placed an unjust burden on the working classes who were obliged to pay more for manufactured goods due to lack of competition. Cleveland favoured a tariff which gave some protection to industry from foreign imports, but lowered costs for all by allowing free entry of raw materials. To this end Cleveland himself jointly authored a tariff bill which was introduced to the House by Congressman William L. Wilson in December, 1893.³ The bill passed the

² Richard E. Welch, *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1988), pp. 122-123

³ *Ibid*, pp. 131-137

House, but thereafter it swiftly became a political football. In the face of strong Republican opposition on principle in the Senate, the bill needed united Democratic support, but sectional interests made such unity impossible. Having forced through silver purchase repeal, Cleveland had little goodwill left in the Senate to overcome such issues. When the bill finally emerged from months of debate it had been heavily amended, so much so that some observers thought it identical to the McKinley Tariff. While this was an overstatement, Cleveland refused to sign the bill, allowing it to become law without his signature as a small improvement on the McKinley Act. Like the silver purchase battle before it, the tariff fight had revealed worrying sectional and ideological splits in the Democratic Party while Cleveland's uncompromising style had done nothing to close the divisions. This would be a precursor to greater problems in the years ahead.

Gresham was called to set out a position for the United States by events in South America in September, 1893. Politics in Brazil had been unstable for several years, ever since the revolution of 1889 which had deposed the nation's monarchy and replaced the empire with a republic. The first President of Brazil was forced to resign in the face of opposition from the National Congress shortly after his election in 1891 and his successor, Vice-President Floriano Vieira Peixoto faced questions over his rule for the remainder of his term. These questions were among the many factors cited by the leaders of a multitude of small rebellions that broke out in the following years culminating in the revolt of a large section of the Brazilian navy in September, 1893. The various causes of the revolt have been summarised by one historian as "personal animosities in the ruling elite, friction in federal-state relations and between the president and the congress, militarism, government extravagance, army-navy rivalry, and some lingering monarchical sentiments following the overthrow of the empire in 1889," while Walter LaFeber suggests that one of the issues which had provoked friction between Peixoto and the National Congress was the reciprocal trade agreement signed between Brazil and the United States in 1891.⁴ The leaders of the revolt, meanwhile, made various claims to justify their actions. The first proclamation of Rear Admiral Custodio José de Mello, the commander of the initial revolt, accused Peixoto of misuse of presidential power and embezzlement of public funds while the manifesto of Mello's successor, Rear Admiral Saldanha da Gama, declared that the overthrow of the Brazilian monarchy had itself been an illegal act and was at the root of the nation's

⁴ Charles W. Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato: The Life of Walter Q. Gresham*, (Lexington, Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988), p. 194; Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898*, (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1963), p. 210

troubles.⁵ Clearly there were many factors at work behind the decision to revolt against the Brazilian government, but it is notable that Secretary Gresham appears to have had no interest in the various justifications that were put forward. While the United States minister in Brazil, Thomas Larkin Thompson, kept his superior well-informed of the various proclamations and manifestos issued by the insurgents, Gresham displayed no obvious interest in their content and did not request further investigation by his minister of the charges made by the rebels. In the case of the Brazilian Naval Revolt the over-riding determinant of policy would not be the questions of morality that had featured so strongly in Hawaii and would reappear in later incidents. Instead American policy would be dictated purely by legal precedent. Regardless of the rights and wrongs of the government of Vice-President Peixoto, that government was internationally acknowledged to be the legal authority in Brazil and was therefore able to manage its internal affairs as it saw fit.⁶ For Gresham the affairs of the Brazilian government would be peripheral, it was to be the actions of the insurgents that formed the foundations of his policy.

The Brazilian Naval Revolt began on September 6, 1893, when several vessels of the Brazilian navy in Rio de Janeiro harbour rebelled against their government. Seizing control of all the Brazilian warships in the harbour, Admiral Mello threatened to bombard the city if Vice-President Peixoto did not resign. The insurgents found themselves to be in a delicate situation: they held the power to dominate Rio harbour and to bombard the city, but the government still held the shoreline and the coastal forts due to the unwavering loyalty of the Brazilian army. They also found their freedom of action to be restricted by the presence of several foreign warships representing Great Britain, France, Italy and Portugal.⁷ It swiftly became apparent that Mello's plan was to bombard the coastal forts and the military installations within the city in the hope that popular pressure would force Peixoto to resign.

Gresham had the choice of three basic options in his response to the revolt: back the Brazilian government, openly support the rebels, or adopt a position of neutrality. His decision can be seen as coming in two phases: the initial definition of the United States'

⁵ *Admiral de Mello's proclamation to his fellow citizens* reproduced in Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, September 11, 1893, [No. 4], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, pp. 47-49; *Manifesto of Rear-Admiral Saldanha da Gama, of the Brazilian navy*, reproduced in Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, December 18, 1893, [No. 107], pp. 83-84

⁶ Despite assuming the powers of the Brazilian presidency on November 23, 1891, when his predecessor Deodoro da Fonseca resigned his office, Floriano Peixoto retained the title of Vice-President. Official dispatches, somewhat confusingly, use the titles of President and Vice-President interchangeably, while some historians have preferred to use the term acting-President. The title of Vice-President, as the most widely used term in the official dispatches, shall be used here.

⁷ Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, September 7, 1893, [No. 3], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 46

basic position in early September, and an elaborated statement of policy that was reached in response to the actions of the insurgents during October and was received by Minister Thompson on November 2. The initial course was not so much a statement of policy as it was an indication of the Cleveland administrations' priorities. With information at a premium and no sure knowledge of how events would unfold Gresham simply was not in a position to set out a detailed course in the first weeks of the revolt. Gresham's first telegram to Thompson following the revolt came on September 8 and instructed the minister "to concert with other legations and make by separate note representations to the Brazilian Government in regard to the suspension of telegraphic intercourse, by which, especially at this time, commerce suffers serious injury."⁸ This communication was followed the next day by a telegram informing the minister, who had requested the presence in Rio de Janeiro of an American warship in the wake of the declaration of martial law by the Brazilian government, that the U.S.S. *Charleston* and the U.S.S. *Detroit* had been ordered to the city.⁹ These messages clearly demonstrate Gresham's priorities: the protection of key interests of the United States and its citizens, namely communication, commerce and protection of life and property. The availability of telegraphic communications permitted Gresham and others in Washington to stay abreast of the situation and was also an important tool for American merchants conducting trade in Brazil. The presence of American warships in Rio harbour would ensure direct protection to American shipping that might be threatened by the rebel ships and to American interests on land that Thompson clearly feared might be endangered by the declaration of martial law. They also offered another means of information gathering for Washington. A further benefit, although it is impossible to know whether this featured in Gresham and Secretary of the Navy Hilary Herbert's thinking in dispatching the warships, was that the United States would be assured equal representation with the European powers that had warships stationed in Rio.

The actions and communications of Minister Thompson support the interpretation that Gresham's initial posture was based upon a belief that the American government's first responsibility was to protect its trade and ensure the safety of its citizens. These messages were largely divided between commercial matters and reports relating to the progress of the revolt which themselves often focussed on potential consequences of these

⁸ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Thompson, September 8, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 47

⁹ Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, September 9, 1893, [No. 3], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 46; Mr. Gresham to Mr. Thompson, September 9, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 47

events for American commerce.¹⁰ His second message after the outbreak of the revolt stressed that he intended, in concert with the other foreign representatives in Rio, to conduct his diplomacy with strict neutrality, in this instance by declining an invitation to attend a meeting with the vice-president to discuss measures to be adopted in the event of a bombardment.¹¹ The fact that Gresham did not send instructions to Thompson on how he was to conduct himself in relation to either the Brazilian government or the rebels until late in September strongly suggests that he approved of this posture of neutrality, a fact borne out by later events. While Thompson's actions and motives would come under a certain amount of scrutiny from Gresham in the later stages of the revolt, his early reactions to the revolt appear to have been accepted as right and proper by the secretary of state. None of this should be surprising for two reasons: firstly, because Thompson, who had been appointed by Gresham earlier in the year, clearly was in a position where he knew his chief's mind and recognised his priorities; and secondly because the stance adopted was a conservative one which was not radically different to those adopted by the other large powers represented in Rio de Janeiro.

The development of a more detailed policy towards the revolt was facilitated by the arrival in Rio harbour of the U.S.S. *Charleston* on September 26 and resulted from the growing concerns of Minister Thompson at the danger to American life and property posed by the rebel fleet's bombardment of the city. On September 28 Thompson telegraphed Washington to report that repeated bombardments had resulted in civilian deaths and the destruction of property and that "if approved by the Department he will advise that a decided stand be taken against allowing it against a defenceless city." The minister also reported that he had "advised the commanding officer of the *Charleston* to protect American goods on barges against seizure by the revolutionists, and to use force if necessary."¹² On the day before he had issued a proclamation to U.S. citizens in Rio that all ships and boats involved in landing American cargo or passengers at the port should fly the American flag to ensure their protection.¹³ Also on the 28th Acting Secretary Strobel cabled Thompson directing him "to furnish the commanding officer of the U.S.S. *Charleston* with a copy of order to the effect that further destruction and bloodshed should be prevented by the exertion of all the moral force of the Government of the United States, by protest and otherwise, and that the protection of American persons and property should

¹⁰ For Minister Thompson's communications from the first weeks of the Brazilian Naval Revolt see *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893-1894*, pp. 45-50

¹¹ Thompson to Gresham, September 7, 1893, [No. 3], *FRUS, 1893*, pp. 45-46

¹² Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, September 28, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 51

¹³ Notice Published by Mr. Thompson, September 27, 1893, reproduced in Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, October 13, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 53

be made the object of every possible effort.”¹⁴ While not an enormous alteration from the initial position of neutrality, this order still marked a significant change in the United States’ posture towards the revolt marking as it did a limitation to the freedom of the insurgents. This was certainly not a statement one way or the other on the rightness of the rebels’ cause, but it was a declaration that harm to American interests would not be tolerated. It was also a statement of the two key principles at stake for the Cleveland administration: humanitarianism and trade. The indiscriminate shelling of civilians and the seizure of American property in the process of being landed at the port were both to be opposed. Once again, however, this shift was by no means a radical one, a fact that is demonstrated by Minister Thompson’s telegram of October 2 reporting that a meeting of the representatives of France, Britain, Portugal, Italy and the United States had taken place in response to an announcement by Mello that he intended to bombard the city again with the result that the representatives advised the commanders of foreign warships in the harbour to “take measures to prevent such bombardment”.¹⁵ On the same day Thompson reported that the diplomatic corps had maintained their neutrality by delivering a verbal note to the Brazilian minister of foreign affairs requesting that no action be taken by his government that might grant the rebels an excuse for attempting another bombardment.¹⁶ Regardless of this display of neutrality there may be some significance in the fact that the next message Thompson received from Gresham was a brief telegram instructing him to “exert himself in favor of the innocent trade of American vessels and of the legitimate inward and outward trade of merchandise belonging to the citizens of the United States.”¹⁷ It would appear that the protection of American trade was the secretary’s primary concern.

The first major change in the nature of the Brazilian Naval Revolt came on October 14 although it was not known of in Washington until the 25th of that month. On the 14th the rebels established a government in Santa Catharina province and officially petitioned the United States and the European powers for recognition as belligerents. This was a significant step since recognition of the rebels as belligerents would legally transform the revolt into a civil war and therefore grant the insurgents numerous extra rights, not the least of which would be the power to declare a blockade of Brazilian ports, an action that clearly ran contrary to Gresham’s concept of American interests. Under these circumstances - as reported to Gresham by Thompson in a telegram of October 24 and received the next day - Gresham naturally fell back on his legal training. Charles W. Calhoun identifies that Gresham drew heavily – and at times quoted verbatim – from Richard Henry Dana’s 1866

¹⁴ Mr. Strobel to Mr. Thompson, September 28, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 51

¹⁵ Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, October 2, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 51

¹⁶ Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, October 2, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, pp. 51-52

¹⁷ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Thompson, October 11, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 52

edition of Henry Wharton's *Elements of International Law* which clearly stated that such status should only be granted if the insurgents could demonstrate that their government and the territory it professed to control was sufficient in size and character to constitute a nation by itself.¹⁸ With no legal obligation to recognise the rebel government and nothing to gain from the move, Gresham was able to telegram Thompson and inform him that belligerent status would not be granted. Instead he instructed his minister to "observe, until further advised, the attitude of an indifferent spectator ... and espouse the course of neither side."¹⁹ Once again there was nothing unusual about Gresham's decision; every other power petitioned by the insurgent government received the same response. Finally, as it became clear that the rebels would not be receiving international sympathy, Gresham cabled Thompson once more to definitively state his preferred course of action. The telegram (dated November 1, but referred to thereafter by Thompson as the instructions of November 2) came as a response to a query from Thompson as to whether American protection would extend as far as Brazilian owned barges being used to unload American goods from ships in the harbour – a necessary part of commerce in the port.²⁰ Gresham's reply was unequivocal:

There having been no recognition by the United States of the insurgents as belligerents and there being no pretence that the port of Rio is blockaded, it is clear that if an American ship anchored in the harbor employs barges and lighters in transferring her cargo to the shore in the usual way and in doing so does not cross or otherwise interfere with Mello's line of fire and he seizes or attempts to seize the barges or lighters, he can and should be resisted.²¹

The secretary of state was determined that commerce should continue as closely to normal as possible. He was also keen to ensure that the American position might not be misunderstood by the rebels, closing the message with the line: "You will deliver or send a copy of this instruction to the commander of the insurgents."

The policy of neutrality was a natural one for Walter Q. Gresham to adopt: it was conservative, legalist and did not seek to push any ulterior agenda. It was not, however, simply a convenient escape for a man who sought to isolate his nation from world affairs. The seriousness with which Gresham approached the policy of neutrality is demonstrated by the care he and Secretary of the Navy Herbert displayed in maintaining it. The secretary was twice faced with situations in which he feared that neutrality had been compromised and on both occasions acted swiftly to ensure that this would not be the case. The more serious of these occasions took place almost simultaneously with Gresham's rejection of

¹⁸ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 196

¹⁹ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Thompson, October 25, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 63

²⁰ Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, October 30, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 63

²¹ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Thompson, November 1, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 64

the rebels' request for belligerent status. It involved the arrival at Rio of Rear Admiral Oscar M. Stanton aboard the U.S.S. *Newark* on October 19.²² In the first few days after his arrival Stanton exchanged visits with Admiral Mello and fired a salute to the rebel commander.²³ Surprised and embarrassed by this unauthorised and unprecedented act of hospitality, Gresham and Herbert instantly recalled Stanton. Minister Thompson was unwittingly present during Mello's visit to the *Newark*, having been unable to leave before the Admiral arrived. His report of the meeting stressed its social character and that politics had not been discussed, but it is clear that Thompson had been surprised by the meeting and would have avoided it if he could.²⁴ Although written after Stanton's recall the minister's version of events would appear to be reliable since he was not reprimanded for his actions. Stanton would later claim that he was simply attempting to build a common foundation for communications with the rebel commander in anticipation of future disturbances, but this was of little consolation for Gresham and Herbert who stoically ignored the messages of praise and thanks they received from the Brazilian government for their swift action.²⁵ The seriousness with which the incident was viewed by the administration is demonstrated by the decision to explain it in President Cleveland's annual message for 1893. In this message Cleveland specifically cited the swift removal of Admiral Stanton as evidence of the "fixed policy of impartial neutrality" that his administration had adopted.²⁶

The second occasion on which Gresham felt it necessary to reaffirm the policy of neutrality related to one of the few notable changes in the condition of the revolt. On December 9, 1893, Thompson reported that the previously unaligned Rear Admiral Saldanha da Gama had arrived in Rio harbour to take command of the rebel forces in the wake of the departure of Admiral Mello in the early hours of December 1.²⁷ During the intervening period the Brazilian government had ordered all foreign merchant ships to evacuate the waterfront area in order to clear a line of fire that would allow its troops on the mainland to attack the rebel fleet. The flaw in this plan was quickly exposed as government troops found themselves under fire from the rebels, prompting the government to once again encourage merchant shipping to use the docks. As Calhoun describes, however, foreign commanders including Captain Picking of the U.S.S. *Charleston* had

²² Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, November 10, 1893, [No. 70] *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, pp. 72-73

²³ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 196

²⁴ Thompson to Gresham, November 10, 1893, [No. 70] *FRUS, 1893*, pp. 72-73

²⁵ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, pp. 196-197; Floriano Peixoto to Grover Cleveland, November 15, 1893, Reel 80, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

²⁶ Grover Cleveland, First Annual Message (second term), December 4, 1893

²⁷ Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, December 9, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 82; Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, December 1, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 77

been ordered not to protect shipping that interfered with the line of fire and were concerned at what they perceived to be an attempt by the Brazilian government to use foreign shipping as a shield for its forces – a direct breach of neutrality.²⁸ From Thompson's reports it is clear that there was insufficient communication between the minister and the naval commander since on December 17 the former was unsure of whether Picking had withdrawn protection for shipping and was encouraging Washington to implement the instruction of November 1 to resist interference with commerce.²⁹ The disagreement between the two was summarised in Thompson's telegram of December 21 in which the minister reported Picking's refusal to protect shipping that entered the line of fire, but argued that such firing was so desultory and covered such a broad expanse of the bay that viewing it as a line of fire would cause serious damage to American commerce.³⁰ At this point Gresham's preference for the legality of his policy over the interests of trade is shown by the fact that no order was sent to Picking to alter his stance. A potential supporting factor in this decision, noted by Calhoun and given credence by several dispatches from Gresham to his minister, is the apparent concern the secretary held over Thompson's credibility and impartiality. In November, after Thompson passed on a request from the U.S. consul at Pernambuco for an American warship to protect U.S. civilians in the light of reported clashes between the Brazilian army and rebel troops in the region, Gresham had sent a brusque reply stating:

Mr. Gresham, remarking that Mr. Thompson's telegram of the 19th does not afford a sufficient basis for instructions, directs him to confer with the commander of the naval forces of the United States, and warns him that he should report facts and not rumors.³¹

Then in late December Thompson was forced to defend himself after Gresham specifically ordered him to stay in Rio de Janeiro rather than at his residence in Petropolis.³² The timing of these orders from Gresham suggests a broader lack of trust in his representatives. Within days of chastising Thompson for reporting rumours he would send an equally scathing message to Minister Willis in Hawaii after his incomplete telegraphic report on the failure of his first meeting with Queen Liliuokalani.³³ Clearly the secretary did not appreciate being asked to make a decision based upon anything less than full and detailed

²⁸ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 197

²⁹ Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, December 17, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 83

³⁰ Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, December 21, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 85

³¹ Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, November 18, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 75; Mr. Gresham to Mr. Thompson, November 20, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 75

³² Mr. Gresham to Mr. Thompson, December 25, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 86; Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, December 28, 1893, [No. 114], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 87

³³ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Willis, November 24, 1893, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, affairs in Hawaii (Appendix II)*, p. 437

facts, although it must be noted that representatives in both Brazil and Hawaii did send general reports to Washington that noted local rumours and, particularly in Brazil where the government controlled the flow of information, unconfirmed reports. The varying degrees of trust in his subordinates would be a feature of Gresham's period in office and, indeed, of the entirety of Cleveland's second term. One cannot help speculating about the likely effects of Gresham's first major controversy in office – the Hawaiian revolution – and the significant part played in that event by a rogue American diplomat upon the secretary's subsequent interaction with his representatives overseas.

Gresham's mistrust of Thompson was, perhaps, somewhat unfair given that the minister had deftly handled the question of neutrality in the Brazilian Naval Revolt from its beginnings with little prompting from his chief. It was perhaps inevitable though that the maintenance of a consistent posture would become harder as the revolt continued. While Thompson can be viewed as overly supportive of the Brazilian government, part of his role as minister was to facilitate trade and it is understandable that he would take a different view to Picking over the matter of what constituted a line of fire given the two men's respective roles. It is also clear from his reports that Minister Thompson very quickly became convinced that the naval revolt was doomed to failure. As early as September 19 he was reporting that the Brazilian people appeared disinterested in the whole affair, viewing it as a matter between the army and navy, while his report of the publication of a manifesto by Admiral Saldanha da Gama noted that it had resulted in protests against the Admiral's plans to restore the empire with support limited to the minority who had derived status from the monarchy.³⁴ The intervening period had seen numerous reports reach Thompson of the perilous military position faced by the rebels away from Rio. Under such circumstances it would perhaps be understandable if Thompson's professionalism lapsed slightly as he began to treat the revolt as a charade.

Certainly Thompson's stance was, to a large extent, validated by the final substantial twist in the Brazilian Naval Revolt. Shortly after his arrival in December, Admiral Saldanha da Gama began to pursue a more active course than his predecessor by releasing his new manifesto calling for the overthrow of the republic, demanding recognition as belligerents from the foreign powers – swiftly rejected by Gresham – and taking a tougher line against the foreign merchant shipping in Rio.³⁵ The announcement that da Gama planned to stop the landing of all merchandise in the port of Rio prompted the diplomatic corps to request that the foreign naval commanders prevent any such action

³⁴ Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, September 19, 1893, [No. 17], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 50; Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, December 18, 1893, [No. 107], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 83

³⁵ Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, December 27, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 86

and also to remind the commanders of the outstanding agreement to prevent the bombardment of the city which was being violated.³⁶ This suggests that Thompson's opinion that the foreign warships should have been providing a more active protection for commerce was shared by his colleagues in the diplomatic community in Rio, but this view was undermined by the decision of the Brazilian government to fortify positions in the city, in breach of the agreement that had been made to deter bombardment. In consequence Gresham dispatched another instruction that did little to change the American position with the possible exception of making it less clear. Regarding the United States principal goals and interests Gresham declared:

Our principal and obvious duty, apart from neutrality, is to guard against needless or illegitimate interference, by either hostile party, with the innocent and legitimate neutral interests of our citizens.³⁷

This demonstrates that Gresham placed the strictures of neutrality above the protection of trade, but his statement that "Vexatious interference with foreign merchant shipping ... is as illegitimate as it is intolerable." and subsequent assertion that the United States had the rights to demand a safe anchorage in which to load and unload goods is a clear indication of his strong desire to maintain commerce. It can be argued that this new focus on commerce as a matter of right marked a slight, but significant change in policy from Gresham perhaps as a result of concern at the possibility that the rebels were imposing a blockade that their numbers did not warrant through the indulgence of the foreign powers. Calhoun argues persuasively, however, that this is not the case and that Gresham was simply seeking to better define the complicated situation that actually existed inside Rio bay within the abstract concepts of international law.³⁸ Whatever the case, the situation in Rio harbour would see a significant change before the end of January.

On January 12, 1894, Admiral A.E.K. Benham arrived at Rio aboard the U.S.S. *San Francisco*.³⁹ The Admiral's arrival was a swap with Admiral Stanton who took over Benham's former duties as commander of the North Atlantic Station rather than a sign of dissatisfaction with Captain Picking's performance. Benham's arrival initially marked no change in the American position in Rio, but within two weeks he was forced to act definitively against the rebel fleet. An accusation on January 24 that a rebel ship had aimed rifle fire against an American merchant ship was met with the claim by da Gama that the

³⁶ Enclosure 2 'Diplomatic Corps to the Naval Commanders', December 19, 1893, in Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, December 31, 1893, [No. 117], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 88

³⁷ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Thompson, January 11, 1894, [No. 78], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 99

³⁸ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, pp. 200-201

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 201

shots had been blanks fired as a warning to a vessel entering the firing zone, but when the following day saw a report of live ammunition being fired at an American ship attempting to dock at the port Benham was moved to demand an end to such interference from da Gama.⁴⁰ It should be noted that Benham stressed to da Gama that his demand was not intended to contradict the previous position of neutrality relating to the armed conflict in the bay, but da Gama's refusal to reply prompted the U.S. commander to offer an armed escort for American merchant vessels travelling to the docks. Interestingly Minister Thompson was either not aware of the harassment of American ships or did not consider it significant since he did not mention it in his report of January 26 and declared that American trade had not suffered "serious interference".⁴¹ Thompson did note, however, that a conference of naval commanders had agreed to oppose the attempts of the insurgents to stop the landing of coal – a move which Thompson viewed as a return to the posture of early November and thus a vindication of his position in the difference of opinion with Captain Picking. It is therefore possible that when Admiral Benham ordered the U.S.S. *Detroit* to escort an American merchantman to the docks on January 29 he was acting in conjunction with a more general policy of assertiveness from the foreign naval commanders. What is unquestionable is that the exchange of fire between the *Detroit* and a rebel vessel marked the end of the more aggressive tactics used by the insurgents since Admiral da Gama's arrival. On that subject it is important to note, as Calhoun describes, that the tough stance adopted by Benham was a response to the actions of the insurgents – rather than an active attempt to change the situation in the harbour by the American commander – and also a measure that clearly fell within the bounds of Gresham's instructions from the start of November and before.⁴² Certainly Benham's actions were not part of a larger plan in Washington to influence the revolt since Thompson received telegrams on January 29 and 30 urgently requesting further information on how and why Benham had acted.⁴³ Specifically the secretary desired to know whether there had been a change in the Admiral's relations with either the insurgents or the Brazilian government and whether the other foreign naval commanders agreed with the action; once again neutrality was at the forefront of Gresham's thinking.⁴⁴ Thompson's report, in which he gave his wholehearted approval to the Admiral's orders, appeared to mollify his chief who replied that the action was justified within his instructions and, somewhat unnecessarily

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 201-202

⁴¹ Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, January 26, 1894, [No. 141], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 115

⁴² Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 202

⁴³ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Thompson, January 29, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 116; Mr. Gresham to Mr. Thompson, January 30, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 116

⁴⁴ Gresham to Thomson, January 30, 1894, *FRUS*, p. 116

given Thompson's enthusiastic reporting of the incident, expressed his hope that Thompson was in accord with the Admiral – further evidence of Gresham's lack of trust in his minister.⁴⁵

Calhoun notes that many observers, both at the time and since, gave credit to the *Detroit* action for bringing the Brazilian Naval Revolt to an end. Calhoun rejects this, quite correctly, on the grounds that the insurgency was not defeated at Rio until mid-March and that the final mopping-up of forces elsewhere took another month after that.⁴⁶ While not wishing to disagree with this analysis, it might be suggested that this ignores one vital aspect of the American action. By using force to oppose the interference of rebel vessels with merchant shipping the American commander forced his counterpart in the rebel fleet to abandon his aggressive tactics. This move, coming in the wake of the failure of the insurgents to inspire support – or even interest – among the Brazilian population marked a serious setback by ending the insurgents' slim hopes of acquiring belligerent status by imposing a blockade on Rio de Janeiro.⁴⁷ Without ever acting outside the bounds laid down by the policy of neutrality, Admiral Benham delivered a heavy blow to the insurgency's chances of success.

The fact that the *Detroit* action was able to inflict a damaging blow upon the insurgents' chances of success without in itself breaching the rules of neutrality is indicative of how much that policy favoured the Brazilian government. The rebels' failure to prove themselves capable of either mounting a genuine blockade of Rio or establishing a viable state of their own robbed them of the benefits that they might have gained from the international community under the law. It is wrong, though, to suggest – as William Appleman Williams does – that Gresham was actually running an interventionist policy in support of the Brazilian government out of fear that the rebels posed a genuine threat to American commerce.⁴⁸ Likewise Walter LaFeber's suggestion that pressure from American business had persuaded Gresham to bring about a more aggressive policy with the goal of ending the rebellion and perhaps increasing the United States' share of the

⁴⁵ Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, January 31, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, pp. 116-117; Mr. Gresham to Mr. Thompson, February 1, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 117

⁴⁶ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 203

⁴⁷ One correspondent to Cleveland reported that most Brazilians saw the republic as a fairer system which offered some hope of personal advancement while the aristocracy also largely supported it having survived the transition from monarchy to republic with their status largely unaffected. All sides reportedly saw the revolt as a clash between the army and the navy with little interest to most civilians. E.A. Fuertes to Grover Cleveland, December 23, 1893, Reel 81, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁴⁸ William Appleman Williams, *The Roots of American Empire*, (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 366

Brazilian market is false.⁴⁹ Both theories are refuted by the consistent policy of neutrality maintained by the Cleveland administration throughout the revolt and by the simple fact that Cleveland and Gresham saw little to be gained from enacting any other policy. While the two men undoubtedly believed that it was the role of government to protect and facilitate overseas trade, it is clear that the policy of neutrality was always uppermost in Gresham's thinking.

Another issue that figures prominently in the historiography is the question of whether Gresham was motivated by fear that the European powers might support the insurgents if it led to a restoration of the Brazilian monarchy. This malign influence is usually attributed to the British, either as a result of direct commercial interests or as an attempt to check the growth of U.S. power in Latin America, although at least one historian has attributed Cleveland's refusal to grant the rebels belligerent status to his concern that they were receiving support from Germany.⁵⁰ Neither suggestion is borne out by the available evidence. In the latter case there appears to be little evidence to show undue concern from Gresham at potential German support for the rebels. On the contrary, Minister Thompson's reports in January, 1894, specifically mentioned the German vessels in Rio harbour as among the few that were willing to defy the rebel's attempted blockade, stating that only the German commander had maintained the stance taken against Admiral Mello after the arrival of Admiral da Gama.⁵¹ This consistent stance from the German officers was confirmed in Thompson's replies to Gresham's querying of Admiral Benham's conduct in relation to the other foreign naval commanders.⁵² The theory that Gresham was motivated by concern over British actions is better supported by Thompson's reports, but also more definitively refuted by Gresham's own words. The cable messages sent to Washington by Thompson after December, 1893, gave a strong impression that it was the British representatives, both military and diplomatic, who were responsible for the change in attitude towards the insurgency and its attempts to frustrate international trade. On December 14 Thompson reported that the British naval officers had withdrawn protection for shipping and on January 29 he informed Gresham that the British diplomatic representative had stated that all other alternatives would have to be exhausted before British vessels used force to restore a British merchant firm's coal trade.⁵³ This message

⁴⁹ LaFeber, *New Empire*, pp. 215-216

⁵⁰ Robert L. Beisner, *From the Old Diplomacy to the New, 1865-1900*, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1975), p. 97

⁵¹ Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, January 12, 1894, [No. 134], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, pp. 105-106

⁵² Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, February 1, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 118

⁵³ Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, December 14, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 82; Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, January 29, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 116

also suggested that the British minister was considering recommending that his government should grant the rebels recognition. Perhaps most importantly, on February 1, Thompson reported discussions between the diplomatic corps and the naval commanders on how to reopen the coal trade in Rio – with the commanders favouring the use of force – in which the British minister, Mr. Wyndham, had openly suggested that the foreign powers would be better served recognising the rebels as belligerents than using force against them since it was in fact the Brazilian government that was drawing out the siege of Rio.⁵⁴ In closing this message Minister Thompson gave his view as to why the British minister would make such a suggestion – and why his European colleagues would silently approve of it – stating:

With no intention of examining into the merits of the commercial arrangement between the United States and Brazil, it can not be denied that it has given to our merchants a leverage of which all Europeans are extremely jealous.

This opinion has perhaps been given greater weight by historians than it was by Thompson's political masters. While it is not beyond the realms of possibility that Minister Wyndham and his European counterparts should have viewed the improving commercial relationship between the newly republican Brazil and the United States – most clearly typified by the reciprocity treaty between the two nations of 1891 – with some concern this is not to say that the British government was prepared to actively meddle in Brazilian internal affairs. It should be remembered that the United States was not alone in having diplomatic representatives that were capable of embarrassing their home government by acting without authorisation. Indeed, Thompson himself was also promoting U.S. investment in Brazil with the same letters that warned of “unfriendly European foreign influences” also declaring that Brazil was “wonderfully endowed in natural resources, affording a prodigious field for profitable development through an intelligent outlay of capital.”⁵⁵ Most importantly the February 1 report was written after the Detroit action had taken place and was only received in Washington on March 19 by which time the revolt had collapsed in Rio. The most substantial allegations from Thompson simply could not have influenced Gresham's actions.

What is certain is that Gresham was sufficiently concerned by the rumours of British support for the rebels to investigate the matter further, but was never moved to change American policy as a result. Calhoun describes a brief exchange between Gresham and the American ambassador in London, Thomas F. Bayard, shortly after Admiral da

⁵⁴ Mr. Thompson to Mr. Gresham, February 1, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, pp. 119-120

⁵⁵ Thomas L. Thompson to Grover Cleveland, April 2, 1894, Reel 84, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Gama took command of the rebel fleet in which the secretary of state instructed Bayard to inform him of any indication that Great Britain sought to interfere in matters in the Americas only for the ambassador to reply that the European powers were far too concerned with affairs on their own side of the Atlantic to be bothered by the situation in Brazil.⁵⁶ It is important to note too, as Calhoun does, that the Brazilian government was itself bringing the rumours of European interference to Gresham's attention through its minister in Washington.⁵⁷ Vice-President Peixoto stood to gain from exploiting American suspicions of the European powers in order to end any chances of the United States recognising the rebels as belligerents. Ultimately, Gresham's feelings about the possibility of British support for the insurgents are demonstrated by a brief reference to the matter in a letter he wrote to Bayard on January 21, 1894 which declared: "I do not believe Great Britain, or any other European Power, would attempt to re-establish the Monarchy in Brazil."⁵⁸ This definitive statement of Gresham's position came only days before Admiral Benham would initiate the action that would severely damage the insurgency's chances of success.

The Brazilian Naval Revolt is a perfect example of Walter Q. Gresham's preferred approach to international diplomacy. Through a conservative and legally sound policy the secretary of state protected American interests in Brazil without involving the United States unnecessarily in Brazilian affairs. By doing so he helped generate good will with the both the Brazilian government and its citizens.⁵⁹ As such it forms a minor triumph for Gresham's vision of international relations. This being so, it is ironic that the revolt – and Admiral Benham's actions in particular – was seized upon by the Democratic press as an example of an assertive and energetic intervention by the Cleveland administration. The administration itself was not so embarrassed by this misinterpretation as to refuse to exploit the political capital it generated and subsequently released the correspondence covering the revolt to the press.⁶⁰ The true message of the Brazilian Naval Revolt for the United States was very different to that put forward by the press, however. While Gresham's policy can be seen as a success, some limitations were still exposed. The mere fact that a conservative administration seeking to enact a minimalist foreign policy was forced to dispatch multiple warships to a foreign capital in order to protect the nation's

⁵⁶ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 199

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 198-199

⁵⁸ Walter Q. Gresham to Thomas F. Bayard, January 21, 1894, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁵⁹ David R. Burke to Grover Cleveland, June 11, 1894, Reel 85, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; R.P.M. Daniel to Grover Cleveland, July 12, 1894, Reel 85, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁶⁰ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, pp. 202-203

interests demonstrated that the United States, while still not as deeply involved in world affairs as a power such as Great Britain, could no longer claim a splendid isolation from trouble overseas.⁶¹ The Cleveland administration had felt obliged to involve itself, even if only in a conservative manner, in the naval revolt and American power played a role in ensuring the insurgency's defeat. The revolt itself may have been a victory for Gresham's vision of a conservative and legal foreign policy, but it also hinted at greater problems that might be produced by the United States' growing power in the future. This would be demonstrated during the Sino-Japanese War.

The origins of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 are somewhat complex involving three East Asian nations and a collection of foreign powers. Shortly after Grover Cleveland's second inauguration, the United States minister in Korea, Augustine Heard, began cabling Gresham that members of an illegal nationalist, xenophobic sect called Tong Hâk were openly protesting in Seoul.⁶² The minister reported the concern amongst Korean officials that the sect's strength in the southern provinces of the country might place foreign missionaries and traders at risk although he himself saw more danger from the "hordes of discontented and poverty stricken people" that had joined with the movement in the south.⁶³ Minister Heard's concerns would prove premature in 1893, but a year later the unrest in southern Korea came to be a catalyst in bringing about the Sino-Japanese War. In May, 1894, Heard's replacement at the Seoul legation, John M. B. Sill, reported that uprisings in three southern provinces were sufficiently serious to prompt the Korean king to request the presence of an American warship at the port of Chemulpo.⁶⁴ When the first Korean forces sent to put down the insurrection met with defeat, King Kojong, pressured by the Chinese consul in Seoul, requested Chinese assistance.⁶⁵ The American chargé d'affaires in China, Charles Denby Jr. – son of the American minister at Peking – reported to Gresham that the Chinese official responsible for dispatching the troops to Korea, Viceroy Li Hung-chang, had shown great reticence in agreeing to the request and had been careful to inform the Japanese and Russian governments that the deployment would only

⁶¹ This fact was demonstrated by Gresham himself who reminded Thompson that, though British vessels at Rio outnumbered American ships by 9 to 1, the United States still held the right to protect its interests regardless of the British position. Gresham to Thomson, January 11, 1894, [No. 78], *FRUS*, p. 99

⁶² Mr. Heard to Mr. Gresham, April 4, 1893, [No. 1], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894 (Appendix I)*, pp. 5-8

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 7; Mr. Heard to Mr. Gresham, May 16, 1893, [No. 6], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894 (Appendix I)*, p. 16

⁶⁴ Mr. Sill to Mr. Gresham, May 17, 1894, [No. 9], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894 (Appendix I)*, p. 18

⁶⁵ Jeffery Dorwart, *The Pigtail War*, (Amherst, Ma.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975), p. 16

last for the duration of the insurrection.⁶⁶ The reason for this caution was swiftly demonstrated as the Japanese government invoked the Tsientsin Convention of 1885 which forbade the sending of troops of either nation to Korea and despatched its own forces. Both nations refused to withdraw their forces while the other's remained. With tensions running high on the Korean peninsula and in the region as a whole Cleveland and Gresham found themselves required to formulate a policy on the matter. Neither man had shown particular interest in the region, with events in Hawaii and Samoa demonstrating their lack of enthusiasm for further involvement in the Pacific. Once again they fell back on their fundamental approach to foreign affairs: the need to protect American commerce and American citizens in the region, and a desire to follow the precepts of international law. In the instance of the Sino-Japanese War, however, both aspects of this default posture would present the president and his secretary of state with unanticipated difficulties.

The concern for protecting American commerce and the safety of United States citizens in both Korea and China – it quickly became obvious that those resident in Japan would be at no risk from military action – was stressed by Cleveland in his annual message of 1894. In that message he stated that the war “deserves our gravest consideration by reason of its disturbance of our growing commercial interests in the two countries and the increased dangers which may result to our citizens domiciled or sojourning in the interior of China.”⁶⁷ He later reiterated the desire to preserve trade and not jeopardise American lives as key reasons why he was willing to offer friendly aid to both nations in the interests of bringing the war to an end. The message also made clear that the United States had no policy in Asia that was endangered by the war and this was something that Gresham would also repeat in his dealings with foreign diplomats. In a despatch to Minister Denby in November, 1894, Gresham described how he had reassured the Chinese and Japanese representatives in Washington of the United States' neutrality by stressing that the war between their home nations did not affect any American policy in Asia.⁶⁸ These repeated declarations that the United States did not have a policy in Asia actually runs contrary to the general policy of protecting American commerce and citizens in the region. While it is true that Cleveland and Gresham were not engaged in an active policy designed to build trade, increase influence, or annex territory in Asia – and Cleveland's reference to the United States' growing trade in the region should not be viewed as anything more than an

⁶⁶ Mr. Denby, chargé, to Mr. Gresham, June 9, 1894, [No. 12], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894 (Appendix I)*, p. 20; The now defunct name Peking is used here in reference to the Chinese capital as it is the term used in the original sources.

⁶⁷ Grover Cleveland, Second Annual Message (second term), December 3, 1894

⁶⁸ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Denby, November 24, 1894, [No. 81], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894 (Appendix I)*, p. 82

acknowledgement of the interest shown in China and Japan by private enterprise – the presence of American citizens in China and Korea, most of them missionaries, demonstrated that American society did hold an agenda towards the region and, while the government did not directly support it, it would undoubtedly move to protect those engaged in it. This was not a major difficulty in theory – although events in Brazil had demonstrated how protecting commercial interests could result in fairly momentous actions – but the presence in the Chinese interior of American citizens engaged in a cause which, while universally viewed as humanitarian at home, might become the focus of hostility for the Chinese population meant that Cleveland’s government was to some extent hostage to the situation. In the event American missions escaped the worst of the anti-foreign attacks that did take place in China during and after the war, but they presented a cause for anxiety and Cleveland was ultimately moved to respond to the attacks through the formation of an investigatory commission.⁶⁹ Once again the presence of American interests overseas made it impossible for the United States to remain aloof from a regional problem, although in this case other motivations led to greater involvement.

As with the Brazilian Naval Revolt the lack of any specific American policy in the region and the presence of small, but politically significant U.S. interests in China, Japan and Korea meant that adopting a neutral stance was a logical decision for Cleveland and Gresham. There were, however, several key differences to the situation in Brazil which made simply maintaining neutrality insufficient as a policy and demanded greater American involvement. The first of these differences was in the humanitarian aspect. While a desire to prevent civilian bloodshed in Rio de Janeiro had prompted the American representatives in the city to support multilateral efforts from the diplomatic corps and naval commanders there the Sino-Japanese War provoked a response on a larger scale. In particular the fact that the war centred upon the independence of a state for which the United States held a historic affinity in Korea made it far harder for the Cleveland administration to remain aloof.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the fact that the Sino-Japanese War was a fully-fledged conflict between powerful nations rather than a local insurgency created a moral dilemma for the president as to whether or not to use his influence to avert potentially large numbers of military and civilian casualties and serious destruction of property. While it would, at first glance, appear incongruous that an administration that had defined its foreign policy by seeking to limit its involvement in events overseas should then be moved to interfere in a war taking place in an area considered to be of marginal

⁶⁹ Grover Cleveland, Third Annual Message (second term), December 2, 1895

⁷⁰ In Cleveland’s annual message of 1894 he specifically noted that the United States had been the first western nation to sign a treaty with Korea.

interest to the United States, the importance of the moral aspects of foreign policy to Cleveland and Gresham should not be underestimated. This is demonstrated by the repeated references made by both men to the importance of friendship with both countries for the United States.⁷¹ China and Japan had long been given an almost mythical status as potential markets for American manufactured goods, but in reality trade with the region was relatively small and most Americans had little knowledge of either nation.⁷² Without a driving ulterior motive for wishing to build friendship and influence in the region it would appear that the desire to use American power to further the interests of peace and international goodwill was a genuine one for Cleveland and Gresham. While moral factors were not the only motivation for American involvement in the Sino-Japanese War it should be noted that a desire to employ the growing power of the United States in a manner that the administration viewed as morally correct once again undermined the simplistic image of Grover Cleveland as an isolationist president.

Similar flexibility is seen in the second key reason why the Cleveland administration engaged in a more active policy than simple neutrality. Having railed against the imprudence of American treaty obligations in Samoa during their first 18 months in office, Cleveland and Gresham showed far less distaste for the United States' obligations towards Korea. The first offers of American good offices to bring about a peaceful resolution to the crisis came in June, 1894, and were a fulfilment of a promise made in the treaty between the two nations in 1882. Dorwart states that this offer was made by Cleveland alone – Gresham was on vacation – and did not represent a serious priority for the president, but the fact remains that the offer was made apparently without Korean pressure.⁷³ It might be argued that this situation differed significantly from Samoa since it did not involve entangling the United States with European powers and undoubtedly this was a major factor – as would be demonstrated by later events – but the offer nevertheless involved entangling the United States, however peripherally, in the affairs of China and Japan as well as Korea. As such it is further evidence of the ways in which moral and legal factors – in this case the desire to fulfil a promise to a weaker nation – affected the formulation of foreign policy.

Complicating matters further for the administration was the level of public interest in the Sino-Japanese War. While the general population may have been largely ignorant of

⁷¹ Cleveland's annual message of 1895 showed obvious pride that American actions which had had no selfish object had received the gratitude of both China and Japan.

⁷² Frank Ninkovich, *Global Dawn: The Cultural Foundation of American Internationalism, 1865-1890*, (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 208-219

⁷³ Dorwart, *Pigtail War*, p. 21; The powerful influence exerted by Japan on the Korean government at this time made any request for intervention by the United States highly improbable unless Japan desired it, but if anything this could be viewed as a convenient excuse for inaction by Cleveland.

China and Japan's cultures and societies this is not to say there was not interest in the two nations. This broader interest combined with the newsworthiness of a genuine international war - American newspapers gave it front page status and dispatched special correspondents to the warzone - to create a general appetite for information on the conflict, as well as a readiness to take sides.⁷⁴ This readiness could take on sometimes alarming proportions; despite the accepted obligation under international law of a neutral state to prevent the recruitment of its own citizens to serve in the armed forces of the belligerents a variety of groups and individuals volunteered their services to the Japanese legation in Washington – so much so that the legation was forced to issue a notice discouraging volunteers.⁷⁵ Just as problematic for the administration was the issue of preventing its citizens from supplying the belligerent nations with arms. Since the war provided an extremely tempting market for American arms-manufacturers and exporters – including opportunists who seized the chance to become gun-runners – this obligation was openly criticised and routinely flouted.⁷⁶ While public interest never reached the level it had in Hawaii or would in relation to Cuba, the Sino-Japanese War received considerably more attention than the Brazilian Naval Revolt, placing greater pressure on Gresham to act. The fact that Japan was widely perceived to be the West's protégé in the region meant that public opinion largely favoured Japan and thus raised questions of whether the United States was right to be maintaining neutrality at all.⁷⁷ Ultimately, the Sino-Japanese War was not of sufficient importance to most Americans to cause real problems for the administration, but it did raise troubling questions of how public opinion might react to a conflict closer to home.

The Cleveland administration's actions towards the Sino-Japanese War would largely be defined by a well-intentioned desire to enact policy that was morally and legally 'right', but those good intentions did not always achieve the anticipated results. Such was the case with the decision to grant American protection to the consular buildings and archives of both China and Japan on their opponent's soil and, consequently, providing diplomatic protection for both nations' citizens as well. In theory this did not represent any

⁷⁴ Ernest R. May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), p. 25

⁷⁵ Dorwart, *Pigtail War*, p. 37

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 34-41

⁷⁷ The September, 1894, edition of *The North American Review* carried a three-part discussion of the war which presented pro-Japanese, pro-Chinese arguments and a more general piece with a neutral standpoint. It is interesting to note that the pro-Chinese article argued that Americans were too willing to support Japan on the grounds that it had embraced elements of Western culture, while the neutral piece was sure of Japanese success. Augustine Heard, D.W. Stevens, and Howard Martin, 'China and Japan in Korea', *The North American Review*, Vol. 159, Issue 454, (September, 1894), pp. 300-321; It has also been suggested that Cleveland and Gresham themselves sympathised with Japan, but not so much as to bias the neutrality policy. Dorwart, *Pigtail War*, p. 122

breach of neutrality since the service was rendered equally to both parties and did not involve actively interfering with either nation's affairs. The move was undermined, however, by several factors, not least the disastrous failure of the Chinese war effort. This was an eventuality that Gresham may well have not anticipated – an indication of the paucity of knowledge and understanding of conditions in East Asia in the State Department. Certainly the sweeping success experienced by the Japanese military was not being universally predicted before war was officially declared – on July 24, 1894, Minister Sill in Korea wrote to Gresham stating that “once [China's] hordes begin to press across the northern border no force here will be able to stay the tide. The Chinese merchants have all left here, fearing the looting by their own troops that they say will surely follow their first success.”⁷⁸ No doubt the Japanese government would not have agreed with Sill's assessment at that time and Viceroy Li's reluctance to dispatch his troops to Korea would appear to suggest that he also was less than convinced of his nation's military superiority. The prospect, though, that Japanese troops would not simply prove victorious in Korea, but would quickly enter mainland China was clearly not widely countenanced outside Japan. The initial dissatisfaction seen in both Chinese and Japanese cities at what was often viewed as American partiality to the opposition predictably became more pronounced in China as the defeats mounted.⁷⁹ In this way the administration's policy actively worked against Cleveland's declared aim of protecting American citizens in East Asia by increasing resentment towards them in the local populations. Even so, this was only a minor failure of diplomacy and one that could be seen to be offset by the goodwill created in the Chinese and Japanese governments, but more serious consequences came about as a result of another unanticipated difficulty: the unpreparedness of the American diplomats in the region to enact the policy both in terms of legal knowledge and intensity of workload. This came to a head in the issue of Japanese spies in China.

The issue of the Chinese pursuit of suspected Japanese spies would prove to be perhaps the most important of the entire conflict for Cleveland and Gresham. Japan had spent the years preceding the Sino-Japanese War building networks of agents inside mainland China and gaining valuable intelligence on Chinese geography, infrastructure and military structures as a result. With the outbreak of war the Chinese government set about finding and destroying these networks, but their methods involved suspecting all Japanese citizens in China which almost inevitably led to a collision with the American

⁷⁸ Mr. Sill to Mr. Gresham, July 24, 1894, [No. 29], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894 (Appendix I)*, p. 40

⁷⁹ Dorwart, *Pigtail War*, p. 45

policy of providing diplomatic protection to Japanese citizens in the Chinese Empire.⁸⁰ With the outbreak of hostilities the American Consul General at Shanghai, Thomas R. Jernigan, promised protection to Japanese citizens who chose to remain in the city rather than returning to their homeland. Controversy arose almost immediately when two Japanese students accused of spying requested asylum in the American consulate on August 10 which Jernigan granted. When the Chinese government protested to Gresham in Washington the secretary requested an explanation from Denby Jr. who defended Jernigan's actions first on legal grounds, then on humanitarian ones. The legal picture was clouded by the existence in Shanghai of a system of international concessions that carried their own extraterritorial jurisdiction, a situation further confused by the strictures of international law relating to wars between nations. The two men had first been arrested in the French concession before being handed over to Jernigan by the French consul.⁸¹ In the face of a legal situation that fell well outside his experience as U.S. circuit judge Gresham consulted his friend the legal expert John Bassett Moore who declared that in a time of war the Japanese fell under the jurisdiction of local courts.⁸² Gresham ordered the two men handed over to the Chinese authorities, but showed his concern for their fate by obtaining what he believed to be a promise from the Chinese Minister in Washington that the men would not be tried until Charles Denby Sr. - the American minister to Peking - returned to China from his medical leave in the United States.⁸³ Consequently the execution of the two men two weeks before Denby Sr. arrived back in China was a matter of some consternation for Gresham who complained to Chinese Minister Yang Yu that he had been placed in an awkward position by China's actions.⁸⁴ This was quickly proven to be the case as the American press seized on the story, including details of torture that the State Department denied. In the Senate, Henry Cabot Lodge turned the incident into a party-political cause celebre and introduced a resolution requesting that the President transmit all diplomatic correspondence relating to the case in the hopes of proving moral cowardice by Gresham.⁸⁵ Writing in *The North American Review*, Senator Cushman K. Davis described the decision to hand over the students - he did not accept that the men were spies - as an "abominable transaction" and declared that "The blood of those youths

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 46

⁸¹ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 175

⁸² Ibid, p. 176; In a personal letter to Minister Denby, Gresham explained that, in his opinion, not delivering the two spies to China "would have been utterly inconsistent with our attitude of impartial neutrality" and that he had been left with no alternative. Walter Q. Gresham to Charles Denby Sr., December 26, 1894, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁸³ Dorwart, *Pigtail War*, p. 50

⁸⁴ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 176

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 177

is on our hands.”⁸⁶ Comparing the incident to the story of Cain and Abel, the Senator blamed Gresham specifically and accused him of abandoning his own agreement to protect Japanese citizens in China. This aggressive querying of the administration’s foreign policy by Congress would prove to be a theme of Cleveland’s remaining years in office, somewhat ironically given his readiness to pass decision of the Hawaiian revolution to Congress in 1893. In December, 1894, Gresham, seeking to avoid jeopardising new treaties he had negotiated with China and Japan and perhaps hoping to calm the ferocity of the press attacks, was able to have the resolution delayed in committee until after the New Year’s recess by inviting Senators John T. Morgan and John Sherman – the ranking Senators from both parties on the Senate foreign relations committee – to the State Department to read the correspondence privately.⁸⁷ This cooled matters temporarily, but the eventual publication of the documents led to further criticism. All of this demonstrates the dangers of following a rigid legalist policy. While it might provide a useful template for action, help build a reputation for American honesty and probity, and even build trust in appreciative European powers, such a policy was not flexible to the needs of public relations and not always comprehensible to the public.⁸⁸ The simple fact was that the American public were not going to be won over by legal technicalities and the impression had been set that the administration had tamely sent two young men to their deaths. At best Gresham was seen as inflexible, at worst he was a craven coward, bowing to the barbaric Chinese. In the case of the Japanese spies Gresham’s actions were entirely consistent with good legal practice, but nevertheless left him open to charges of cowardice from his political opponents such as Lodge and Teddy Roosevelt.⁸⁹ This is an important point and one worth digressing briefly from the immediate study of the Sino-Japanese War in order to examine.

As shown by the Hawaiian revolution, the dramatic growth of American power and influence in the late 19th Century led to a national debate on how best that power might be

⁸⁶ Cushman K. Davis, ‘Two Years of Democratic Diplomacy’, *The North American Review*, Vol. 160, Issue 460, (March, 1895), p. 277

⁸⁷ Walter Q. Gresham to John T. Morgan, December 6, 1894, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Walter Q. Gresham to John Sherman, December 6, 1894, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁸⁸ Interestingly, Senator Davis’ article in *The North American Review* itself addressed Gresham’s actions in largely legal terms - questioning his legal responsibility to hand over the men and accusing him of setting a bad precedent for the future. An article published by the same magazine a month later by Senator George Gray defended the administration’s actions in an equally legalistic manner. This demonstrates that the legalist approach had won at least partial acceptance in Congress, but also that the vagaries of legal interpretation might prove to be a crucial flaw in it as a means of formulating policy. Davis, ‘Two Years of Democratic Diplomacy’, *The North American Review*, pp. 277-284; George Gray, ‘Two Years of American Diplomacy’, *The North American Review*, Vol. 160, Issue 461, (April, 1895), pp. 409-424

⁸⁹ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 177

used. While Cleveland's two terms in office were divided by the Republican administration of Benjamin Harrison and the foreign policy leadership of James G. Blaine, it would not be these two men who led the opposition to his foreign policy.⁹⁰ Instead this role was taken by a new generation of men who would eventually do much to shape the role of the United States in global affairs, most famously Henry Cabot Lodge and Theodore Roosevelt. As Cleveland's second term continued the debate over the United States' place in the world, its opportunities and its responsibilities was increasingly (although not exclusively) conducted between the administration and this new rank of young Republicans. This debate itself contained numerous smaller questions one of which concerned the nature of American honour. Many historians have speculated, with good reason, that the appearance of a generation of politicians in the 1890s who believed that the United States should be more active in world affairs and who were largely untroubled by the prospect of war with European powers may well have been related to the fact that thirty years had passed since the Civil War. At this time the generation that had fought the Civil War – as represented by Presidents Hayes, Garfield and Harrison – was retiring from the political scene and being replaced by younger men who had been too young to fight in the war, but had grown up surrounded by stories of the glory of battle. Cleveland should be included with the former group; even though he did not fight himself, two of his brothers served in the Union army and having lived through the conflict as an adult he would have undoubtedly seen the consequences of war if only from a distance. As is often the case those who had seen the horrors of warfare for themselves were less inclined to plunge recklessly into situations that might lead to war than the younger 'jingoes' best represented by Roosevelt. While the often larger than life character of Teddy Roosevelt should not be viewed as entirely typical of his political class it does provide an excellent contrast to the conservatism of Cleveland and Gresham (himself a Civil War veteran). Roosevelt's views of Cleveland's actions throughout his second term provide an interesting commentary on the administration's foreign policy. Specifically these views often focus on Roosevelt's conception of national honour which differed markedly from Cleveland's. Where Cleveland's vision of national honour – which formed the basis of much of his foreign policy – was one of justice, honesty, morality and the open-handed and fair treatment of all nations regardless of size or power, Roosevelt's emphasised strength and the necessity of earning and keeping the respect and even the awe of others. One noted historian of Roosevelt's effect on the evolution of American foreign policy has even suggested that he was convinced that the United States could not act unjustly, an almost total contrast to

⁹⁰ Blaine died shortly before Cleveland's inauguration while Harrison's involvement in politics declined after leaving office so that he offered only sporadic criticism.

Cleveland's concern that the nation must diligently pursue a legally proper course.⁹¹ The result of this differing conception of American honour was a tendency towards caution and passivity from Cleveland and a demand for action from Roosevelt.

Returning to the Sino-Japanese War, the Cleveland administration's policy of simultaneous neutrality and humanitarianism twice displayed its contradictory nature before and after the declaration of hostilities. In both cases the contradiction was based around the offering of American good offices to bring about a peaceful resolution to the crisis. The first such offer was the one made in late July, 1894, in response to Korea's request under the 1882 treaty, while the second came on November 6 of that year. The second offer came as a result of weeks of lobbying by the Chinese government through the American legation in Peking and through its own minister in Washington, although Gresham was keen to make clear to Minister Denby that it was not the result of an official Chinese request for diplomatic intervention by the western powers, news of which reached him on the same day that he issued his instructions to both Denby and Minister Dun in Tokyo that they should proffer the United States good offices in the interests of making peace.⁹² This coincidence of timing would prove somewhat embarrassing to both the United States and China since Cleveland and Gresham refused to act in concert with European powers in anything more important than an arbitration tribunal for determining the size of an indemnity.⁹³ This had been the consistent policy of the administration since the summer when they had rejected an approach from Great Britain to take part in a multilateral effort to defuse the crisis in Korea and declined to take part in a similar multilateral intervention proposed by Lord Kimberley shortly after the outbreak of hostilities.⁹⁴ Most embarrassingly President Cleveland had turned down a second proposal of international cooperation from Lord Kimberley, the British foreign minister, less than a month before the offer of November 6.⁹⁵ Gresham explained the decision in a telegram

⁹¹ Howard K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1956, reprint 1989), p. 25

⁹² Mr. Gresham to Mr. Denby, November 6, 1894, [No. 67], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894 (Appendix I)*, p. 76

⁹³ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Denby, November 8, 1894, [No. 68], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894 (Appendix I)*, p. 77

⁹⁴ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 173; Sir Julian Pauncefort to Walter Q. Gresham, August 7, 1894, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; The Navy Department did not share the State Department's reluctance to work with its foreign counterparts, reaching agreements for concerted action in defence of foreign citizens in China with British, French and German commanders - although no such actions took place. Dorwart, *Pigtail War*, p. 61

⁹⁵ Mr. Goschen to Mr. Gresham, October 6, 1894, [No. 56], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894 (Appendix I)*, p. 70; Mr. Gresham to Mr. Goschen, October 12, 1894, [No. 58], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894 (Appendix I)*, p. 70; The weight carried by these decisions is illustrated by the fact that Gresham specifically requested Cleveland's decision on how to reply to the offer of October 6, Walter Q. Gresham to Grover Cleveland, October 12, 1894, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

initially written for Denby on November 24, but also sent to Dun two days later. Here he stated, in words strongly reminiscent of Cleveland's statements relating to Samoa in his annual messages of 1893 and 1894:

With a few exceptions the record of our diplomatic history shows no departure from the wise policy of avoiding foreign alliances and embarrassing participation in guaranteeing the independence of distant states. The United States may, however, consistently with that policy, lend their aid to further the efforts of friendly powers unhappily at war to compose their differences whenever they concur in expressing a desire for our impartial mediation.⁹⁶

Once again Gresham displayed the administration's desire to stay true to the tenets of Washington, Jefferson and Monroe, but the words did not match the reality. The United States' first involvement in the Sino-Japanese War had been an attempt to protect the independence of Korea and, while Cleveland and Gresham steadfastly refused to entangle the nation in any multilateral intervention, the offering of good offices to China and Japan led to the possibility of becoming entangled in the affairs of those nations. While this danger might have been acceptable since the offer was intended to be of only minor involvement and short duration, in the event American involvement would prove to be considerably more entangling than Cleveland and Gresham had wished.

The entanglement came about as a consequence of a series of incremental steps which ultimately culminated in embarrassment for the administration and fears of damage to Japanese-American friendship. On November 17 the Japanese foreign minister informed Minister Dun in Tokyo that his government would not be taking up the United States offer of good offices on the grounds that the war had been a universal success for Japan and that there was no reason to believe that the victories would not continue.⁹⁷ Dun was also informed, though, that the Japanese government would consider a request for peace negotiations if China made the first approach with the American legation in Peking being suggested as the best channel for such an offer. This suggestion was in line with the first offers of American good offices and was a logical decision given the role that the United States had accepted in taking on the diplomatic assets and duties of the warring nations within the opponent's territories. Subsequently American diplomats served as the only diplomatic conduit between China and Japan from November 1894 until the final peace settlement in April 1895.⁹⁸ This innocent attempt to act as a good neighbour was undermined by the unauthorised and increasingly self-interested interference of Minister

⁹⁶ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Denby, November 24, 1894, [No. 81], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894 (Appendix I)*, pp. 81-82

⁹⁷ Note Verbale, November 17, 1894, [No. 75], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894 (Appendix I)*, p. 79

⁹⁸ Dorwart, *Pigtail War*, p. 78

Denby. In the words of Jeffery Dorwart “Minister Denby did not share Gresham’s narrow, legalistic interpretation of messengerial good offices. From the outset, he saw his position as an opportunity to change the course of East Asian history and increase American influence in the area.”⁹⁹ As a vital figure in the chain of communication between the Chinese and Japanese governments Denby quickly took on the role of advisor to the Chinese foreign office, the Tsungli-yamên. In this role he won praise from the Chinese Emperor, but he also caused minor problems for his masters in Washington.¹⁰⁰ As the negotiations dragged on, delayed by seemingly endless technicalities and procrastination on both sides, this role gradually expanded from one of advising on how best China should respond to Japan’s demands to the point where Denby specifically advised Viceroy Li that China should sell railroad, banking and mining concessions in order to pay the indemnity that Japan demanded as one of the precursors of peace, with the implication that American companies would make the best purchasers.¹⁰¹ This earned the minister a swift rebuke from Gresham who warned that the minister would be beset with concession seekers while a subsequent proposal to present the offer of a loan from an American syndicate to the Chinese government brought a warning not to involve himself in an official capacity, but Denby’s attempts to persuade his political masters that they were missing a golden opportunity to expand American commerce and influence in East Asia persisted to the point that Gresham’s successor, Richard Olney was forced to instruct him to desist.¹⁰² Matters were yet further complicated by the arrival in China of John W. Foster, the former secretary of state during the last days of the Benjamin Harrison administration, who claimed to Gresham that he would be utilising his good relations with a Chinese official who had been an envoy in Washington in order to assist in bringing about peace.¹⁰³ While Foster was an old acquaintance of Gresham’s and had served the Cleveland administration at the arbitration tribunal of the Bering Sea seal fishing dispute with Great Britain the secretary was troubled by the prospect of an American private citizen interfering with negotiations and potentially threatening neutrality as a result. His suspicions about Foster’s true motives were revealed in a letter to Ambassador Bayard in London in late December shortly after learning that the former secretary of state was involved in a scheme to help China raise a \$400 million loan to pay the indemnity demanded by Japan where he noted

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ The Emperor of the Chinese Empire to Grover Cleveland, February 16, 1895, Reel 88, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁰¹ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, pp. 174-175

¹⁰² Walter Q. Gresham to Charles Denby Sr., April 12, 1895, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Charles Denby Sr. to Walter Q. Gresham, May 12, 1895, and Walter Q. Gresham to Charles Denby Sr., May 14, 1895, Reel 90, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 175

¹⁰³ Dorwart, *Pigtail War*, p. 82

that Foster's "prospects for becoming a millionaire are flattering."¹⁰⁴ The machinations of Denby and Foster demonstrate once again the possibilities for influencing foreign policy that still existed for individuals – even private citizens – in the 1890s. This recurring issue – best illustrated by the actions of Minister Stevens in Hawaii – was drawing to a close, however, with the availability of very rapid communication between the State Department in Washington and its representatives overseas thanks to the expanding network of telegraph cables and the increasing professionalization of the American diplomatic corps. In the event the actions of neither man had a significant impact on the peace negotiations, but the incident with Foster did lead to yet further trouble for Gresham in Congress. On January 4, 1895, the Senate passed a resolution directing Gresham to inform them of any official capacity held by Foster in regard to the Chinese peace negotiations.¹⁰⁵ Gresham was comfortably able to answer this resolution in the negative (aided by similarly refutations from Senator Morgan), but the matter was another minor embarrassment for the administration.¹⁰⁶

In terms of American interests at stake the Sino-Japanese War was a relatively minor incident for the Cleveland administration by comparison to the revolutions in Hawaii and Cuba or the clash with Britain over Venezuela, but it may hold a far greater significance historically as an indicator of issues that were to gain importance in the remaining years of Cleveland's term. The administration's chosen policy of neutrality combined with a morally-based desire to use American power and prestige to first preserve and then restore peace can be considered, for all its contradictions and minor failings, to have fulfilled its aims. Cleveland and Gresham succeeded in protecting American lives and property in East Asia, were influential in the peace process, generated goodwill in China and Japan, and preserved the independence of Korea. This last point could be considered a major triumph, but it is hard to say exactly how far the administration would have been willing to go on Korea's behalf if Japan had sought to occupy the Korean peninsula permanently. Cleveland's annual message of 1894 stated that he had "felt constrained" under the terms of the 1882 treaty with Korea to offer good offices to resolve the problems "growing out of the Japanese demands for administrative reforms in Korea".¹⁰⁷ These reforms were diligently reported to Gresham by Minister Sill throughout 1894 without

¹⁰⁴ Walter Q. Gresham to Thomas F. Bayard, December 24, 1894, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁰⁵ Senate Resolution, January 4, 1895, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁰⁶ Walter Q. Gresham in reply to Senate Resolution of January 4, 1895, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Dorwart, *Pigtail War*, p. 83

¹⁰⁷ Grover Cleveland, Second Annual Message (second term), December 3, 1894

prompting any change in American policy towards Japan – indeed Gresham declined a specific request from the Korean minister in Washington to organise international intervention against Japan’s interference in Korean governmental affairs – and a pro-Japanese coup that occurred in Korea late in 1895 was also accepted without protest.¹⁰⁸ This lack of concern might be explained by the fact that Korea had been gradually extricating itself from Chinese suzerainty for several decades and therefore the growth of Japanese influence was seen as beneficial in completing this movement. Equally, it might be cynically suggested that Korea’s independence was expected to always be reliant on the goodwill of one or other of its more powerful neighbours and thus not worth damaging Japanese relations. It is interesting that Cleveland chose to remain aloof when Russia, France and Germany intervened after the peace settlement to force Japan to abandon its claim under the treaty to the Liao Tung peninsula. Gresham had demonstrated his concern about the prospect of such intervention if Japan was seen to be over-reaching itself as a result of its military successes by warning the Japanese government that they risked having a peace settlement imposed upon them by the foreign powers represented in China if they upset the balance of power too much. This friendly warning was the furthest the administration was prepared to go in restraining Japanese ambitions, but it is open to debate whether they would have joined a wider intervention if the fundamental independence of Korea had been challenged. When fears arose that Japanese forces threatened Peking itself late in 1894 Gresham reluctantly arranged for a contingent of marines to be dispatched to Tientsin ready for deployment to the capital, but insisted that any such move would only take place in the event of other powers doing the same.¹⁰⁹ Dorwart suggests that this indicates a desire to maintain equality with the other foreign powers in China and notes the difficulties of reconciling the deployment of marines without China’s permission with the policy of neutrality.¹¹⁰ While the latter point is valid one might argue that the question of deploying small numbers of marines in China, even in the capital, was less a question of equality with other powers and more a matter of fulfilling the administration’s aim of protecting American citizens and property of which Peking contained some numbers. Finally, it should be noted that Cleveland’s lack of opposition to European meddling in the Sino-Japanese peace settlement was in stark

¹⁰⁸ Mr. Sill to Mr. Gresham, July 24, 1894, [No. 29], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894 (Appendix I)*, p. 40; Mr. Gresham to Mr. Bayard, July 20, 1894, [No. 28], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894 (Appendix I)*, p. 37; Walter LaFeber, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, Vol. II: The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 119

¹⁰⁹ Dorwart, *Pigtail War*, p. 69

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

contrast to his reactions to British intervention in the affairs of Nicaragua and Venezuela in 1894 and 1895.

The administration's limited policy had achieved success, but there had also been failures which may have carried far greater significance than was immediately apparent. Cleveland and Gresham's policy encountered considerably greater difficulties at home than it did actually being implemented in East Asia. The administration – and Gresham in particular – came under fierce criticism in the press and in Congress over several aspects of policy, particularly over the inflexibility of the legally-minded policy relating to the Japanese spies and over the actions of John W. Foster. Undoubtedly these attacks had much to do with partisan politics – the questions over the role played by the Republican Foster were undoubtedly related to his long acquaintance with Gresham – but it could be suggested that to a large extent Cleveland and Gresham brought extra trouble upon themselves through the narrowness of their policy. Their intentions may have been good, but the problems the administration encountered with their own diplomats and the criticism their policy sustained both in the press and in Congress suggests that Cleveland was losing the debate over the United States' place in global affairs.

The administration also left itself open to accusations of losing out in East Asia by not seeking to take advantage of the situation commercially. The actions of Denby and Foster demonstrate a wider desire to cash in on China's weakened position which Cleveland and Gresham staunchly resisted. LaFeber has noted that Denby was instructed in the summer of 1895 to exert himself on behalf of securing “equal and liberal trading advantages” in Korea and China while the newly appointed Secretary of State Olney changed State Department procedures to make it easier for Americans to invest in Chinese concessions, but both moves are indicative of Cleveland's belief that government should facilitate and protect private enterprise, not actively seek to promote it.¹¹¹ At a time when the carving up of China into zones of commercial interest by the European powers was considered imminent by many observers such instructions are far closer to the Open Door policies of Cleveland's successors and further indicate his belief in the rightness of commercial competition on a level playing field.

Both in the Brazilian Naval Revolt and the Sino-Japanese War Cleveland and Gresham attempted to follow a policy of legal neutrality. The former case came to be viewed as a minor triumph for the administration, but the latter should probably be viewed on balance as a failure. This failure was not due to the neutrality policy being wrong or

¹¹¹ LaFeber, *New Empire*, p. 310

ineffective – indeed for this reason it seems highly probable that Gresham and Cleveland would not have agreed that there had been a failure – but to domestic factors and, in particular, a failure to lead public opinion. Ironically it might be argued that the success of the Brazilian Naval Revolt came about when the neutrality policy slipped and American force was applied against the rebels; this is not entirely true – the action was legally sound within the policy – but it is clear that Gresham was briefly concerned that the *Detroit* action might have been a breach of neutrality. In both cases the neutrality policy was an attempt to maintain the status quo while, at most, boosting goodwill towards the United States, and it is here that the problem arose for the Cleveland administration. The decision not to attempt to use the Brazilian Naval Revolt or the Sino-Japanese War for commercial gain was a natural one for Cleveland and Gresham both because it was legally correct and because it was politically conservative. For Cleveland in particular actively using foreign policy to expand American commerce was anathema. For Cleveland it was the role of businessmen and merchants to seek out new and larger markets overseas and the role of government to facilitate this work and to protect legitimate American interests once they were established. Cleveland saw no merit in acquiring colonies when the continental United States contained seemingly limitless resources of its own that had been only partially tapped by industry; similarly he had no desire to open new markets using force – whether actual or threatened – preferring instead to allow the power of American industry to assert itself and win foreign markets through its own efficiency and strength. His preferred method for facilitating this – while achieving a variety of other benefits – was tariff reform. However, while President Cleveland and Secretary of State Gresham were content to adopt policies that were legally sound and presented the United States to the world as a paragon of virtue, an opposition was swiftly taking shape that believed the nation should be seeking to gain more from its foreign relations and the Brazilian Naval Revolt and the Sino-Japanese War indicated that public opinion was moving to follow this new vision of the United States in the world. In Brazil the conflict had been limited and in an area of only relatively minor interest for most Americans being outside the immediate Caribbean sphere although Gresham still found himself being lobbied by some areas of industry and commerce. Supporting one side over the other would have seen little obvious benefit to the United States and therefore the media found little to criticise in neutrality. Finally, the *Detroit* action appeared to demonstrate greater aggression – and to carry greater weight in ending the revolt – than was actually the case resulting in a public relations success which had little to do with policy. By comparison, the Sino-Japanese War was a major conflict between two nations with which American citizens were familiar and,

more importantly, about which they had preformed opinions. For a variety of reasons, not least of them racial, the American people were predisposed to view Japan favourably over China as the nation of progress and enlightenment in a backwards and superstitious region. It is no coincidence that the public relations difficulties encountered by the Cleveland administration occurred against a backdrop of heightened opposition to Chinese immigration and racism against Chinese already resident in the United States.¹¹² This obviously created a climate in which a policy of neutrality could be viewed as unnecessarily favouring backwards China over progressive Japan; even though Gresham himself probably sympathised with those who viewed Japan more favourably, describing China as “a vast inert mass of humanity.”¹¹³ Under such circumstances it was easy for the Republican press to build the story of the executed Japanese spies into a public furore. Equally, the reluctance to exploit the situation for commercial gain met with greater opposition in the Sino-Japanese War than in the Brazilian Naval Revolt. Unlike Brazil the region of East Asia, and China in particular, had been portrayed for generations as an unlimited market for American manufactured goods. While it is open to debate how widely this vision was accepted by either American manufacturers or the American public undoubtedly it does serve to illustrate that the region was the subject of popular interest. The efforts of Minister Denby to extract commercial gains without consulting his political masters demonstrates that at least some Americans believed there were opportunities to be taken in China. Overall the picture of Cleveland and Gresham’s foreign policy that emerges from the Brazilian Naval Revolt and the Sino-Japanese War is one of principle, but also of stubbornness and even a refusal to work towards the nation’s material interests due to a belief that policy should be governed by less base motives. That said many of the policies pioneered by Cleveland and Gresham – in particular relating to the Sino-Japanese War – would be reprised to a large extent by William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt in their handling of Chinese trade, the Boxer Rebellion and the Russo-Japanese War. The Cleveland administration’s desire for limited action and legal neutrality can be viewed as

¹¹² Jeffery Dorwart notes how the Chinese were subject to similar levels of racism as those experienced by African-Americans even down to Sambo-like stereotypes. The Chinese government was viewed, perhaps not unfairly, as corrupt and inefficient while their soldiers were portrayed as tough, but essentially animal. By contrast the Japanese were seen as the West’s protégé in Asia, embodying Christian virtues of piety, honesty, lawfulness, and loyalty, and with some aspects – such as the military field hospitals run by the Red Cross Society of Japan that dispensed treatment for soldiers of both sides – viewed in particular as matters for the United States and Europe to draw lessons from. Dorwart, *Pigtail War*, pp. 92-95, 95, 112, 116, 117-118; Recently Ninkovich has suggested that liberal opinion in the United States dismissed many of these racial arguments against the Chinese, but stresses that cultural issues stemming from the Chinese history of invention and education led to them still being widely viewed as a threat to white civilisation. Ninkovich, *Global Dawn*, p. 175

¹¹³ Walter Q. Gresham to Charles Denby, December 26, 1894, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

laudable policy in a general sense, but in the partisan and racist atmosphere of the 1890s it was not necessarily good politics.

Chapter 3 – Nicaragua, Venezuela and the Monroe Doctrine

Grover Cleveland's second presidential term saw a variety of minor foreign policy incidents from around the world, but three incidents in particular have acquired a prominent place in the historiography of the presidency. Two of these – the revolutions in Hawaii and Cuba – bookended the presidency, but the third reached its climax almost exactly at the midpoint of Cleveland's term. The Venezuelan Border Dispute was a major event in the history of American foreign relations in the late nineteenth century and, while it has suffered in recent years from the same neglect that has seen the events in Hawaii and Cuba come to be overwhelmed by the War of 1898 in most textbooks, it has been credited as forming a turning point in U.S. foreign policy in a variety of ways. At different times it has been suggested that the Dispute brought the United States close to war with Great Britain, can be seen as the beginning of the 'Special Relationship' between the American and British governments, and reinvigorated – and even reinvented – the Monroe Doctrine.¹ Such claims obviously warrant investigation and it can reasonably be argued that the Venezuelan Border Dispute is deserving of restoration to greater prominence in the larger narrative of American foreign relations.

It may be, however, that the Venezuelan incident is not the only such event that has been unfairly neglected by historians. For over a year before the United States became involved in the Venezuelan Border Dispute events in Nicaragua had occupied much of the attention of the State Department. While largely relegated to little more than a handful of paragraphs even in histories of late-nineteenth century foreign policy, these events covered a full range of the largest issues facing American policymakers at the time. The situation in Nicaragua involved questions of the sovereignty of a Central American republic, the rights and responsibilities of a European power in the Americas, the United States relationship with its smaller brethren in the western hemisphere, a potential challenge to the Monroe Doctrine, and a threat to the commercial interests and investments of thousands of American citizens. As such, while the events in Nicaragua may not have held the long term significance of the Venezuelan Border Dispute, they form something of a case study in the changing position of the United States in the world.

¹ Wilfrid Hardy Callcott, *The Caribbean Policy of the United States, 1890-1920*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1966); Richard H. Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt, Culture, Diplomacy, and Expansion: A New View of American Imperialism*, (Baton Rouge, LA.: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), p. 158; George B. Young, 'Intervention Under the Monroe Doctrine: The Olney Corollary', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 2, (June, 1942), p. 247

The Venezuelan Border Dispute would prove to be a significant - albeit short-lived - domestic political event in itself, but events in Nicaragua were always overshadowed by greater issues at home in 1894. Despite the Cleveland administration's best efforts in repealing the Sherman Silver Purchase Act and passing the Wilson-Gorman Tariff Act, the recession that plagued the country after 1893 did not improve. These difficult economic conditions resulted in working class unrest which raised fears in some areas of outright revolution. In areas of the West hit hardest by the recession bands of unemployed men coalesced into 'armies' which demanded measures to ease the financial suffering of farming communities - usually by creating currency inflation - and threatened social upheaval. The most significant of these 'armies', led by Jacob Coxey, marched on Washington to demand the issue of \$500,000,000 in paper money for highway construction. It was viewed seriously enough by Attorney General Richard Olney for government agents to infiltrate the march and report on its progress. Cleveland himself, however, was unconvinced of the threat and he would eventually be proven right as Coxey failed to gather support as he marched and ultimately arrived at Capitol Hill with only 300 followers, where he was immediately arrested for trespassing on the grass.² Coxey's march had proven to be something of a joke, but considerably more troubling was an increase in worker unrest with 1894 marked by a series of strikes - most notably the Pullman Strike which took place in June and July. A strike which began over wage cuts and rent increases at the Pullman railroad car works near Chicago spread to become a general railroad strike which eventually affected rail traffic in 27 states and crippled the transportation network in some areas.³ In early July Olney intervened. Believing that if he could destroy the strike at its epicentre in Chicago it would fail everywhere, Olney demonstrated his skill as a former railroad lawyer - a connection which undoubtedly swayed his sympathies toward the railroad managers - by using the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to draw up an injunction against the strikers interfering with railroad traffic in Chicago on the grounds that it was obstructing the federal mails.⁴ When the strikers ignored this injunction Cleveland ordered federal troops to the city sparking rioting and clashes between unemployed workers and the soldiers in which as many as 25 people were killed.⁵ In the wake of the bloodshed, the strike leaders were arrested and the strike came to an end, but not without raising fears of

² Richard E. Welch, *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1988), p. 150

³ *Ibid*, pp. 141-142

⁴ Almont Lindsey, *The Pullman Strike: The Story of a Unique Experiment and of a Great Labour Upheaval*, (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1964), p. 150; Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement of the United States, Vol. II: From the Founding of the American Federation of Labor to the Emergence of American Imperialism, 2nd Edition*, (New York: International Publishers, 1975), pp. 266-267

⁵ Foner, *History of the Labor Movement, Vol. II*, p. 269

social upheaval in the middle classes and angering workers who believed the Cleveland administration had acted as the tools of the railroad directors. These factors, coming on top of the continuing failure to restore the nation's economy and perhaps also some dissatisfaction at the refusal to annex Hawaii in 1893, combined to cause a landslide in the Congressional elections of November, 1894, in which the Democrats lost 113 seats in the House and 5 in the Senate and lost control of both houses. Perhaps as troublingly, the Democratic Party struggled to put up a united front in the election with their energies "expended primarily in castigating party enemies, instead of fighting Republican opponents."⁶ The extent to which these events affected the Cleveland administration's foreign policy in 1894 and 1895 has been the subject of lively debate; what is certain is that they forecast further troubles for the administration in its final two years.

As the domestic troubles of 1894 unfolded, the Cleveland administration found itself also responding to other problems several thousand miles away in the Central American republic of Nicaragua. The United States' involvement in Nicaraguan affairs centred on a debate over the sovereignty of the Mosquito Indians who occupied a large reservation on the Central American country's southeast coast.⁷ The reservation had been guaranteed to the Indians since 1860 when Nicaragua signed the Treaty of Managua with Great Britain. It had previously been a British protectorate and, while this status was officially relinquished under the treaty, a stipulation remained that the Indians should maintain a measure of self-government under Nicaraguan sovereignty. Complicating matters further was Britain's insistence that they were entitled to intercede on behalf of the Indians in any dispute with Nicaragua, a position that was reinforced in 1881 when the Emperor of Austria delivered an arbitration decision that practically rendered the Mosquito Reservation independent of Nicaraguan rule excepting the appointment of a Nicaraguan commissioner to protect its sovereign rights.⁸ Such potential for British involvement in Central American affairs in spite of the Monroe Doctrine was clearly unwelcome for the United States and the Emperor of Austria's appointment as arbiter was never accepted by the American government, continuing to be a matter of discontent in 1894.⁹ Ironically, however, the arbitration decision may have played a large part in increasing American influence in the region and, ultimately, bringing an end to the British pseudo-protectorate.

⁶ Welch, *Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, p. 202

⁷ The Native Americans that occupy the region are more correctly known as Miskitos, but for the purpose of clarity the term Mosquito will be used here as it was exclusively in the documents of the period.

⁸ Charles W. Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato: The Life of Walter Q. Gresham*, (Lexington, Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988), p. 204

⁹ Mr. Bayard to Mr. Gresham, March 16, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 251

The decision of 1881 granted the Mosquito Indians the right to exercise all the powers necessary to regulate trade in the reservation. Whether this played a role in the subsequent increase in American investment in the region is open to debate, but it is indisputable that this freedom from Nicaraguan control came to be seen by merchants and investors at the reservation's capital, Bluefields, as vital to their economic welfare.

The increase in American investment and commerce in the Mosquito Reservation was dramatic. Beginning in the 1880s, American businessmen poured capital into the exploitation of the rich resources to be found in the territory. While bananas and other fruit were the largest exports, the investors also sought to capitalise on the reservation's natural wealth in minerals, timber and hides.¹⁰ By 1893 American investments in the Mosquito Reservation amounted to \$2,000,000, with overall trade with the United States totalling as much as \$4,000,000 per year.¹¹ More importantly, American firms had taken up a dominant position in the region's economy, conducting 90% of the commerce and holding 90-95% of the reservation's total wealth.¹² By this standard, the Mosquito Reservation is indicative of the change taking place in the United States position in the world. Having built such strong commercial ties with this small corner of the Western Caribbean, and with such substantial investments at stake for American citizens, the United States government found itself more deeply involved in local affairs than it might have wished.

This American presence in Nicaragua became relevant to the State Department early in 1894 when the outbreak of hostilities between Nicaragua and Honduras led to B.B. Seat, the U.S. Consular Agent at Bluefields, requesting that a warship be sent to protect American citizens and their property in the reservation.¹³ Although Gresham arranged with the Navy Department to have the U.S.S. *Kearsage* dispatched to the region, there appeared to be little cause for concern since Bluefields was well-removed from the scene of the invasion at Cape Gracias á Dios. However, the crisis with Honduras exposed deep flaws in the relationship between the Nicaraguan government and the authorities on the Mosquito Reservation. The Indian government – which by 1894 was largely controlled by the foreign community and by black Jamaican immigrants in particular – disputed the right of Nicaragua to mobilise troops within the reservation without its permission and threatened to make an official protest to Great Britain. They also made moves to form their own

¹⁰ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 205

¹¹ Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898*, (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1963), pp. 220-221

¹² Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 205; LaFeber, *New Empire*, p. 221

¹³ Mr. Seat to Mr. Gresham, January 25, 1894, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894*, Appendix I, p. 234

defence militia.¹⁴ Under these circumstances, it is possible that Seat's request for a warship was as much motivated by concerns about Nicaragua's potential actions as by the possibility of an invasion by Honduran forces. Certainly the need for an American military presence at Bluefields became more urgent shortly afterwards when Nicaraguan troops occupied the town on the night of February 10-11.¹⁵

This occupation would prove to be the first of many in 1894 with troops from Nicaragua and British and American marines all being deployed at various times in an attempt to maintain order in Bluefields and the surrounding reservation. In general this was the result of the failure of the leading figures on the reservation and the Nicaraguan officials sent to work with them to create a workable settlement that would allow the reservation's diverse community to govern itself. As the failure to bring about a political settlement continued through the summer Gresham was also forced to confront the issue of involvement by American citizens and even American diplomats in local affairs. Ultimately he presided over the United States' response to a British occupation of the port of Corinto on Nicaragua's Pacific coast in 1895. Once again, much of his policy would be based upon a foundation of strict legality.

The existence of the Treaty of Managua and Britain's consequent assertion of a right to intervene on the behalf of the Mosquito Indians in any dispute with the Nicaraguan government meant that any unrest involving the Mosquito Reservation was always going to be a matter of concern for the United States. Under the Monroe Doctrine, opposition to European involvement in the affairs of the American continents had, of course, been the United States' declared policy since 1823, but enforcement of the doctrine varied throughout the 19th century. This was specifically true in relation to Nicaragua where a succession of diplomatic exchanges demonstrate the flexible interpretation of the doctrine. First, the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850 between Great Britain and the United States had attempted to ensure that neither nation could construct and own an inter-oceanic canal in Central America and also stipulated that there was to be no colonisation of Central American nations including Nicaragua and the Mosquito Coast. While a strong endorsement of the principles of the Monroe Doctrine, the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty was somewhat undermined by the differing interpretations placed upon it by the United States and Britain with the British protectorate then in existence over the Mosquito Coast being a particular source of controversy. This area of dispute was supposedly removed by the Treaty of Managua in 1860 when Britain acknowledged Nicaraguan sovereignty over the

¹⁴ Mr. Seat to Mr. Braida, January 22, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 235-236

¹⁵ Mr. Braida to Mr. Uhl, February 13, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 237-238

Mosquito Reservation, but the issue was clouded by the subsequent British claim to intercede on the Indians' behalf. It arose again in 1879 when Nicaragua agreed, without consulting the United States, to submit the question of the extent of its sovereignty over the Mosquito Reservation to the arbitration of the Emperor of Austria-Hungary. At the time the United States did not protest, but the arbitration decision handed down in 1881 was never acknowledged as binding by the American government and the actions of both Britain and Nicaragua clearly still rankled with some members of the State Department in 1894.¹⁶ Finally, as recently as 1888 the Nicaraguan government had appealed to the United States for assistance after the British government had threatened to intervene against perceived infringements of Mosquito sovereignty. The Secretary of State at the time – Thomas F. Bayard who held the post of Ambassador to Great Britain in 1894 – stated:

The matter is one in which the Government of the United States feels at least an equal interest with that of Great Britain, inasmuch as a number of our citizens are now engaged in business within the reservation and by far the larger part of the foreign commerce of that region is at present carried on between the ports of Bluefields and New Orleans.¹⁷

In a lengthy instruction to the American Minister in London, Bayard made plain that the United States would not tolerate any attempt to re-establish a British protectorate on the Mosquito Coast.¹⁸ This led to a denial that the British government had any such intentions, but at least one of Gresham's predecessors found this declaration to be rendered worthless by their continued assertion of the right of intervention.¹⁹

It is clear from these events that the United States government was becoming increasingly assertive of its declared position under the Monroe Doctrine in Nicaragua during the later years of the 19th century. It could be argued that this was simply the result of the increasing American commercial interest in the region, but the actions of Bayard and Gresham – both natural foreign policy conservatives – suggest that this growing assertiveness was more likely to be a consequence of expanding American power on the world stage. This argument would be supported by the events of 1894 and 1895 and thus forms an interesting counterpoint to the fundamental conservatism of Grover Cleveland's

¹⁶ Bayard to Gresham, March 16, 1894, *FRUS*, pp. 251-252; A recurring feature of dispatches between Ambassador Bayard and Secretary of State Gresham in 1894 would be the repeated declaration that the United States had only acquiesced in the Treaty of Managua under the impression that it formed a total renunciation of British interest in the Mosquito Reservation.

¹⁷ Mr. Bayard to Mr. Phelps, November 23, 1888, [No. 999], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1888*, p. 759

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 759-767

¹⁹ Mr. Foster to Mr. Lincoln, February 8, 1893, [No. 1053], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1893*, p. 314

foreign policy with its generally limited aims and reluctance to involve the United States in the affairs of other nations.

Gresham had shown little concern over the events taking place on the reservation in January and February of 1894, but was moved to act when reports reached Washington of the landing of British marines at Bluefields on March 5. Within days of the landing telegrams were sent to the American representatives in Nicaragua and Great Britain seeking more information on the landings and specifically querying the “alleged grounds” and “the occasion” for the British action.²⁰ If doubt remained as to the reason for Gresham’s questions – and apparently Minister Baker in Nicaragua did not fully comprehend his chief’s thinking – it was decisively removed by his second telegram to Nicaragua which stated: “Did Great Britain land troops under asserted right of sovereignty or only for protection? Prompt answer desired.”²¹ Clearly the State Department was troubled by the prospect that Britain had forcibly asserted its claim to intercede for the Mosquito Indians in direct opposition to the Nicaraguan government’s attempt to assert its own sovereignty over the reservation.

This anxiety was only partially alleviated by Ambassador Bayard’s replies from London. Bayard’s cabled report on his meeting with the British Foreign Minister, Lord Kimberley, declared “I believe landing of forces was to extend safety to residents and check violence” while his more detailed written report of the same meeting stated his belief that the commander of the U.S.S. *Kearsage* would also have landed marines to protect American lives and property if that vessel had arrived at Bluefields before its British counterpart.²² A subsequent dispatch based on an official memorandum from Lord Kimberley explaining the British actions at Bluefields also demonstrated Bayard’s belief that the landing was intended to protect white traders rather than the Mosquito Indians, going further to suggest that the discussions taking place between the British Consul and the Nicaraguan general in the town aimed at restoring order could be taken as proof that Britain recognised Nicaraguan sovereignty.²³ Gresham, however, clearly did not share Bayard’s confidence in British intentions. In a lengthy dispatch on April 30 the Secretary of State stated his belief that the British government had been aware of an abortive agreement between its representatives in the reservation and the Nicaraguan commissioner

²⁰ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Baker, March 7, 1894, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 239; Mr. Gresham to Mr. Bayard, March 9, 1894, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 250

²¹ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Baker, March 14, 1894, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 250

²² Mr. Bayard to Mr. Gresham, March 15, 1894, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 250-251; Bayard to Gresham, March 16, 1894, *FRUS*, p. 251

²³ Mr. Bayard to Mr. Gresham, March 29, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 258-260

there concluded on March 4, but negotiated several days earlier, and had also been fully apprised of a second agreement that was announced on March 25, six days after it was negotiated.²⁴ He was supported in this belief by reports from Captain Watson of the U.S.S. *San Francisco* (the *Kearsage* having been wrecked en route to Nicaragua) and Mr. Braida, U.S. Consul at San Juan del Norte, both of whom visited Bluefields in March and April and reported that the British consul was working directly with the Nicaraguan government to create a new authority for the reservation.²⁵ Gresham, it seems, was concerned that Britain was only withdrawing its support from the Mosquito Indians in order to enter into a partnership with the Nicaraguan government which would contravene the Treaty of Managua still further. This is confirmed by a personal letter that Gresham wrote to Bayard on May 2 in which he wrote “For some reason the Government of Nicaragua now appears to be unfriendly to the United States, and it is believed here (not without reason), that English interests have brought about this feeling.”²⁶ At the close of the April 30 dispatch, Bayard was instructed “to express to Lord Kimberley the President’s hope and expectation ... that no foreign agency shall be permitted to dictate or participate in the administration of affairs in the Mosquito Reservation.”²⁷

All of this combined to form a surprisingly aggressive opening stance from Gresham towards Great Britain over the Mosquito Reservation. In a region in which the United States held commercial interests that, while dominant, were not of any great significance the cautious Secretary of State was setting out a very active position that questioned the interaction of the British and Nicaraguan governments and it appears clear that this was designed to forestall any attack on the Monroe Doctrine by Britain. No other convincing explanation has been put forward for Gresham’s stance. Of the little that has been written on the subject, the most expansive is that of Walter LaFeber, written in 1963. In *The New Empire* LaFeber states “Gresham maneuvered England out of its strategic position in Nicaragua and led the United States into the newly created political vacuum to replace the British.”²⁸ This argument credits Gresham with greater aggression than he actually applied. While LaFeber has repeated this claim in more recent works, there is no evidence that Gresham actively sought to place the United States in a position from which

²⁴ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Bayard, April 30, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 271-273

²⁵ Ibid; Mr. Braida to Mr. Uhl, March 18, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 255; Mr. Braida to Mr. Baker, March 21, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 256-258; Mr. Braida to Mr. Uhl, March 26, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 258

²⁶ Walter Q. Gresham to Thomas F. Bayard, May 2, 1894, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

²⁷ Gresham to Bayard, April 30, 1894, *FRUS*, p. 273

²⁸ LaFeber, *New Empire*, pp. 218-219

to exert control over Nicaragua and such a move would not have been in character with his actions in Hawaii and Brazil.²⁹ A more convincing interpretation is that of Charles W. Calhoun who suggests that, in formulating American policy towards the region, Gresham was forced to choose between American businesses that had flourished under the British pseudo-protectorate and the international standing of the Monroe Doctrine and ultimately chose the latter.³⁰ This theory is in character with Gresham's legalistic approach to foreign policy and is borne out by his stance towards the governments of both Britain and Nicaragua. It also raises questions about the anti-imperialism of both Gresham and President Cleveland. While there was no attempt to influence Nicaragua's actions, the use of the United States' growing power to more actively assert the Monroe Doctrine potentially placed it in a position that can be viewed as imperialist. The late 19th Century had already seen Central American nations invoke the Monroe Doctrine while appealing to the United States for help in disputes with European powers (as illustrated by Nicaragua itself in 1888). By actively asserting the Monroe Doctrine, Gresham and Cleveland essentially placed the United States in the position of regional hegemon, if a benign and conservative one. Whether this constitutes imperialism is then a matter of definition since a lack of desire to directly influence the actions of other governments in the Americas did not negate a paternalistic stance towards those governments. However one chooses to define the policy, once again it can clearly be seen as an attempt by Cleveland and Gresham to set out their vision of how American power should be applied to defend the United States' traditional sphere of influence in the Western hemisphere. This would be even more starkly demonstrated in relation to Venezuela the next year.

Further evidence of Gresham's determination to defend – and perhaps even reinvigorate – the Monroe Doctrine can be seen in his next exchange with Bayard. In a meeting on May 22, Lord Kimberley responded to Gresham's stern warning of April 30 in decidedly conciliatory terms, declaring once again that Great Britain had no intention or desire to impose a protectorate over the reservation regardless of the large foreign community that had grown up at Bluefields since the Treaty of Managua was signed.³¹ Furthermore, the Foreign Minister had disavowed the actions of the British consul in involving himself with the negotiations to form a new government for the Mosquito

²⁹ Walter LaFeber, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, Vol. II: The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 123

³⁰ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 204

³¹ Mr. Bayard to Mr. Gresham, May 28, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 291-293

Reservation. Most remarkable was Bayard's description of Kimberley's desire to follow the United States' lead in Nicaragua:

His lordship further expressed a strong desire to learn what the United States Government considered it advisable should be done in the present status of affairs at Bluefields.

He said the United States are, as it were, "on the spot," and could judge what line of action was necessary to produce requisite and reasonable security for persons and property in that region.

He appeared to be disposed to follow in the line which should be approved and adopted by the United States, so that a coincidence of view and action should be arrived at by the United States and Great Britain.³²

While it is notable that Bayard's third statement is considerably more conjectural than the pair that preceded it, that such sentiments should be expressed by the British Foreign Secretary is quite remarkable. As such they may mark a recognition in the British government – or at least the Liberal government that Lord Kimberley represented – that the United States was now sufficiently strong that competing with them in Central America would be a mistake. This could be seen as direct evidence of Mead's argument that growing threats to Britain's dominance in the late 19th Century saw a reappraisal of British interests and relationships in the Americas and a new desire to placate the American government.³³ Whatever the case, Bayard was left convinced that "They do not desire to have any but the most friendly and mutually accommodating relations with the United States," and that British intentions in Nicaragua were entirely benign.³⁴

All of this would appear to have been an impressive victory for Gresham's foreign policy, but the Secretary of State was determined not to yield anything to his British counterpart. Indeed, he did not simply reject the British advances, but seized on the opportunity to make a forceful statement about American intentions. In a dispatch of July 19, Gresham instructed Bayard to reject the implied offer of working with Britain to create a new government for the Mosquito Reservation on the grounds that it "might imply a willingness on the part of this Administration to depart from the consistent policy pursued by previous Administrations in dealing with Central American questions."³⁵ This carried a dual significance: firstly Gresham was unwilling to compromise the Monroe Doctrine by granting legitimacy to the British interest in Nicaragua through joint action between the two nations. Secondly, the Secretary of State specifically would not accept any

³² Ibid, p. 292

³³ Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 82-83

³⁴ Bayard to Gresham, May 28, 1894, *FRUS*, pp. 292-293

³⁵ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Bayard, July 19, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 311-312

governmental arrangement at Bluefields that did not conform to the traditional American interpretation of the Treaty of Managua. This is particularly significant since the previous, foreign-dominated government, that had existed at Bluefields before February, 1894, was not considered to have been in line with the initial intentions of the treaty and thus he was in effect demanding a radical alteration in the political situation on the Reservation.

Denying that there was any major difficulty to be solved at Bluefields, Gresham insisted that the “alien administration” that had dominated the Indian population must be removed. He made no comment on what should take its place, but declared that “The sovereignty of Nicaragua over the whole of the national domain is unquestionable.” In this case the strict interpretation of the Treaty of Managua – and by extension the Monroe Doctrine itself – precluded any alternative government, even one that might benefit the United States or its citizens:

No matter how conspicuous the American or other alien interests which have grown up under the fiction of Indian self-government, neither the United States nor Great Britain can fairly sanction or uphold this colorable abuse of the sovereignty of Nicaragua.

.... This being so, the United States could neither participate in nor sanction any device whereby the ultimate authority and international responsibility of Nicaragua in respect to American citizens in the reservation might be impaired or restricted.

All of this was a forceful declaration of American intent and one which can be seen as a significant victory for Cleveland’s administration, but it is not immediately clear as to why Gresham felt motivated to make such a bold statement. Certainly the move conforms with LaFeber’s suggestion that Gresham was seeking to manoeuvre the British out of Nicaragua in order to allow the United States to take their place, but both Gresham’s rhetoric and subsequent events speak against this. It is possible that Gresham was specifically seeking to reinvigorate the Monroe Doctrine, but there is no readily apparent reason why he should wish to do this. A far more likely explanation is that Gresham was simply acting in accordance with his preferred policy earlier in the administration. Events in Hawaii, Brazil and China had all demonstrated that a concern for legal probity was the Secretary’s preferred policy foundation and, this being the case, the declarations of his July 19 dispatch form a logical train. Gresham was correcting what he perceived to be a legal injustice under the terms of the Treaty of Managua because he deemed himself to have a legal and moral obligation to do so. Once again the growing might of the United States – and, perhaps more importantly, the rising threat to Great Britain of Germany and Russia – was granting the Secretary of State the power to act, if not as a global policeman, then certainly as a hemispheric legal counsel.

On that subject, it should be noted that one reason why Gresham was able to enact his policy was that Britain had little material incentive to dispute the case with the United States; Americans dominated the local commerce and Britain's interests in the region were limited to some black Jamaican immigrants and the historical protection of the Mosquito Indians, an arrangement that was of little obvious benefit to the British government in 1894 and one which Ambassador Bayard suggested the Foreign Office would be happy to relinquish.³⁶ It has been suggested that the potential construction of an inter-oceanic canal through Nicaragua meant that the region continued to be a matter of interest to Great Britain, but by the 1890s the only significant efforts to build any such canal were American in origin.³⁷ While it might be argued that a continued British presence in Nicaragua might have been useful in frustrating American plans to construct a canal, the strong position held by Britain both strategically – in terms of its Caribbean possessions – and legally – under the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty which forbade either nation from constructing a Central American canal for their exclusive use – meant that physical control of Nicaraguan soil was an unnecessary burden. In all, it might be argued that the deferential attitude shown by the British government over Nicaragua formed the first tentative stage of an Anglo-American cooperative movement that would eventually culminate in the 'Special Relationship' of the twentieth century. While this might be overstating the case somewhat, it does appear clear that the British government of the time was happy to abandon its historic obligations to the Mosquito Indians in order to improve relations with the United States. It is equally possible that Gresham's repeated assertions to Bayard that the United States would not support any of its own citizens who attempted to manipulate the situation in the reservation in order to set up a government more responsive to their needs were intended for British consumption and designed as reassurance that the American government was not seeking to profit directly from the British withdrawal.³⁸

Although British interest in constructing an inter-oceanic canal had declined, Nicaragua's promise as a possible location for such a project made it a nation of interest to some American politicians who hoped that a canal would facilitate the growth of American commerce with China and Japan. Cleveland, while not totally opposed to the concept of a trans-isthmian canal, does not appear to have shared their enthusiasm and certainly his record in office showed little desire to encourage such a project.³⁹ In 1885, Cleveland's

³⁶ Mr. Bayard to Mr. Gresham, August 10, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 322-323

³⁷ LaFeber, *American Search for Opportunity*, p. 123

³⁸ Gresham to Bayard, July 19, 1894, *FRUS*, p. 312; Mr. Gresham to Mr. Bayard, July 23, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 313

³⁹ Welch, *Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, p. 178

first foreign policy decision as President had been to withdraw the Frelinghuysen-Zavala Treaty from Senate consideration on the grounds that it constituted an entangling alliance. The treaty had granted the United States the right to construct a trans-isthmian canal through Nicaragua which was to be jointly owned and operated by the two who would be thenceforth connected by an alliance and a promise of American protection of Nicaraguan territory.⁴⁰ Undoubtedly it was the proposal of an alliance and an open-ended commitment to defend Nicaraguan territory that prompted Cleveland to put an end to the treaty, but he also did not believe that it was the role of government to take the lead in such projects. In this he was opposed not simply by Republicans who held a broader vision of the rights and duties of government, but also by some in his own party. Most notably Senator John T. Morgan of Alabama, who served in the Senate for 30 years and was Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations during the first two years of Cleveland's second term, was a keen Democratic supporter of a trans-isthmian canal in the belief that the economic development of the Caribbean would see an end to the South's status as an economic colony of the North.⁴¹ Morgan and others saw the crisis in Nicaragua as an opportunity to push forward with the canal project, but despite repeated lobbying found the President and Gresham to be intransigent.⁴² When Morgan attempted to secure a government guarantee for \$70 million worth of bonds for the Maritime Canal Company - an American company which had begun operating in Nicaragua in 1889 - Cleveland threatened to veto the bill.⁴³ Gresham would defend the rights of the company when the Nicaraguan government threatened to terminate its concession in 1894, but only as a standard diplomatic procedure while he also ordered the American Minister in Managua to disavow any intimation that the United States might guarantee the company's credit or assist in finishing its work.⁴⁴ Whatever their objectives in Nicaragua, the Cleveland administration was not seeking to facilitate the construction of a canal.

While Gresham's handling of American policy relating to events in the Mosquito Reservation held less long-term significance than his dealings with Great Britain, it still serves as an example of many of the problems facing the Secretary of State in the mid-

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 158-159

⁴¹ Joseph A. Fry, 'John Tyler Morgan's Southern Expansionism', *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 9, No. 4, (1985) p. 330

⁴² John T. Morgan to Grover Cleveland, January 24, 1894, Reel 82, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; John T. Morgan to Grover Cleveland, April 17, 1894, Reel 84, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁴³ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 209; Charles S. Campbell, *The Transformation of American Foreign Policy: 1865-1900*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), pp. 224-228; Campbell notes that Cleveland signed the bill which had incorporated the Maritime Canal Company in 1889, but suggests this was a matter of routine rather than an indication of support.

⁴⁴ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 209

1890s. Foremost amongst these are Gresham's basic approach to policy, the difficulties of communicating with and controlling diplomats across great distances, and the problems created by the personal agendas of local American residents. The first of these was relatively simple: consistent with his actions in Hawaii, Brazil and China, Gresham sought to place his policy on a solid legal foundation. Under international law and the treaties recognised by the United States, the Nicaraguan government was indisputably, in Gresham's eyes, the sovereign power in the Mosquito Reservation. This being so, the Secretary of State's policy can largely be viewed as an extension of his neutrality policy elsewhere. If the government of Nicaragua lived up to their treaty obligations toward American citizens residing in the country then the United States government had no right to interfere with Nicaraguan internal affairs. This was a message that was emphasised repeatedly in his instructions to the State Department's representatives in the region.⁴⁵

If creating the policy was a relatively easy decision for Gresham, then enacting it proved to be a far more difficult proposition. This was due not so much to the opposition of either Nicaragua or Great Britain, but to the machinations and various agendas of the Americans in the region. Of these, perhaps the most problematic were the State Department's own representatives: Lewis Baker, the U.S. Minister in Managua, A.C. Braida, the U.S. Consul for the region who was based at San Juan del Norte, and B.B. Seat, the U.S. Consular Agent at Bluefields. As in Hawaii and Brazil, Gresham found himself repeatedly having to restrain these representatives of the American government and compensate for their actions. While none of them came close to emulating Minister Stevens' efforts at creating U.S. foreign policy in Hawaii, all three frustrated the Secretary of State with their actions and served to illustrate the difficulties of enacting centralised policy at a distance in the late 19th century.

A major contributor to this problem was simply the matter of the distance between the United States and Nicaragua and the difficulties of communicating with the State Department's representatives there. By comparison with the incidents in Hawaii or China, Gresham was able to communicate with his minister in Nicaragua very easily: telegraph networks connected Washington to Managua, enabling the Secretary of State to request and receive urgent messages from Minister Baker in a matter of hours. In this respect Baker was as accessible as his counterparts in European capitals. Beyond the vicinity of Managua, however, the situation was very different. Internal communications within Nicaragua itself were slow and unreliable. During one crisis Minister Baker reported that

⁴⁵ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Baker, October 30, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 351-352; Mr. Gresham to Mr. Baker, November 15, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 353-354

the sole telegraph line between Managua and the Mosquito Reservation was down, thus precluding any hopes of speedy communication between the capital and Bluefields.⁴⁶ He also noted that in times of crisis the Nicaraguan government would only convey letters or telegrams that were “entirely agreeable to them.” Further to this, surface communications between Bluefields and Managua were extremely difficult. Baker described to Gresham how his journey to the Mosquito Reservation had involved “a most difficult trip, changing conveyances nine times in consequence of the low stage of water in the San Juan River,” and only arriving in Bluefields courtesy of the U.S.S. *San Francisco*.⁴⁷ Surface communications between Nicaragua and Washington were little better with diplomatic dispatches between Baker and the State Department taking anything from two to six weeks to reach their destination – by contrast regular transatlantic shipping allowed America’s ambassadors in Europe to deliver full written reports in less than two weeks. Indeed, due to the easy access to Caribbean shipping routes from Bluefields, it was often possible for Braida and Seat to communicate with Washington more swiftly than their superior in Managua could. This was highlighted in the summer of 1894 when Minister Baker informed Gresham that the presence of an American warship at Bluefields meant that Washington could now be in possession of reports from the reservation in as little as 6 or 7 days, much faster than he himself could be.⁴⁸ All this combined to create a situation whereby it was virtually impossible for the Secretary of State, his minister in Managua, and the American consular representatives in the reservation to be in full possession of the same facts and instructions at any one time and thus effective control of the situation from Washington was also an impossibility. Under such circumstances the State Department was forced to place its trust in the good judgement of its officers overseas, something that Gresham would consider to be seriously lacking in Nicaragua.

All three American diplomats involved in the events surrounding the Mosquito Reservation opened themselves to criticism in some way and, in many respects, they are illustrative of the issues facing the State Department at the end of the 19th century. Consular Agent Seat was accused by the Nicaraguan foreign minister of sympathy towards the rebellion against Nicaraguan sovereignty that occurred in the first week of July, 1894. The foreign minister cited comments by Seat reported in the American press as further evidence that he was prejudiced against the Nicaraguan government.⁴⁹ Worse, from

⁴⁶ Mr. Baker to Mr. Gresham, July 14, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 309

⁴⁷ Mr. Baker to Mr. Gresham, May 2, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 273-275

⁴⁸ Baker to Gresham, July 14, 1894, *FRUS*, p. 309

⁴⁹ Mr. Madriz to Mr. Baker, July 28, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 325-326

Gresham's point of view, were the actions of Seat and Consul Braida in involving themselves in the attempts to form a provisional government for the reservation after the first landing of British marines in March. Braida, in particular, had to be restrained by a cabled admonishment from Gresham after acquiescing in a system that saw Seat appoint two Americans to sit on the five man council that would take up the task of municipal government. Gresham declared: "You are not authorized to perform diplomatic functions, and will not meddle in political affairs in Mosquito."⁵⁰ Braida, meanwhile, was also the subject of accusations from the Nicaraguan government that he was acting in collusion with the British Consul against them, something he denied, claiming instead that it was the British who were colluding with Nicaraguan officials.⁵¹ In this way the inadequacies of the communication system became obvious as telegrams gave only a partial picture of the true situation while the written reports that were designed to provide clarity took weeks to reach their destination and often passed fresh instructions travelling from Washington on the way. Under such circumstances Gresham was reliant on his minister in Nicaragua to control matters on his behalf and provide him with regular reports.

Minister Baker failed to fulfil either of these tasks. During the confusion that followed the first landing of British marines in March, 1894, Gresham was twice forced to cable his minister for information about the grounds under which the landing had taken place and eventually had to directly order him to visit Bluefields personally in order to report on the situation first hand.⁵² Having already requested a full report on the situation in the aftermath of Braida and Seat's involvement in the new municipal council, Gresham eventually lost patience with Baker's reluctance to take personal control of the situation and, in words strongly reminiscent of the message sent to Minister Willis in Hawaii after the failure of his initial interview with Queen Liliuokalani, declared: "Your failure to send full information in regard to Bluefields incident has been embarrassing here. You should go there at once. No officer of this Government was authorized to participate with Nicaraguan authorities and British consul in organizing provisional administration."⁵³ Thus we see a powerful condemnation of Baker's failure to provide his chief with information and to manage his subordinates, but these were not his only failings. Baker clearly had little respect for Nicaragua's government or its people: he repeatedly argued to both

⁵⁰ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Braida, March 28, 1894, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 258

⁵¹ Mr. Baker to Mr. Gresham, March 20, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 255

⁵² Gresham to Baker, March 7, 1894, [Telegram], *FRUS*, p. 239; Gresham to Baker, March 14, 1894, [Telegram], *FRUS*, p. 250

⁵³ Mr. Baker to Mr. Gresham, April 17, 1894, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 271

Gresham and the Nicaraguan foreign minister, José Madriz, that Nicaraguan rule was damaging American businesses in the reservation, prompting the latter to politely suggest that such feelings were inevitable in a community that was used to governing affairs for their own benefit.⁵⁴ Further to this Baker angered Gresham, first by negotiating with the Nicaraguan commissioner at Bluefields to have Nicaraguan soldiers withdrawn from the town – a violation, as Gresham saw it, of Nicaraguan sovereignty – and then, when the troops were returned to the town after Baker’s departure, misrepresenting the facts of the agreement in his report to the State Department.⁵⁵ In this latter incident, it is interesting to note that the Nicaraguan government appealed directly to the State Department about Baker’s interference with their affairs and that Gresham appeared to put more faith in the information he received from Nicaragua’s minister in Washington than he did in that supplied by his own minister at Managua.⁵⁶ As early as May 2, 1894, Gresham’s opinion of Baker was sufficiently low to lead him to write to Bayard “Mr. Baker’s appointment to Nicaragua was an unfortunate one. He is a vain, weak man, and it may become necessary to recall him.”⁵⁷

Such fundamental failings of the State Department hierarchy as were seen in Nicaragua are characteristic of the difficulties faced by U.S. Secretaries of State in the late 19th century. In particular, the staffing of diplomatic missions with untrained, underpaid appointees – a product of the spoils system – created a fertile situation for unauthorised actions based on personal agendas. Charles Calhoun has suggested that Gresham contributed to his own difficulties in Nicaragua by delegating the task of managing department patronage instead of superintending it himself, but the combination of poor communication and lack of either the financial incentive to attract good applicants to unglamorous posts such as Managua or the training to professionalise the service made such problems largely inevitable.⁵⁸ Certainly Gresham repeatedly showed more faith in the reports delivered by professional naval officers than in those delivered by diplomats.⁵⁹ Contributing to this was the divergence between Gresham and Cleveland’s conception of what constituted good American foreign policy and the views of more activist thinkers

⁵⁴ Baker to Gresham, May 2, 1894, *FRUS*, pp. 273-275; Baker to Madriz, July 26, 1894, *FRUS*, pp. 324-325; Madriz to Baker, July 28, 1894, *FRUS*, pp. 325-326

⁵⁵ Mr. Baker to Mr. Gresham, May 10, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 287-290; Mr. Baker to Mr. Gresham, May 30, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 293; Mr. Gresham to Mr. Baker, June 13, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 296; Mr. Gresham to Mr. Baker, July 12, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 306-307

⁵⁶ Mr. Madriz to Mr. Guzman, June 4, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 296-300

⁵⁷ Gresham to Bayard, May 2, 1894, Reel 2, Gresham Papers, MD, LC

⁵⁸ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 208

⁵⁹ Gresham to Bayard, April 30, 1894, *FRUS*, pp. 271-273

amongst whom Baker, Braida and Seat could be numbered. This difference of opinion is well illustrated in a message from Baker to Gresham of June 7, 1894. On May 12, Gresham had instructed Baker to await instructions on how to proceed and that in the meantime he “should take care to say nothing tending to disparage Nicaragua’s rightful claim to paramount sovereignty or to encourage pretensions to autonomous rights inconsistent therewith.”⁶⁰ In his June 7 reply Baker stated:

I will say that I have on all proper occasions affirmed Nicaragua’s rightful claim to paramount sovereignty over the Mosquito territory; but, while conceding this, I have expressed the hope that the American citizens who have gone to that territory and invested money and labor and procured titles to property under certain treaty stipulations will be protected in the rights that they have acquired by proper arrangement between the two Governments.

This argument treads a fine line between protecting the property and livelihoods of American citizens and the creation of a de facto protectorate in which the U.S. government pressured Nicaragua into granting its citizens special status. Gresham’s conception of foreign policy was that the fair and equitable treatment of foreign governments under the law as set out in international treaty rights was sufficient to guarantee American citizens their rights abroad and that it was not the place of the government to give them an advantage. In Nicaragua, Baker, Braida and Seat all expanded this conception and thus attempted to manipulate events – the formation of a new government on the reservation, the exercise of Nicaraguan authority and taxation, and the placement of Nicaraguan troops – for the benefit of American commerce.

Gresham’s defence of Nicaraguan sovereignty over the Mosquito Reservation inevitably placed him in opposition, not just to Baker, Braida and Seat, but also to many of the Americans residing in the region. Amongst this expatriate community there was undoubtedly opposition to Nicaraguan rule due to a combination of reluctance to relinquish their privileged position under the previous administration in the reservation and concern over potential damage that new Nicaraguan taxes and regulations might do to their businesses.⁶¹ There may also be evidence to suggest a genuine desire from the American community to see full representation of all the major groups in the reservation - American, British, native and Creole - on any ruling council, although this may very well have been a convenient method of reducing the influence of the Nicaraguan commissioner and his chosen representatives.⁶² As has already been noted, Secretary Gresham saw no merit to such ideas, arguing that the foreign community that had grown up in the reservation since

⁶⁰ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Baker, May 12, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 290

⁶¹ Braida to Uhl, March 18, 1894, *FRUS*, p. 255; Mr. Baker to Mr. Madriz, July 26, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 324-325; Madriz to Baker, July 28, 1894, *FRUS*, pp. 325-326

⁶² Mr. Seat to Mr. Braida, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 253-254

the Treaty of Managua held no legal right to separate representation in government. By contrast, Gresham saw it as his duty to attempt to control the actions of the American community in and around Bluefields, ordering his representatives in the country to urge the expatriates not to become involved in the political instability in the region. This came to a head when another insurrection broke out against Nicaraguan rule at Bluefields on July 5, 1894, prompting the U.S.S. *Marblehead* to land marines to protect life and property, and culminating in an attack by the insurgents on a detachment of Nicaraguan soldiers – killing two, wounding one and capturing six or seven and a large cache of weapons.⁶³ Reports that American citizens had been involved in the insurrection were clearly concerning to Gresham who once again requested an immediate report from Minister Baker.⁶⁴ These reports were clearly widespread since Seat’s original report on the incident had sought to dismiss any such claims as inevitable Nicaraguan propaganda and had suggested that at most “two or three irresponsible parties” might have been involved.⁶⁵ While it is clear that Gresham was alarmed by the prospect that American citizens might seek to provoke an armed rebellion against Nicaraguan rule of the Mosquito Reservation – perhaps with the aim of creating a new independent state as a result – the insurrection of July 5, 1894, did also lead him to toughen his stance towards the Nicaraguan government. This came as a result of the arrest – and subsequent deportation without trial – of two American citizens named Lampton and Wiltbank who had taken up positions in the provisional government that briefly ruled the reservation after the ousting of Nicaraguan forces.⁶⁶ Tellingly, Gresham’s anger upon learning of the arrests from the naval commander at Bluefields was not confined simply to the “lawless proceeding” whereby the men were seized after being invited to visit the Nicaraguan commissioner, denied permission to speak to family or friends, and transported to Managua.⁶⁷ The Secretary of State also noted that arrests in such fashion violated the treaty between the United States and Nicaragua that had been signed in 1887 and was “an ungenerous response to the friendly disposition recently manifested by this Government respecting the sovereignty of Nicaragua over the Mosquito territory.” Clearly Gresham was annoyed to have his dual policies of legal probity and respecting all nations as equals under the law treated so shabbily. LaFeber has suggested that this attempt to convince the Nicaraguan government to allow Lampton and Wiltbank to return to

⁶³ Mr. Seat to Mr. Braida, July [Unknown date between 7th and 11th], 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 303-304

⁶⁴ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Baker, July 12, 1894, [Telegram], *FRUS*, p. 306

⁶⁵ Seat to Braida, July, 1894, *FRUS*, pp. 303-304

⁶⁶ Mr. Baker to Mr. Gresham, August 28, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 331-332

⁶⁷ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Baker, August 29, 1894, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 332-333

Bluefields was a violation of his own policy of neutrality, but it seems likely that Gresham was motivated simply by his own conviction that international law should be paramount and that the men's legal rights had not been respected.⁶⁸ This being so, it is interesting to note that when Minister Guzman explained the Nicaraguan government's actions to Gresham a month later he did so by directly responding to Gresham's charge that the Treaty of 1887 had been violated and explaining that the men in question had forfeited their treaty rights by engaging in armed rebellion against Nicaraguan rule.⁶⁹ While making this defence, however, Guzman also informed Gresham that the two men would be allowed to return to Bluefields for a sufficient period necessary to settle up any outstanding business affairs – a period that was later extended indefinitely, possibly due to Gresham's continued probing into the events surrounding the men's arrests and the summary manner of their deportation.⁷⁰ It seems the Nicaraguan government, having made its point, did not wish to alienate the United States further.

One reason why the Nicaraguan government may have considered it prudent not to risk damaging relations with the United States became clear in November, 1894. On November 20 the Mosquito Indians formally surrendered their special privileges under the Treaty of Managua and agreed to incorporate themselves and their reservation into Nicaragua. This was a very satisfactory conclusion to the events of 1894 for Gresham, bringing a permanent settlement of the matter and marking a success for his policy of supporting Nicaraguan sovereignty over the region. Almost immediately, however, another difficulty arose as within days of the agreement being signed – and, indeed, several weeks before he received confirmation of the signing from Baker – the Nicaraguan minister in Washington reported to Gresham that the British minister at Managua was refusing to recognise Nicaraguan sovereignty over the Mosquito Reservation and had requested that a British warship be sent to Bluefields.⁷¹ At the same time that he reported these events Minister Guzman also requested that the American government send a cruiser of their own to the port in response. What followed provides a fine illustration of Gresham and Cleveland's perception of proper American foreign policy. The British refusal to accept Nicaraguan sovereignty was not, as Minister Guzman implied, a last-ditch attempt to save Britain's claims to the Mosquito Reservation, but was actually a result of the arrests and

⁶⁸ LaFeber, *The New Empire*, p. 225

⁶⁹ Mr. Guzman to Mr. Gresham, September 22, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 343

⁷⁰ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Baker, October 1, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 348; Mr. Gresham to Mr. Baker, October 30, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 351-352

⁷¹ Mr. Guzman to Mr. Gresham, November 23, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 354

deportations made after the July 5 insurrection. At the same time that the two Americans were arrested, twelve British subjects including the British Vice-Consul, Edwin D. Hatch, were also taken into custody and summarily deported and, unlike the Americans, were not swiftly permitted to return.⁷² It was for this reason that Britain refused to recognise Nicaragua's assumption of sovereignty until compensation had been agreed. As early as November 24, Ambassador Bayard was reporting that he had discussed the matter of the "rough treatment of Mr. Hatch" with Lord Kimberley and that the Foreign Secretary :

"[desired] explicitly to have it understood that any action in the way of obtaining redress from Nicaragua which Her Majesty's Government may hereafter decide is necessary in the premises is wholly unconnected with any political or conventional question touching the Mosquito Reservation, but is simply a proceeding, on the grounds of international law, to obtain satisfaction for an affront."⁷³

This statement largely set the tone for the events of the next six months as British pressure for monetary compensation from Nicaragua increased, culminating in the seizure by British marines of the port of Corinto on April 27, 1895. During this time Gresham came under repeated attack from the Republican press, but it is clear that he always had confidence that Britain would honour the Monroe Doctrine.⁷⁴ Even as he instructed Bayard to investigate the Nicaraguan claims that a British warship was being sent to Bluefields in November, 1894, Gresham declared that "this information is not fully credited here," and Bayard's subsequent report that the refusal to acknowledge Nicaraguan sovereignty was simply a caveat pending settlement of the Hatch incident seems to have satisfied the State Department.⁷⁵ Indeed, a telegram sent to Bayard on December 17 informing the Ambassador "Statements in newspapers of to-day about action of United States, based upon what Great Britain has done or may do at Bluefields, pure fabrication" demonstrates that a greater concern was that miscommunication across the Atlantic might create a diplomatic controversy where none existed.⁷⁶ In general it appears that there was a strong mutual desire between the State Department and the Foreign Office not to allow the events in Nicaragua to create a rift between the two countries.⁷⁷

⁷² Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, pp. 202-203

⁷³ Mr. Bayard to Mr. Gresham, November 24, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 354-355

⁷⁴ Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, p. 203

⁷⁵ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Bayard, November 24, 1894, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 356; Mr. Bayard to Mr. Gresham, November 27, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, pp. 356-357

⁷⁶ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Bayard, November 28, 1894, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 357

⁷⁷ Mr. Bayard to Mr. Gresham, December 20, 1894, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894, Appendix I*, p. 359

One manifestation of this fact was in Gresham's refusal to intercede directly with Great Britain on Nicaragua's behalf over the matter of compensation. As British pressure increased, the poverty-stricken Nicaraguan government – after some convincing by Gresham – belatedly granted the same amnesty to the British subjects arrested at Bluefields that had been given to Lampton and Wiltbank, but found the Foreign Office to be unmoved in its demand for compensation.⁷⁸ On April 13, 1895, Minister Baker cabled Washington that “The Nicaraguan Government begs me to ask intervention my Government in their behalf for the settlement of indemnity question with Great Britain.”⁷⁹ This appeal was rejected by Gresham who saw no legal case for American involvement in the dispute, but he did instruct Bayard to informally suggest to Lord Kimberley that accepting a Nicaraguan request for two weeks clemency “would avoid embarrassment to commerce of this and other countries and be very satisfactory to the United States.”⁸⁰ In the event this request was not granted, but even the physical occupation of Nicaraguan territory – although Calhoun notes that Corinto was “as far from Mosquito as possible” – prompted only a gentle warning, even if it came directly from President Cleveland, that Britain should give Nicaragua the chance to settle the demands on condition that British troops withdrew from Corinto.⁸¹ While it is possible that a lengthy occupation might have led to greater difficulties between the United States and Great Britain, Cleveland's remonstrance proved unnecessary when the government of El Salvador agreed to guarantee the payment of an indemnity for its neighbour the following day.⁸²

The tumultuous events in Nicaragua between February, 1894, and May, 1895, are illustrative of many of the problems facing American policymakers in the late 19th century. The expansion of American trade and investment forced the State Department to take an interest in areas that previously were of little concern while the difficulty of communicating with isolated regions left the Department groping for information and struggling to control representatives who often acted according to their own perception of what was in the national interest. In particular, Nicaragua demonstrated the affect that growing American power and influence was having on the Monroe Doctrine. While the

⁷⁸ Walter Q. Gresham to Thomas F. Bayard, December 24, 1894, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁷⁹ Mr. Baker to Mr. Gresham, April 13, 1895, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part. 2*, p. 1029

⁸⁰ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Bayard, April 24, 1895, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part. 1*, pp. 696-697

⁸¹ Mr. Uhl to Mr. Bayard, May 1, 1895, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part. 1*, p. 697; Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 212

⁸² Mr. Bayard to Mr. Gresham, May 2, 1895, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part. 1*, p. 697

Sino-Japanese War may have suggested that American power was still developing on the global stage, the conciliatory attitude displayed by Great Britain suggested that the United States could be in a position to place a greater emphasis on the enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine as international law. The Monroe Doctrine had always been rather convenient for Great Britain as it formed a barrier to colonial acquisitions in the Americas by its European rivals, but the forcefulness with which Cleveland and Gresham asserted the Doctrine in Nicaragua and the willingness with which the Foreign Office acquiesced may be an indication of a significant change, not least because neither Cleveland nor Gresham desired to expand American authority in Central America. Finally, the dangers of this changing position were also demonstrated by the attempt from the Nicaraguan government to use the Monroe Doctrine to make the United States its shield against European demands. While this was not a new event – having occurred in Nicaragua itself only half a decade earlier – changing public opinion in the United States meant that such requests were guaranteed a more receptive audience. Gresham and Cleveland’s legalist policy may have allowed them to avoid becoming entangled in Nicaragua’s problem in 1895, but the decision to assert that policy more actively would lead to a much greater controversy in Venezuela later that same year.

The Venezuelan Border Dispute has been one of the most keenly debated events in American foreign policy of the late nineteenth century, but in common with much of the field has drifted into obscurity in recent decades. Among historians of the period, opinion has been divided as to the dispute’s significance in the evolution of American foreign policy. Assessments have varied from Calhoun’s claim that it formed “the most important incident in the foreign policy of the second Cleveland administration, with the possible exception of Hawaii, and one of the most important in all of the nineteenth century” and LaFeber’s declaration that only the 1893-97 depression and the battle of Manila Bay during the War of 1898 played a greater role in bringing about the creation of an American empire, to Richard Welch’s suggestion that the dispute had comparatively little long-term impact beyond a possible reawakening of interest in the Monroe Doctrine among the American public.⁸³ Allan Nevins criticised the tendency of the first historians to examine Cleveland’s record on foreign policy to focus on the dispute, suggesting instead that the administration’s actions towards Hawaii were of greater significance.⁸⁴ This disagreement is the result of several factors, not least the dispute’s somewhat sensational character that

⁸³ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 214; LaFeber, *New Empire*, p. 242; Welch, *Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, pp. 190-191

⁸⁴ Allan Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage*, (1932, reprint New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1966), p. 549

made it headline news at the time and saw the creation of a brief war scare with Great Britain. This sensationalism – and the war scare in particular – may have combined to suggest a greater significance for the Venezuelan Border Dispute than it in fact merited. Undoubtedly, however, the dispute touched on numerous subjects of interest including the growth of American power, commerce, and relations between the United States and Europe and Latin America.

A major reason why the dispute has been the subject of such debate is simply the difficulty of accounting for the actions of Cleveland and his advisors. The key dispatches and declarations that make up the heart of the dispute appear, at first glance, to be utterly out of character with the rest of Cleveland's foreign policy, being assertive almost to the point of aggression, lacking the usual careful moderation and legal conservatism, and even somewhat risking the peace and well-being of the nation. Adding to this difficulty of comprehension is a record of contemporary correspondence that is substantial, but far from conclusive in supporting any argument. Most tantalizing of all is the fact that the Venezuelan Border Dispute is the one foreign policy event of Cleveland's presidencies that he subsequently sought to explain himself. In a series of lectures at Princeton University that were subsequently published as the final – and lengthiest – chapter in his book *Presidential Problems*, Cleveland set out his vision of the dispute and the United States' part in it, but did so in such a way as to still leave many questions about his actions – and the reasoning behind them in particular – unanswered.

The United States' involvement in the Venezuelan Border Dispute is much easier to describe than it is to explain. The events forming the Cleveland administration's participation in the dispute are characterised by sporadic moments of action separated by months of inactivity. The dispute itself centred on the boundary between Venezuela and the colony of British Guiana, but ultimately it stemmed from the earliest colonisation of South America with the competing claims of the governments of Venezuela and Great Britain being founded upon the boundaries of the first European colonies. These claims were, at best, ill-defined since neither Spain nor the Netherlands, the original colonisers, had found it necessary to delineate a precise border between their possessions through unsettled jungle. Even after sovereignty passed from Spain and the Netherlands in the early 19th century little attempt was made to formalise the boundary. In its constitution of 1811 the new state of Venezuela claimed the Essequibo River as its Eastern border – a line that was also claimed in 1822 by the short-lived Republic of Colombia, of which Venezuela formed a part between 1821 and 1830 – but the newly independent republic was never in a

position to assert this claim except on paper.⁸⁵ It was only in 1840 that the British government, who had come into possession of the territory that became British Guiana through the Convention of London in 1814, sought to firmly establish the extent of their possessions by commissioning Robert Schomburgk to produce a survey based upon the Dutch government's claims. The line proposed by Schomburgk in 1841 was immediately challenged by the Venezuelan government with the result that the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Aberdeen, ordered the removal of markers placed at Point Barima – a sensitive site due to its proximity to the mouth of the Orinoco River – and subsequently offered a concessionary agreement that would have seen a partition of the disputed territory between the Essequibo and the Orinoco. Venezuela's rejection of this offer led to half a century of increasingly bitter wrangling during which time the significantly swifter expansion of British settlement first reduced the willingness of Great Britain to concede territory and then led to a steady increase in the amount of land it claimed beyond the Schomburgk Line. Venezuela first brought the matter to the attention of the United States in 1876 and apparently received no reply, but from 1881 a steady stream of correspondence passed between the two nations on the subject, culminating in the formal tendering of American good offices to end the dispute to the British government in February, 1887. Such offers and suggestions of arbitration were made several times between 1887 and the return of Grover Cleveland to the White House in 1893.

It is debatable whether Cleveland had already determined to act upon the Venezuelan Border Dispute before his second inauguration. Certainly he was acquainted with the dispute since his previous administration had been the first to offer American good offices to bring about a settlement. These low-key suggestions ultimately culminated in a dispatch of February 17, 1888, in which Thomas Bayard – then Cleveland's Secretary of State – informed Minister Phelps in London of a growing concern within the administration about the expansion of British claims.⁸⁶ This dispatch was, in Phelps' opinion, unlikely to help matters and so he chose not to transmit it to Lord Salisbury, the Foreign Secretary.⁸⁷ That Cleveland maintained at least a passing interest in the dispute is

⁸⁵ Thorough histories of the dispute from the perspectives of both the Venezuelan and British governments can be found in *Prominent facts relating to the boundary question between Venezuela and Great Britain*, enclosed in Dr. Lobo to Mr. Gresham, October 26, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894*, pp. 803-805 and Lord Salisbury to Sir Julian Pauncefote, November 26, 1895, [No. 190], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part. 1*, pp. 567-576

⁸⁶ Mr. Bayard to Mr. Phelps, February 17, 1888, [No. 791], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1888-89*, pp. 698-699

⁸⁷ It has been suggested that Cleveland was unaware that this dispatch was not passed to the British government and that this might go some way to explaining his frustration with British reluctance to accept American involvement in the dispute (see Callcott, *Caribbean Policy of the United States*, p. 57). This explanation is supported by the fact that Cleveland mentions the dispatch in *Presidential Problems*, but makes no reference to the fact it was not transmitted to Lord Salisbury. It would seem doubtful, however, that

demonstrated by the fact that he referred to it in his Annual Messages of both 1893 and 1894. The first such reference, however, is extremely brief – simply declaring the desirability that diplomatic relations between Britain and Venezuela, which had been broken off by the latter in 1887, be restored with a view to ending the dispute – and gives no indication that the issue would become one of great importance for the President later in his term. This might not be the case regarding the 1894 Message in which Cleveland declared:

The boundary of British Guiana still remains in dispute between Great Britain and Venezuela. Believing that its early settlement on some just basis alike honorable to both parties is in the line of our established policy to remove from this hemisphere all causes of difference with powers beyond the sea, I shall renew the efforts heretofore made to bring about a restoration of diplomatic relations between the disputants and to induce a reference to arbitration...⁸⁸

Certainly this was a more forceful statement, suggesting that the Monroe Doctrine might interest the United States in the dispute and raising the possibility that its involvement might go beyond merely facilitating a restoration of diplomatic relations and instead involve a push for arbitration of the dispute itself.

The period between Cleveland's second inauguration and his 1894 Annual Message appears little different to the previous decade in terms of American interest in the Venezuelan Border Dispute. In October, 1893, Secretary Gresham met with Dr. David Lobo, the interim chargé d'affaires at the Venezuelan legation in Washington, who subsequently presented him with a written summary of the dispute as Venezuela perceived it.⁸⁹ Unfortunately, it seems it is no longer possible to identify who requested this meeting – and, indeed, what its primary purpose was since it coincided with the Venezuelan government closing the Orinoco River to shipping – but it is perhaps telling that the meeting coincided with the Venezuelan government beginning to put pressure on the American minister in Caracas to have the United States once again tender its good offices in the interest of bringing the dispute to a conclusion.⁹⁰ Whatever the case, Gresham did not respond to Venezuela's pressure with any great urgency. On January 8, 1894, he met with Jose Andrade, the new Venezuelan minister in Washington, specifically to discuss the boundary dispute, at which time he requested clarification of Venezuela's position. This

Cleveland's actions in 1895 were noticeably altered by his belief that a moderately stern declaration of American concern had been ignored more than seven years previously. Grover Cleveland, *Presidential Problems*, (New York: The Century Company, 1904, reprint Boston, Ma.: Elibron Classics, 2005), pp. 243-244

⁸⁸ Grover Cleveland, Second Annual Message (second term), December 3, 1894

⁸⁹ Lobo to Gresham, October 26, 1893, *FRUS, 1894*, pp. 803-805

⁹⁰ Mr. Partridge to Mr. Gresham, November 15, 1893, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894*, pp. 805-806

clarification came in the form of a 29 page memorandum delivered by Andrade on March 31, accompanied by a note that once again requested American good offices in securing arbitration of the dispute. This lengthy history would form the basis for much of the Cleveland administration's argument in their exchanges with Great Britain, but it did not lead to an immediate change in the administration's stance. Once again, Gresham instructed Bayard to raise the matter of restoring diplomatic relations with the British Government in the summer of 1894, a mission which the Ambassador pursued with so little alacrity that Gresham reminded him to press the matter 5 months later.⁹¹

It is possible that this lack of action on Gresham's proposal was the reason for Cleveland's slightly more emphatic declaration of American interest in the dispute in his Annual Message of 1894. It may also have been the result of increasing pressure from Venezuela. The Venezuelan foreign minister, P. Ezequiel Rojas, seized on several opportunities to praise what he saw as American sympathy for his nation's plight. In January, 1894, he wrote to Cleveland to thank him for his reference to the dispute in the Annual Message of 1893, and in that same month Gresham had to gently disabuse Rojas of the belief that a map published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture showing Venezuela's western border to be the Essequibo River could be construed as official recognition of his country's case.⁹² Of rather greater significance was the work of a former U.S. Minister to Venezuela who agreed to work for the Venezuelan government in promoting their cause in the United States.

In 1894 the Venezuelan government hired William L. Scruggs to work for them in Washington to raise the profile of the border dispute. Scruggs was familiar to the Venezuelan government having served as the United States minister in Caracas several years earlier, a position from which he was removed after he attempted to bribe the Venezuelan president.⁹³ He set to work energetically, writing a pamphlet entitled *British Aggressions in Venezuela, or the Monroe Doctrine on Trial* which he distributed widely to Congressmen, State Governors, newspaper editors, and cabinet members, as well as being sold to the public on newsstands.⁹⁴ He also met many of these leading politicians and public figures in person, including both Gresham and Cleveland himself.⁹⁵ Scruggs' most

⁹¹ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Bayard, July 13, 1894, [No. 442], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894*, pp. 250-252; Mr. Gresham to Mr. Bayard, December 1, 1894, [No. 548], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894*, p. 252

⁹² P. Ezequiel Rojas to Grover Cleveland, January 15, 1894, Reel 82, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Mr. Gresham to Mr. Rojas, January 21, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894*, pp. 809-810

⁹³ Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, p. 197

⁹⁴ Dexter Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1867-1907*, (Johns Hopkins Press, 1937, reprint Gloucester, MA.: Peter Smith, 1966), p. 143

⁹⁵ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 217; Perkins, *Monroe Doctrine*, p. 147

concrete achievement came in January, 1895, when he successfully lobbied his congressional representative, Leonidas Livingston of Georgia, to introduce a resolution of Scruggs' own writing supporting Cleveland's call for arbitration for the dispute as expressed in the Annual Message of 1894. The resolution passed both houses unanimously, with only minor changes, and received Cleveland's signature on February 20.⁹⁶

The combination of Venezuelan pressure and British disinterest combined to gradually increase Cleveland's interest in the dispute sufficiently that by March, 1895, he called a cabinet meeting involving Gresham, Treasury Secretary John G. Carlisle, Secretary of War Daniel S. Lamont, and Attorney General Richard Olney at which it was agreed that Gresham should compile a detailed report on the history and legality of the dispute and the best means for bringing it to an end.⁹⁷ The Secretary of State began work on this report and also enlisted the help of his friend, the legal scholar John Bassett Moore, to prepare a new instruction to Bayard aimed at soliciting action from the British government. Apparently concerned at the extent to which Gresham was championing the Venezuelan cause, Moore succeeded in moderating the language and the April 9 dispatch was only slightly more assertive than its predecessors.⁹⁸ This would prove to be Gresham's last act in the dispute. In early May he was incapacitated by illness – one of several that he had suffered during his time in Washington – and on May 28 he died.

Gresham's replacement at the State Department was Richard Olney, the former Attorney General. He went to work producing a new report on the dispute which now took the form of a diplomatic dispatch that Bayard would pass to the British government. Olney's report was written in June and early July, slightly revised (but enthusiastically approved) by Cleveland, and dispatched to London on July 20. While no draft exists of Gresham's planned report it is generally agreed that Olney took a very different stance to his predecessor. In one move it altered the American position in the dispute from one of increasingly frustrated observer to outright involvement in all but name. In the course of eighteen pages Olney endeavoured to deliver a reasonable and measured argument for both arbitration and the right of the United States to intervene under the Monroe Doctrine.⁹⁹ He succeeded in presenting an argument that was heavily biased towards Venezuela, seemingly designed to provoke outrage from its British audience, and loaded with high-handed rhetoric and sweeping claims of American power. The message ranged across a history of the dispute that was clearly drawn from the Venezuelan versions supplied by

⁹⁶ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 217; Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, p.197

⁹⁷ Welch, *Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, p. 181

⁹⁸ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 218

⁹⁹ For full text of the dispatch see Richard Olney to Thomas F. Bayard, July 20, 1895, [No. 804], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part 1*, pp. 545-562

Lobo and Andrade earlier in Cleveland's second term and a lengthy discussion of the origins and history of the Monroe Doctrine before finally discussing its applicability to the dispute. The early section contains numerous factual errors – such as the declaration that every Presidential administration since Monroe had examined and approved the doctrine – but these pale into significance by comparison with the claims made later in the dispatch. Of these the most notable are the statement that “distance and three thousand miles of intervening ocean make any permanent political union between an European and an American state unnatural and inexpedient” and that “the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition.”¹⁰⁰ More than a century later it might be possible to argue that Olney was largely correct in his assertion that distance made long-term political union between Europe and America “unnatural”, but even today his prophecy has not been entirely fulfilled and to make such a suggestion to the government of an empire that still claimed sovereignty over a territory as vast as Canada or as diverse as the West Indies – not to mention British Guiana itself – was both insulting and nonsensical. The declaration that the United States was “practically sovereign” in the Americas only served to further the insult and extend it to the independent republics of the hemisphere. Beyond such rhetoric, however, Olney attempted to make two fundamental arguments: that the United States' proximity and commercial and political ties to the other nations on the American continents meant that the subjugation of one of them by a European power harmed the United States and thus invoked the Monroe Doctrine, and that, should the United States accept the expansion of European territory on the continent once, it would result in numerous such expansions, bringing the United States into close proximity with all the European powers. This would force it to maintain an army and navy equivalent to its European rivals and thus undermine and fundamentally alter the nature of American society.¹⁰¹

Having delivered this inflammatory dispatch – and it is apparent from the opening paragraph of the message which stated the President was aware “of the serious responsibility in any action now to be taken” that its nature was clear to everybody involved – Cleveland and Olney then found themselves in the faintly absurd position of waiting nearly five months for a reply.¹⁰² This was the result of many factors, not least the explicit instruction to Bayard that the President desired an answer in time for his next

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, pp. 556, 558

¹⁰¹ Ibid, pp. 557, 558

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 545

annual message at the opening of Congress in early December.¹⁰³ This lengthy timeframe would seem to demonstrate that Cleveland and Olney were not seeking to provoke the British government any more than was necessary, although Olney's two enquiries to Bayard in the intervening period indicate a degree of impatience. Matters were not helped by the fact that the new British Prime Minister – the experienced statesman Lord Salisbury – who was also fulfilling the role of Foreign Secretary, found himself distracted by minor crises in Turkey and Russia which further delayed his giving attention to a question that was of comparatively little concern to Great Britain.¹⁰⁴ Despite this the two-part reply was written early enough to be cabled, either in part or full, to Washington in ample time for the convening of Congress, but was instead sent by ship and thus was not delivered to Cleveland by the British Ambassador, Sir Julian Pauncefote, until December 7. In the meantime Cleveland had been forced to content himself with a statement in his Annual Message of 1895 that informed Congress of the sending of the July 20 dispatch and briefly outlining its argument and aims before promising a full report to Congress when the awaited reply was received.¹⁰⁵

Salisbury's reply, when it arrived, was delivered in two parts. The first dealt specifically with the Monroe Doctrine as a concept while the second discussed the border dispute. Neither dispatch made good reading for Cleveland and Olney. The first dismissed the Monroe Doctrine as a policy that – despite being tacitly endorsed at one time by Great Britain as sharing the common goal of protecting the fledgling American republics from European domination – had long since ceased to be relevant. Rejecting Olney's argument that American republics needed to be protected from predatory European powers, Salisbury declared “The dangers which were apprehended by President Monroe have no relation to the state of things in which we live at the present day.”¹⁰⁶ The Prime Minister depicted the doctrine as an American curio, understandably treasured, but of little weight in the real world of international politics.¹⁰⁷ Having so summarily dismissed both the validity and the applicability of the Monroe Doctrine, Lord Salisbury's decision to produce a second dispatch dealing with the Venezuelan Border Dispute specifically was a somewhat strange one.¹⁰⁸ The first message had not explicitly denied that the United States

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 562

¹⁰⁴ Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, p. 206

¹⁰⁵ Grover Cleveland, Third Annual Message (second term), December 2, 1895

¹⁰⁶ Lord Salisbury to Sir Julian Pauncefote, November 26, 1895, [No. 189], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part. 1*, p. 564

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

¹⁰⁸ Gerald G. Eggert suggests that Lord Salisbury's original intention was to only reply to the Monroe Doctrine and that he was subsequently persuaded to write the dispatch after consultation with Queen Victoria and his cabinet. This might serve to explain why the second note could be seen as respectful in object, but

might have a legitimate interest in Venezuelan affairs – simply that those interests could not derive purely from geography – but it had made clear that Great Britain considered the matter to be a private one.¹⁰⁹ It is possible that it was intended as a gesture of respect to the United States or, perhaps more likely, an attempt to correct American misapprehensions in the hope that it would induce them to reconsider their position on the subject. The latter explanation would certainly be consistent with the form of the dispatch, which was given over almost entirely to setting out a British version of the history of the dispute with Salisbury acknowledging that Great Britain’s policy of treating the matter as a private dispute between two nations had inevitably led the United States to base its position on information provided by the Venezuelan government.¹¹⁰ However, if the Prime Minister was seeking to convince Cleveland and his advisors to moderate their support for Venezuela, he did so in a remarkably indelicate manner. His tone throughout both messages has been described as “that of the peremptory schoolmaster trying – with fading patience – to correct the ignorance of dullards in Washington” and everything about the messages – from timing to tone and style – suggested that Salisbury had badly misjudged both the importance of the dispute and the level of American interest in it.¹¹¹

While the delay had been frustrating, it seems that Cleveland was not unduly concerned about the matter. Only days before Salisbury’s reply was delivered the President had written to Olney informing him that he was leaving Washington for a weeklong hunting trip and that any message from London could be kept “in [Olney’s] pocket” until he returned since he had no intention of being hurried on the matter.¹¹² From this it would appear that Cleveland, like Salisbury, had misjudged the situation across the Atlantic and was not expecting the blunt rejection not just of American involvement in the dispute but of the Monroe Doctrine itself. That said, the possibility of outright rejection must have been seriously discussed in the months between July 20 and December 7 because Olney was able immediately to set to work preparing a response in the form of a special message to Congress which rebutted Salisbury’s arguments relating to the Monroe Doctrine and, more significantly, proposed a commission of inquiry to be created by the United States in order to ascertain, once and for all, the true facts of the dispute.¹¹³ It has been suggested

disrespectful in tone. Gerald G. Eggert, *Richard Olney: Evolution of a Statesman*, (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1974), p. 216

¹⁰⁹ Salisbury to Pauncefote, November 26, 1895, [No. 189], *FRUS, 1895, Pt. 1*, pp. 566, 563

¹¹⁰ Lord Salisbury to Sir Julian Pauncefote, November 26, 1895, [No. 190], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part. 1*, p. 568

¹¹¹ Welch, *Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, p. 184

¹¹² Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, December 3, 1895, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹¹³ Grover Cleveland, Special Message to Congress, December 17, 1895, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part. 1*, p. 545

that Olney thus swayed Cleveland's judgement in the tone and content of the message, but this is unlikely, firstly, because the President had clearly had some time to consider a variety of possibilities during the autumn of 1895 and then subsequently spent many hours revising Olney's work, and secondly because he was later quoted as saying "I do not think that, in all my experience, I have ever had to deal with any official document, prepared by another, which so entirely satisfied my critical requirements."¹¹⁴ The special message concluded with a declaration that it would be the duty of the United States to "resist by every means in its power as a wilful aggression upon its rights and interests the appropriation by Great Britain of any lands or the exercise of governmental jurisdiction over any territory which after investigation we have determined of right belongs to Venezuela."¹¹⁵ The potential significance of this was underlined by the statement: "In making these recommendations I am fully alive to the responsibility incurred, and keenly realize all the consequences that may follow."¹¹⁶

The December 17 special message brought the Venezuelan Border Dispute to a head and raised the spectre of war between the United States and Great Britain, but it also marked the first step in a movement towards a settlement. While the solemn references to the potential consequences of the commission of inquiry caused a stir in the media on both sides of the Atlantic and led to a brief dip in the New York stock market, undoubtedly Cleveland, Salisbury and others most closely involved in the matter recognised that war was neither likely nor desirable for either nation. In *Presidential Problems* Cleveland makes no mention one way or the other as to whether he considered war to be a serious possibility, but two works published shortly after his death gave the recollection of those around him at the time. George F. Parker quoted a letter sent to him in 1909 by Cleveland's Secretary of the Interior, Hoke Smith, who declared:

I heard him refer to this message, shortly after he sent it to Congress, as his "peace message," and as "the only way, in his judgment, to prevent a probable collision between the two nations." I have no doubt that he sent the message to Congress believing that with it the risk of trouble was far less than if diplomatic negotiations continued in the ordinary way.¹¹⁷

A work of 1910 included a brief report of a meeting between the author and Cleveland's former private secretary, Henry Thurber, who told him that the President responded to the

¹¹⁴ Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, pp. 640-641; Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, p. 208; George F. Parker, *Recollections of Grover Cleveland*, (New York: The Century Co., 1909), p. 197

¹¹⁵ Grover Cleveland, Special Message to Congress, December 17, 1895, *FRUS, 1895, Pt. 1*, p. 545

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹¹⁷ Parker, *Recollections*, pp. 200-201

suggestion that the message was too strong with the words “Thurber, this does not mean war; *it means arbitration.*”¹¹⁸

While such recollections – revisited more than a decade after the event – may have benefited somewhat from hindsight, it seems clear that Cleveland did not consider war to be a likely consequence of his special message. At the time he made no attempt to prepare the nation or its military for war and neither he nor Salisbury rushed to reopen diplomatic correspondence. War became even less likely a little over two weeks after the special message when it was revealed that the German Kaiser had responded to a failed raid by British colonial police into the Transvaal by sending a congratulatory telegram to Paul Kruger, the Boer President, that was widely regarded as meddling in a British sphere of influence and perhaps hinting that Germany would offer material support if asked. This provoked a far greater indignation in the British public than had Cleveland’s special message and, while not completely soothing ruffled feathers, placed the Venezuelan Border Dispute in perspective. At a cabinet meeting on January 11, 1896, it was agreed that an amicable settlement of the dispute was desirable and that the first step in bringing this about would be to informally approach Ambassador Bayard through an unofficial third party.¹¹⁹ This contact went ahead on January 12 through the medium of Lord Playfair, a British chemist who had married an American. Playfair would prove to be the most important of several unofficial intermediaries who, while ultimately achieving little of substance themselves, did help to establish the form and structure of the deal that was eventually reached between Great Britain and the United States later that year. Official negotiations reopened in early March when Lord Salisbury, encouraged by signs of American flexibility in the unofficial discussions, agreed to Olney’s suggestion that direct negotiations take place between himself and Sir Julian Pauncefote in Washington.¹²⁰ Progress was slow, but with the brief wave of jingoist sentiment in the United States long subsided by the summer of 1896 there was little need for urgency.¹²¹ This is not to say that Cleveland and Olney were willing to allow matters to drag on indefinitely; with Salisbury finally showing a willingness to negotiate and with the British government distracted by its problems in Turkey and South Africa there was an incentive to press the matter in order to

¹¹⁸ Richard Watson Gilder, *Grover Cleveland: A Record of Friendship*, (New York: The Century Co., 1910), pp. 201-202

¹¹⁹ Joseph J. Mathews, ‘Informal Diplomacy in the Venezuelan Crisis of 1896’, *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 52, No. 2, (1963), p. 197

¹²⁰ Mr. Bayard to the Marquis of Salisbury, February 27, 1896, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1896*, pp. 240-241; Lord Salisbury to Mr. Bayard, March 3, 1896, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1896*, pp. 241-242; Mathews, ‘Informal Diplomacy in the Venezuelan Crisis of 1896’, p. 207

¹²¹ Mathews, ‘Informal Diplomacy in the Venezuelan Crisis of 1896’, p. 202; Olney did make several attempts – both official and unofficial – to keep negotiations moving through the spring and summer of 1896, including a month-long visit to Britain in July by his friend Henry White who worked to raise the public profile of the dispute – see Mathews, ‘Informal Diplomacy in the Venezuelan Crisis of 1896’, pp. 209-210

achieve a favourable settlement. Olney's primary tool for maintaining this pressure was the commission of enquiry announced by Cleveland in his message of December 17. Despite British requests to withdraw or suspend the commission Olney insisted that it continued its work unless an agreement was signed.¹²² Desiring to placate the United States as a kindred people who could ensure the neutrality of the Americas on their behalf, the British government showed a new willingness to retreat from its declared position. The negotiations swiftly developed into a discussion of the length of time for which any site had to have been occupied by either side before it could become ineligible for arbitration. With opening positions of 10 years and 60 years for Great Britain and the United States respectively, the final agreement of 50 years' occupation was an undoubted victory for American diplomacy. The result was an Anglo-American agreement concluded on November 12, 1896, which would form the basis of a treaty between Great Britain and Venezuela. The agreement provided for an arbitral tribunal which would investigate and define the new border. Areas that had been settled for over 50 years were to be exempt from arbitration with other settled regions given special consideration.¹²³ Venezuela, which had been utterly excluded from the negotiations, was presented with the *fait accompli* to sign. The news that British settlements of 50 years were to be excluded from arbitration – a proposal which had been rejected many times by the Venezuelan government in its own negotiations with Britain in previous decades – sparked riots in Caracas, but the agreement was eventually signed, reluctantly, on February 2, 1897.¹²⁴ Bruised Venezuelan feelings were not assuaged by the eventual arbitration ruling in October, 1899, which granted most of the disputed territory to British Guyana, with the exception of the mouth of the Orinoco and 5,000 square miles in the interior.¹²⁵ Looking back on the incident in 1901, Cleveland expressed himself satisfied with the decision.¹²⁶

During this process there were three moments of decision for the Cleveland administration which require further investigation in order to better understand their actions. One came in 1893 or 1894 when the administration first chose to put pressure on the British government to bring the dispute to a conclusion. The second occurred in April,

¹²² Richard Olney to Sir Julian Pauncefote, April 10, 1896, Reel 51, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹²³ 'Heads of proposed treaty between Venezuela and Great Britain for settlement of Venezuelan boundary question as agreed upon between Great Britain and the United States', November 12, 1896, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1896*, pp. 254-255

¹²⁴ Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), pp. 208-209

¹²⁵ Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, p. 219

¹²⁶ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, March 3, 1901, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

1895, when it was decided that the United States would have to force the issue, ultimately resulting in the July 20 dispatch. Finally, the period between sending the July 20 dispatch and the delivery of Cleveland's special message of December 17 – and especially the ten days following the receipt of Lord Salisbury's reply on December 7 – also requires examination.

It is impossible to say exactly how much Venezuelan agitation served to provoke Cleveland's interest in the border dispute and to what extent his interest was a result of his previous work on the matter during his first presidency. Likewise it is hard to judge whether the reference to the dispute in his annual message of 1893 was the result of the first applications of Venezuelan pressure in October of that year or a decision taken by Cleveland himself. Since the reference showed no signs of presaging any greater action than that undertaken during his previous term – or by Benjamin Harrison's administration – it would seem that this pressure served as a reminder at most. Indeed, it is perhaps more likely that the annual message of 1893 was more significant in that it demonstrated to the Venezuelan government that they might have an audience in Washington that would be receptive to further pressure. Certainly the first months of 1894 showed a rise in American interest in the dispute, beginning with the meeting between Gresham and Minister Andrade on January 8 that resulted in the Venezuelan minister supplying the State Department with a lengthy history of the dispute on March 31. It was this document which Cleveland himself took to be the starting point of his second administration's involvement in the dispute when he wrote *Presidential Problems*.¹²⁷ This version of events explains the renewed attempts to convince the British government to reach a settlement with Venezuela, but the slow pace of progress in 1894 – with dispatches sent to Ambassador Bayard in July and December – does little to explain the dramatic increase in American urgency in 1895.

One potential reason for the change that took place in 1895 is the work of William Scruggs. Exactly how much influence Venezuela's propagandist had on the growing determination of the Cleveland administration to act is difficult to ascertain and has been the subject of some debate. Scruggs has been credited by some historians with raising the profile of the dispute in the United States and, directly or indirectly, altering the administration's stance as a result.¹²⁸ Others, however, have played down Scruggs' importance and even suggested that his efforts may have been counter-productive as far as

¹²⁷ Cleveland, *Presidential Problems*, pp. 247-248

¹²⁸ Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, p. 197; Welch, *Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, p. 181

the administration was concerned.¹²⁹ Correspondence between Cleveland and Olney shortly after the pair left office starkly illustrates the low opinion both men held of Scruggs with Olney expressing concern over Scruggs' "lack of character" and Cleveland calling him "a high grade liar."¹³⁰ Gresham too disliked Scruggs and his efforts to manipulate public opinion in order to bring pressure to bear on the administration.¹³¹ Such dislike does not necessarily rule out the possibility of Scruggs successfully influencing policymakers in the administration, but it would seem strange that Cleveland and his Secretaries of State so wholeheartedly accepted the Venezuelan version of history if they had such a low opinion of the man who was doing most to promote it. Perhaps more likely is the possibility that Scruggs' notable success in drafting the resolution passed by Congress on February 20, 1895, calling on Cleveland to recommend arbitration of the dispute to both Britain and Venezuela – something he had already been attempting for some time – was indicative of a more effective influence on the White House. In his letter to Olney of December 3, 1895, Cleveland informed the Secretary of State that he would not be hurried on the issue "even if the Congress should begin grinding again the resolution-of-inquiry mill."¹³² While this letter related to a later moment of decision it shows that Cleveland was not oblivious to the wishes of Congress, even if he did not always bow to them. Much of Cleveland's second term was spent battling with Congress – and the Senate in particular – over a variety of issues, both foreign and domestic and, while Cleveland may not have been overly troubled by the prospect of battling with Congress over another issue, it is possible that he was more willing to take the lead on the issue if it meant pre-empting yet another disagreement. The fact that Henry Cabot Lodge had published a profoundly anti-British article in the *North American Review* in June, 1895, stating that Congress would act to defend the Monroe Doctrine in Venezuela during its next session may also have weighed on the President's mind.¹³³ That said, the 53rd Congress was a lame duck by the start of 1895 and went into recess in early March granting Cleveland a full nine months before the opening of the 54th Congress on December 2. Under these circumstances there was no reason for Cleveland to fear Congressional interference at any point in the most critical period of escalation in the Venezuelan Border Dispute.

¹²⁹ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, pp. 217-218

¹³⁰ Richard Olney to Grover Cleveland, May 19, 1897, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, May 20, 1897, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹³¹ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 218

¹³² Cleveland to Olney, December 3, 1895, Reel 59, Olney Papers, MD, LC

¹³³ Henry Cabot Lodge, 'England, Venezuela, and the Monroe Doctrine', *The North American Review*, Vol. 160, Issue 463, (June, 1895), pp. 651-658

At best it is possible to say that the influence of Scruggs and pressure from Congress may have played a part in prompting action from the Cleveland administration, but questions over Scruggs' character and Congress' power to influence the President's actions would suggest that this influence can only have been contributory. Clearly the escalation of the dispute resulted from at least one other influence. The timing of this escalation is particularly telling. Cleveland called his cabinet meeting to discuss the issue in March, 1895, and this – and the resulting decision to have Gresham compile a report on the dispute – can be seen as the beginning of serious American interest in forcing a settlement. The date of the meeting would suggest that the Congressional resolution played at least some part in prompting Cleveland to devote attention to the dispute. Further to this it is clear that he was starting to become frustrated by the British government's cool responses to the offers of American good offices the year before. In *Presidential Problems* Cleveland specifically refers to a dispatch from the British Foreign Office to Ambassador Pauncefote dated February 23, 1895, which described recent meetings with Ambassador Bayard in London and reiterated Great Britain's insistence that any arbitration of the dispute should exclude the Schomburgk line as well as complaining of Venezuelan violations in January, 1895, of British territory.¹³⁴ Cleveland himself states that this dispatch was a turning point, declaring that "It now became plainly apparent that a new stage had been reached in the progress of our intervention," and that national honour and duty now necessitated that the administration define its stance.¹³⁵ Finally, an incident which took place in the disputed territory on January 2, 1895, in which Venezuelan soldiers arrested two British policemen on the upper Cuyuni River may also have played a part in changing American attitudes. The Venezuelan government swiftly sought to disavow the arrests in the hopes of preventing a diplomatic incident, but Cleveland states in *Presidential Problems* that it was not the incident that concerned him so much as the fact that the British government was treating the Schomburgk line as a de facto border.¹³⁶

The decision to have Gresham compile a report on the dispute can be seen as a turning point in American involvement, but one other factor played a major role in the evolution of the administration's policy. Gresham's death on May 28, 1895, prompted a reshuffle of Cleveland's cabinet and saw Richard Olney, the former Attorney General, promoted to Secretary of State. This change was significant for several reasons involving both the dispute itself and the Cleveland administration's approach to foreign policy more broadly. In many ways Olney was the logical choice to succeed Gresham at the State

¹³⁴ Cleveland, *Presidential Problems*, pp. 251-252

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 252-253

¹³⁶ Mr. Pulido to Mr. Andrade, April 18, 1895, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part. 2*, pp. 1483-1484; Cleveland, *Presidential Problems*, p. 252

Department. Given the difficulties Cleveland had experienced in filling the post in 1893 and the extent to which domestic and foreign events had seen the administration subjected to criticism from Congress and the press in the intervening years it made sense to promote a trusted member of the cabinet rather than appoint an outsider to such a senior position. Similarly, the growing interest in the Venezuelan Border Dispute and the outbreak of revolution in Cuba in the spring of 1895 meant that having a Secretary of State who was already well acquainted with the administration's position on foreign affairs was desirable. Cleveland and Gresham's preference for a foreign policy based on the rule of law meant that the Attorney General was likely to be well acquainted with their actions and also the man best positioned to replace Gresham. Olney had already shown interest in foreign policy questions - most notably demonstrated by his October 9, 1893, letter to Gresham on the subject of the Hawaiian revolution - and was trusted and liked by Cleveland.

Despite this continuity the appointment of Olney to replace Gresham heralded a change in approach to foreign policy. The two men approached legal practice in differing ways and this difference in style would be replicated in their diplomacy. Gresham had spent most of the previous 25 years as a federal judge, arbitrating in the disputes of others. Olney, by contrast, had spent the majority of his career as a corporate lawyer – mostly for railroads – where he had shown a particular skill for finding and exploiting legal loopholes.¹³⁷ He was, however, a conservative intellectually, even if his methods might be more inventive than Gresham's. Under Cleveland's leadership – and with another legal mind running the State Department – the administration's foreign policy was to retain the foundation of legality and conservatism that it had developed under Gresham, but Olney's personal influence opened the possibility of a more expansive interpretation of legal precedent if it was believed necessary to achieve that policy's objectives.

In terms of personality, too, Olney may not have been the ideal choice to manage the nation's foreign relations. Described by one historian as “a man who raised truculence to an art form,” he was not suited to the delicate diplomacy of which Lord Salisbury was a master and his frustration with European diplomacy was demonstrated in a letter to Cleveland in the summer of 1896 - when progress on a treaty to settle the dispute seemed slow - in which he declared:

Undoubtedly all this backing and filling is true diplomacy. There may be something very profound in it. But my impression is that it is a sort of pettifogging which accomplishes nothing and which is in truth not in keeping with the serious character of the grave issues involved.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Eggert, *Richard Olney*, p. 25

¹³⁸ Welch, *Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, p. 143; Richard Olney to Grover Cleveland, July 16, 1896, Reel 51, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Under such circumstances it was to be expected that the conduct of American foreign policy would take on a new directness and urgency and this can certainly be seen to be the case with the July 20 dispatch. While no copy of Gresham's first drafts of his report on the dispute are known to still exist, historians and biographers are agreed that his version would not have been anything like as aggressive or assertive as Olney's dispatch.¹³⁹ That said, it has also been argued that Gresham was equally as determined as Cleveland to have the dispute settled, but would simply have taken a more reserved approach which might still have yielded the desired results without insulting Great Britain.¹⁴⁰ Certainly his growing distrust of the Venezuelan position meant that he suggested an independent investigation shortly before his death, although whether Cleveland was made aware of the idea is unclear.¹⁴¹

It would be an overstatement to suggest that Olney's appointment as Secretary of State fundamentally altered the United States approach to the Venezuelan Border Dispute. Undoubtedly Olney brought a different – and unorthodox – style of diplomacy to the State Department, but the aims of the Cleveland administration remained largely unchanged. Most importantly, Cleveland himself was heavily involved in both formulating the objectives of the administration and supervising and approving the work of his subordinates. In particular, he gave his wholehearted endorsement to Olney's draft of the July 20 dispatch describing it as “the best thing of the kind I have ever read” and praising Olney for placing the Monroe Doctrine “on better and more defensible ground than any of your predecessors – or *mine*.”¹⁴² The President may have suggested “a little more softened verbiage here and there”, but such strong praise can leave little doubt that he was an enthusiastic supporter of taking a strong stand on the matter. The question remains of why the normally conservative Cleveland would endorse such a dramatic statement of American authority. Charles S. Campbell has suggested that Cleveland was more willing to approve Olney's work because “presumably he did not want to offend his new Secretary of State at the very beginning of the latter's duties.”¹⁴³ Such an argument would seem unlikely for a man of Cleveland's character even if his new Secretary of State was a complete stranger, but by the summer of 1895 the correspondence between the two men reveals a very convivial relationship between the two founded upon a mutual love of hunting and

¹³⁹ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, pp. 219-220; Callcott, *Caribbean Policy of the United States*, p. 89

¹⁴⁰ LaFeber, *New Empire*, p. 255

¹⁴¹ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 219

¹⁴² Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, July 7, 1895, Reel 62, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁴³ Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, p. 201

fishing as well as a similarity of views that would see the men discussing political issues together for years after they left government. In the summer of 1895 Olney used his connections with New England railroads to arrange for a private carriage to take the families of both himself and the President to their summer residences on Cape Cod and a month later used those same contacts to arrange to have a private physician brought in from Boston without the Clevelands' knowledge in case of an emergency when Frances Cleveland gave birth to their third child.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, it can be further argued that, far from being surprised by Olney's aggressive tone in writing the July 20 dispatch, Cleveland was well aware of his new Secretary of State's style and methods before appointing him. The Pullman Strike of 1894 had seen Cleveland and Olney adopt a similar working relationship to that seen in the Venezuelan Border Dispute with the President supervising and approving the policy devised by his subordinate. In the case of the Pullman Strike, Olney had shown the same aggressive approach to a problem and innovative interpretation of legal statutes – the Sherman Anti-trust Act of 1890 – that he would demonstrate in the July 20 dispatch. Cleveland knew how Olney worked; he may even have considered this approach to have been exactly what was needed to induce movement in the dispute.

If the July 20 dispatch was a result of Olney's aggressive style and a growing frustration with British intransigence then the December 17 special message can be seen as an extension of these same causes since nothing occurred between July and December, 1895, to reduce the effect of either. Indeed, the result of the July 20 dispatch was an exacerbation of the original causes. The frustration Cleveland had experienced in the spring of 1895 was vastly increased both by Lord Salisbury's categorical rejection of the dispatch's argument and the slightly patronising tone in which it was delivered. In particular, Salisbury's careful noting of the inherent problems with arbitrating a dispute – the problem of finding a qualified and unbiased arbitrator, the difficulty in insuring compliance with any verdict – and outright refusal to consent to the transferring of British citizens to Venezuelan rule were a direct snub to the President's many requests that the dispute be submitted to arbitration.¹⁴⁵ Some evidence of this irritation can be seen to still be persisting many years after the event in his likening in *Presidential Problems* of Lord Salisbury to “the shrewd, sharp trader who demands exorbitant terms, and at the same time

¹⁴⁴ Richard Olney to J. R. Kendrick, May 20, 1895, Reel 50, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Richard Olney to J. R. Kendrick, June 17, 1895, Reel 50, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁴⁵ Salisbury to Pauncefote, November 26, 1895, [No. 189], *FRUS, 1895, Pt. 1*, p. 565; Salisbury to Pauncefote, November 26, 1895, [No. 190], *FRUS, 1895, Pt. 1*, p. 575; Cleveland's personal adherence to the principle of arbitration is repeatedly demonstrated in *Presidential Problems* where he is often scathing of British refusal to arbitrate within the Schomburgk line. (See Cleveland, *Presidential Problem*, pp. 205, 208, 210, 221-222).

invites negotiation, looking for a result abundantly profitable in the large range for dicker which he has created.”¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, having set out such an aggressive stance in the dispatch, Cleveland and Olney found themselves in a position from which retreat was difficult. In the closing words of his special message Cleveland declared that “national self-respect and honor” were now at stake beyond the issues of the dispute itself.¹⁴⁷ There is little to suggest, however, that Cleveland and Olney desired to back down. While the special message did not repeat the more outlandish claims of the July message – in particular the points relating to the United States’ practical sovereignty in South America or the unnatural relationships between European powers and their American colonies – it was still largely devoted to a defence of the Monroe Doctrine rather than a rationalisation for American involvement in the border dispute. By December 17 the dispute itself had ceased to be the sole issue and the Monroe Doctrine and the broader question of American authority within the Western hemisphere had also become key points of debate. To some extent this was also true of the concept of arbitration which Cleveland had so repeatedly suggested to be the best means of settling the dispute and which Lord Salisbury had called into question in his reply to the July 20 dispatch. Both the Monroe Doctrine and arbitration would be dealt with before the Venezuelan Border Dispute was finally settled by the treaty signed on February 2, 1897: the doctrine by the proposition of an international conference on the subject which Olney rejected on the grounds that the United States, having made its point, only stood to lose by opening the subject to general debate when a successfully negotiated settlement of the dispute would vindicate the July 20 dispatch, and arbitration both in the final settlement of the dispute itself and by a separate General Arbitration Treaty with Great Britain.

This treaty had its origin in a Congressional resolution passed in 1890 asking the President, when he saw fit, to attempt negotiations for an agreement whereby disagreements which could not be solved through diplomacy would be submitted to arbitration. When the British Parliament passed its own resolution acknowledging their American counterparts and expressing hope that the British Government would act toward such an agreement Cleveland raised the subject in his annual message of 1893.¹⁴⁸ The subject of international arbitration appealed to Cleveland and Gresham as a means of promoting international peace through application of the law, but subsequent discussions produced little of substance. The subject of a general arbitration agreement was reignited by the Venezuelan negotiations. An initial proposal by Lord Salisbury that the Venezuela

¹⁴⁶ Cleveland, *Presidential Problem*, p. 200 – the comparison is later repeated p. 222

¹⁴⁷ Grover Cleveland, Special Message to Congress, December 17, 1895, *FRUS, 1895, Pt. 1*, p. 545

¹⁴⁸ Grover Cleveland, First Annual Message (second term), December 4, 1893

dispute be included in the negotiations for a broader arbitration treaty was swiftly rejected so as not to delay the Venezuela agreement and the two negotiations proceeded in parallel.¹⁴⁹ In the event the negotiations for the arbitration agreement were concluded shortly before those for the Venezuelan treaty – perhaps due to the less emotive subject matter as well as to the good will felt toward the project by both sides. Unlike the Venezuelan treaty, however, the Olney-Pauncefote Treaty – as the General Arbitration Treaty was officially titled – found itself at the mercy of Senate ratification. A *Baltimore Sun* editorial of February 26, 1897, suggested that posterity would view the arbitration agreement as the Cleveland administrations “greatest and most beneficent accomplishment” in the field of foreign relations, but by this point the treaty was already in trouble.¹⁵⁰ Almost immediately Olney found himself defending the treaty against charges that it would see the arbitration of the Monroe Doctrine – a particularly galling accusation since the defence and vindication of the doctrine had been one of the administration’s great successes in relation to the Venezuelan Border Dispute.¹⁵¹ Worse was to follow as the administration’s opponents in the Senate continued to question every aspect of the treaty to the point that Olney wrote to a friend in New York suggesting that he organise public meetings in support of the treaty to ensure that it was not simply killed by Senate indifference.¹⁵² While the treaty was not ultimately the victim of indifference, Olney’s fears would be confirmed shortly after the Cleveland administration left office when the severely amended treaty failed to be ratified by the Senate.¹⁵³ An article in the *New York Herald* the next day noted that “25 out of the 31 who voted or who were paired against the treaty were advocates of the free coinage of silver” and placed the blame for the treaty’s rejection on “the jingo spirit which characterizes the doings of the Senate, combined with fanatical opposition of silver men of all parties to anything emanating from Cleveland’s administration.”¹⁵⁴ For his part, Olney spread the blame a little wider, naming jingoism, “dislike of anything emanating from the Cleveland administration” and pressure from ship-building interests who feared the treaty would put an end to naval expansion. His chief target, however, was the Senate itself which he accused of making a bid for control of foreign policy. Noting that the treaty had the support of the McKinley administration and of the public, Olney told a friend:

¹⁴⁹ Richard Olney to Sir Julian Pauncefote, March, 1897, Reel 93, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁵⁰ *Baltimore Sun*, February 26, 1897

¹⁵¹ Richard Olney to George F. Edmunds, January 18, 1897, Reel 50, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁵² Richard Olney to H.L. Nelson, February 11, 1897, Reel 50, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁵³ Campbell, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy*, p. 219

¹⁵⁴ *New York Herald*, May 6, 1897

The Senate immediately assumed an hostile attitude. The Treaty, in getting itself made by the sole act of the executive, without leave of the Senate first had and obtained, had committed the unpardonable sin. It must be either altogether defeated or so altered as to bear an unmistakable Senate stamp -- and thus be the means of both humiliating the executive and of showing to the world the greatness of the Senate.

Whether this bid for power was real – and a clash between the President and the Senate had played a major role in the evolution of American policy toward Cuba in the last years of the Cleveland administration – it seems clear that Cleveland’s inability to maintain the support of his own party in Congress had helped to produce the failure of the treaty. Ultimately, the Olney-Pauncefote Treaty was a failure, but it was still an important indicator of Cleveland and Olney’s approach to foreign policy. A General Arbitration Treaty had not been a priority of the administration when they came to power, but when the opportunity to create such an agreement had arisen they pursued it seriously. In negotiations lasting nearly a year and Senate debates lasting several months Olney showed his commitment to the treaty as a practical instrument designed to change the face of international relations. It was particularly significant as an attempt to create a lasting foreign policy legacy for the Cleveland administration beyond the examples set in the handling of foreign incidents and to actively promote a legalist approach to foreign affairs. Most notably, both the British and American governments expressed their hopes that the treaty would not simply be an agreement curious to their relationship with one another, but would serve as a model for the handling of disputes with other nations as well.¹⁵⁵ This was not to be, but the Olney-Pauncefote Treaty did at least stand as further proof of the growing accord between Great Britain and the United States which was also demonstrated in Nicaragua and the Venezuela agreement itself.

All this explains how the Cleveland administration found itself becoming increasingly caught up in the Venezuelan Border Dispute, but it does not fully explain why Cleveland was convinced that it was necessary to act in the first place. In *Presidential Problems* Cleveland was unequivocal in his declaration that the decision to intervene had come because the Monroe Doctrine was at stake. Writing specifically about his special message of December 17, 1895, he declared:

... it was necessary in order to assert and vindicate a principle distinctively American, and in the maintenance of which the American people and Government of the United States were profoundly concerned. It was because this principle was

¹⁵⁵ Lord Salisbury to Sir Julian Pauncefote, May 18, 1896, Reel 94, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Grover Cleveland, Special Message to Congress, January 11, 1897

endangered, and because those charged with administrative responsibility would not abandon or neglect it, that our Government interposed to prevent any further colonization of American soil by a European nation.¹⁵⁶

This explanation, however, only suffices for the special message. Cleveland had not invoked the Monroe Doctrine during his first term in office and, indeed, admitted to Bayard in a letter written shortly after his special message that he was largely ignorant of the differing opinions over the applicability of the Monroe Doctrine to the dispute.¹⁵⁷ The Monroe Doctrine was invoked in the July 20 dispatch, but if Cleveland was freely admitting some 5 months later that he was not an expert on the subject then it is likely that the doctrine itself was not always the primary issue. A more convincing explanation is that the President and his Secretaries of State became alarmed at the expansion of British claims in the late 1880s and early 1890s and subsequently employed the Monroe Doctrine as the best justification for American intervention. In a dispatch sent to Bayard on July 13, 1894, Gresham noted that between 1885 and 1886 the British claim had “silently increased by some 33,000 square miles” and had then expanded again in 1887 “to embrace the rich mining district of Yuruani”.¹⁵⁸ Such suspicions were encouraged by the Venezuelan government who made a point of informing the State Department of any British proposals to develop the infrastructure within the disputed territory and thus, in Venezuela’s opinion, further their claims.¹⁵⁹ Tellingly, this theme was picked up again in the July 20 dispatch with the crucial addition of two further British claims. In the dispatch Olney highlighted the line put forward by Lord Salisbury in 1890 which “fixed the starting point of the line in the mouth of the Amacuro west of the Punta Barima on the Orinoco,” as well as the most recent claim, made in 1893, which “carried the boundary from a point to the west of the Amacuro as far as the source of the Cumano River and the Sierra of Usupamo.”¹⁶⁰ It is clear from this that the administration was concerned not simply by the gradual expansion of the British claims, but by the significance of the territory those claims were beginning to encompass. In the July 20 dispatch Olney made no reference to the mineral-rich area around the Yuruan River, but he twice specifically noted that the last two British claims had expanded past the mouth of the Orinoco River, the tributary system of which dominated communications – and therefore commerce – in the Northern section of South

¹⁵⁶ Cleveland, *Presidential Problems*, p. 279

¹⁵⁷ Grover Cleveland to Thomas F. Bayard, December 29, 1895, *Letters of Grover Cleveland, 1850-1908*, Allan Nevins Ed., (Cambridge, Ma.: The Riverside Press, 1933), p. 417

¹⁵⁸ Gresham to Bayard, July 13, 1894, [No. 442], *FRUS, 1894*, p. 250

¹⁵⁹ Mr. Andrade to Mr. Gresham, December 19, 1894, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1894*, pp. 841-843

¹⁶⁰ Olney to Bayard, July 20, 1895, [No. 804], *FRUS, 1895, Pt. 1*, p. 547

America.¹⁶¹ This may provide the key to understanding why President Cleveland chose to intervene in the Venezuelan Border Dispute in 1895. The expansion of British claims to the Orinoco – as well, perhaps, as the Venezuelan reports that the colonial authorities in Guyana were seeking to build a communications infrastructure in that territory – raised a genuine fear that a major change might come about in the strategic and commercial balance of South America. This change did not have to threaten existing American interests in order to justify action – there was, after all, nothing in the United States’ existing or even potential trade with Venezuela and the surrounding region to justify risking good relations with Great Britain, the nation’s biggest trading partner. The European powers had recently portioned out amongst themselves the vast majority of the continent of Africa. To a man of Cleveland’s conservative temperament in foreign affairs this was outside the purview of the United States as defined by the Monroe Doctrine and Washington’s Farewell Address. The transferral of control over the Orinoco, however, risked sparking a similar ‘Scramble’ for Latin America in which the European powers reacted to Britain’s coup by seizing any other territory of potential significance. This was the scenario set out by Olney in the July 20 dispatch, and while Salisbury may have been correct to scoff at such a theory, the potential severity of such a course of events justified forcing a conclusion to the dispute. Cleveland might have resisted the temptation to act if he had believed that Great Britain had a genuine case to support its claims, but his conviction that the European power was bullying a weaker opponent without justification provided a moral imperative to act beyond the broader power politics.

Thus we see that the concerns over the potential consequences of Great Britain’s expanding claims compelled Cleveland to act. This being so, he and his Secretaries of State sought out a legal precedent that would allow them to intervene and so invoked the Monroe Doctrine. They did so in such a way as to necessitate an elastic and expanded interpretation of the doctrine. LaFeber has gone so far as to suggest that if the Monroe Doctrine had not existed the July 20 dispatch would have been written anyway, with the term “American Self-Interest” taking its place.¹⁶² This is an over-simplification since the history of Cleveland’s diplomacy during his second term is one of following legal precedent in order to justify foreign policy decisions, but it is true that Olney brought a more flexible and aggressive approach to legal interpretation than his predecessor had done. Once the Monroe Doctrine had been invoked it had to be defended against Lord Salisbury’s attack. Eggert states that Olney wanted to drop all reference to the doctrine once it became apparent that Salisbury was willing to acknowledge the United States’ right

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 559

¹⁶² LaFeber, *New Empire*, p. 260

to intervene to bring the dispute to a conclusion.¹⁶³ According to Eggert it was Cleveland who recognised that Salisbury's challenge to the Monroe Doctrine could not go unanswered and so devoted much of his special message on December 17 to defending it.¹⁶⁴ This is consistent with Cleveland's history of seeking to achieve his desired result through a dogged pursuit of his chosen method rather than simply accept a swift victory in the matter at hand. Such tactics had failed in Hawaii where it proved impossible to arrive at a negotiated settlement to restore the Hawaiian monarchy, but in the case of the Monroe Doctrine he was in a position to stand his ground. The result was, in some respects, an implicit victory for the Monroe Doctrine since the Venezuelan Border Dispute was brought to a conclusion despite Salisbury's denouncement of the doctrine and with Cleveland's defence of it left unanswered. All of this demonstrates, once again, the growing might of the United States in world affairs. If Grover Cleveland was willing to flex the nation's muscles – even if only very slightly – in defence of his conservative principles and was able to uphold those principles against the opposition of an experienced statesman of the calibre of Lord Salisbury then the United States was clearly a powerful force, particularly within its own hemisphere.

The specific legacies of the Cleveland administration's actions in Nicaragua and Venezuela were fleeting at best. Olney's expanded interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine – what became known as the Olney Corollary to the doctrine – that declared the right of the United States to intervene in disputes anywhere in the Americas was a radical change, but it was not intended to set the tone for the future development of either the doctrine or American relations with Latin America. The Olney Corollary was superseded by the Roosevelt Corollary – which declared an American right to directly interfere in the internal affairs of American nations in order to stabilise their currencies – in 1904 and thus formed the foundation for a more assertive interpretation of the Doctrine. As such the Olney Corollary can be seen as a trailblazer for the more radical interpretation of its successor, but it is clear that this was not intended by either Olney or Cleveland in 1895. Indeed, as one historian has recently noted, Olney was very careful to qualify his interpretation of the Doctrine – denying that it served as a protectorate, insisting that American states still had to observe their obligations to other nations, and rejecting interference with American states – in an attempt to ensure that men such as Lodge and Roosevelt would not be able to use the Doctrine to propose a more aggressive approach to foreign policy.¹⁶⁵ However

¹⁶³ Eggert, *Richard Olney*, p. 220

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 221

¹⁶⁵ Sexton, *Monroe Doctrine*, p. 206

radical its approach to the Monroe Doctrine may have been, the Olney Corollary only sought to protect American nations from European interference and it certainly did not countenance the direct interference in the internal affairs of those nations. This being so, it can be seen as another stage in the debate between Cleveland and the young Republicans such as Roosevelt and Lodge over how to exercise the nation's newfound might.

Neither the events in Nicaragua nor the Venezuelan Border Dispute led to a greatly improved profile for the United States in Latin America, or an identifiable increase in trade with the region. The Venezuelan incident in particular seems better designed to alienate South American nations than ingratiate the United States to them. Dexter Perkins notes the mixed reaction in Central and South America to Cleveland's special message with appreciation of the United States' stand against the European power tempered by concern at Olney's claims of American sovereignty.¹⁶⁶ For Venezuela in particular the positive reaction to the special message was quickly destroyed by the exclusion of the Venezuelan government from the treaty negotiations in London resulting in a settlement that was far removed from that government's original demands. All things considered, if Cleveland had hoped to use the dispute to raise the United States' profile in Central and South America he went about it in a remarkably ham-fisted way.

Ultimately, the most lasting legacy of the two Latin American incidents was the growth of American authority over the Western hemisphere in European eyes and, in particular, the improvement of Anglo-British relations. While it still may be saying too much to suggest that the Special Relationship began in Nicaragua or the Venezuelan Border Dispute, the two incidents are indicative of a new understanding between the two governments as both tried to comprehend the implications of the growth of American power. The former indicated a willingness on the part of Lord Rosebery's Liberal government to work with the United States in Central America and a commensurate willingness of the Cleveland administration to acknowledge the right of Great Britain to insist upon payment of debts by American nations; the latter achieved the more difficult task of gaining the recognition of Lord Salisbury's Conservatives that the United States could interfere in the affairs of the British Empire even if it could not dictate terms. The result, despite some occasional turbulence both domestically and internationally, was a better understanding between the two nations at a time of international change.

¹⁶⁶ Perkins, *Monroe Doctrine*, pp. 209-216

Chapter 4 – Cuba

Of the three central foreign policy incidents of Grover Cleveland's second term – the Hawaiian revolution, the Venezuelan Border Dispute, and the Cuban revolution – it was the latter that would have the most tangible impact on the evolution of U.S. foreign policy and the creation of an American empire. If the Venezuelan Border Dispute had demonstrated a new American assertiveness in foreign policy rhetoric and ideology, the Cuban revolution which began in 1895 would prove to be the trigger for actions that would fundamentally change the position of the United States in global affairs. As the central cause of the War of 1898 the Cuban revolution can safely be called a turning point in U.S. history.

This being the case, it is easy to overlook the fact that the Cuban revolution endured for more than three years before the United States finally intervened – a fact that has led one biographer to suggest that Cleveland's role has been “treated as an unimportant prologue to the Cuban policy of the McKinley administration.”¹ In fact two of those three years came under the leadership of Cleveland and Olney for whom Cuba formed the culmination of their foreign policy. Between the outbreak of revolution in February, 1895, and the inauguration of President McKinley on March 4, 1897, the administration's response to the situation in Cuba saw them face a variety of challenges overseas. Clear parallels can be drawn between the answers to many of these challenges and the administration's actions in previous incidents as Cleveland and Olney employed the template for action they – and Gresham – had established elsewhere. Beyond this, however, the administration faced further challenges from Congress that required new and radical responses and which ultimately saw the propagation of a new interpretation of executive power, paving the way for the new American foreign policy of the next century.

The Cuban revolution against Spanish rule began on February 24, 1895, with a rebellion in Santiago province. In April the arrival in Cuba of the political dissident José Martí and the military commanders Máximo Gómez and Antonio Maceo confirmed that the insurgency would be a serious one.² Both Maceo and Gómez had commanded rebel forces in the previous major insurrection in Cuba, which had lasted from 1868 until 1878, while Martí was one of the leading advocates of Cuban independence and an important figure in the exiled Cuban community in the United States. The revolution of 1895 was, in

¹ Richard E. Welch, *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1988), p. 194

² Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 88-89

many respects, a continuation of the conflict of 1868-78. The problems of arbitrary colonial rule, racial divisions, and chronic debt and the subsequent heavy taxation it caused had all played a part in the development of that rebellion and the passage of seventeen years did little to dissipate them. The Ten Years War had ended with promises of reform which swiftly proved to be illusory, while subsequent attempts to implement autonomous rule for all Spanish overseas territories by the Spanish Foreign Minister Antonio Maura y Montaner in the winter of 1893-94 had received so little support in Spain that he had been forced to tender his resignation.³ The internal problems were exacerbated by the loss of Cuba's favoured position as a sugar supplier to the United States under the Wilson-Gorman tariff of 1894. As had happened in Hawaii under the McKinley tariff of 1890, the blow to sugar producers in Cuba led to increased unemployment and further damaged the island's already weak economy.⁴ Meanwhile, activists such as Martí agitated for full Cuban independence, gaining significant financial backing in the United States. As a result, when open rebellion finally broke out in 1895, the rebels were supplied by shipments of arms, ammunition and other supplies transported from the United States by filibustering expeditions.

The Cleveland administration's policy towards the revolution evolved gradually over the course of two years. The first response conformed to the precedent established in the Brazilian Naval Revolt and the Sino-Japanese War: placing the United States on a neutral course and dealing with any incidents that directly involved American interests as they occurred. There is little to suggest that either Cleveland, Gresham or Olney initially saw any great significance in the outbreak of revolution. Unrest was not unusual on the island and the Spanish government had no desire to advertise the seriousness of their predicament as the insurrection grew in strength over the summer of 1895. Beyond this, neither Cleveland nor his Secretaries of State had any preconceived designs on Cuba, any more than they had had on Brazil 18 months before, making their usual conservative stance a natural one. To the administration this was a Spanish internal matter and it was the duty of the United States to simply mind its legal obligations. Observing these obligations, however, was easier said than done. Cuba had been the focus of interest for many Americans throughout the 19th Century and the U.S. government had repeatedly sought to buy the island from Spain in the 1840s and 1850s.⁵ While the Cleveland administration now stood opposed to any such acquisition, this position was not widely supported. The

³ Ibid, p. 91

⁴ Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898*, (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1963), p. 286

⁵ Gott, *Cuba*, p. 68

summer of 1895 saw a stream of messages pass between the Spanish Minister in Washington and the State Department calling the United States government's attention to a series of alleged breaches of neutrality by American citizens. While some – such as an allegation that the Cuban rebels were openly recruiting volunteers in New Orleans – were found by investigators to be without foundation it was clear that the rebels were receiving tangible support in the form of arms and ammunition from the United States.⁶ The extent of the problem was sufficient to encourage Cleveland to issue a proclamation of American neutrality on June 12 warning U.S. citizens against serving in, recruiting for, or attempting to supply the rebel forces.⁷

While the Spanish minister in Washington attempted to ensure that the United States government did everything it could to fulfil its legal obligations, the State Department increasingly found itself asserting the legal rights of American citizens in Cuba as the insurgency – and the efforts to control it – threatened to infringe them. In this respect the administration was again essentially following the course that had been laid out in previous incidents such as the Brazilian Naval Revolt and the incidents at Bluefields in Nicaragua. In the case of Cuba, however, both the number and the severity of the cases which the State Department found itself raising with the Spanish government and the Cuban authorities gave warning that the situation on the island was far more serious than either of the incidents in Brazil and Nicaragua.

The first major incident that required the State Department's intervention was the firing on the American mail steamer *Alliança* in international waters by a Spanish gunboat patrolling off the coast of Cuba. Although the *Alliança* was not hit and sailed on to its destination without further interference, when news of the incident reached Washington Gresham demanded an immediate apology and assurances that all Spanish commanders would be instructed to ensure that such events would not be repeated.⁸ The subsequent investigation revealed that the incident had been the result of an error by the Spanish commander in calculating the positions of the two vessels resulting in the mistaken impression that the *Alliança* had entered Cuban waters.⁹ Gresham received his apology while the officer in question was relieved of his command, but perhaps more important was the instruction issued to all Spanish commanders in Cuban waters not to interfere with

⁶ Mr. Muruaga to Mr. Gresham, March 30, 1895, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part 2*, p. 1191; Mr. Uhl to Mr. Muruaga, April 6, 1895, [No. 17], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part 2*, p. 1194

⁷ Grover Cleveland, 'A Proclamation', *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part 2*, p. 1195

⁸ Mr. Gresham to Mr. Taylor, March 14, 1895, [Telegram], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part 2*, p. 1177

⁹ Mr. Taylor to Mr. Gresham, May 20, 1895, [No. 357], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part 2*, pp. 1184-85

legitimate American shipping. The strong wording of the normally placid Gresham's first telegram of protest which demanded that "Forcible interferences with [regular American mail and commercial shipping] can not be claimed as a belligerent act, whether they pass within 3 miles of the Cuban coast or not, and can under no circumstances be tolerated when no state of war exists," demonstrated the seriousness with which he viewed any interference with American commerce as a result of the insurrection.¹⁰ Once again, the needs of American commerce were a priority for the Cleveland administration. The fact that the captain of the Spanish gunboat had seen fit to go so far as to open fire on the *Alliança*, though, also demonstrated that the Cuban authorities saw filibustering expeditions as a very real threat, thus posing a conundrum that would be hard to solve: how could Spanish forces control the Cuban coast without interfering with American commerce?

As well as the *Alliança* incident, the early months of the insurrection saw the first examples of what would be a recurring problem for the United States in their relations with Spain: the arrest of American citizens in Cuba on suspicion of aiding the rebels. Such arrests would prove to be a key concern for the State Department over the next three years with the situation being confused by a variety of issues.¹¹ The first such problem was the dubious citizenship status of many of those arrested. Dual American-Spanish citizenship was not uncommon in Cuba with many people born on the island living in the United States long enough to acquire American citizenship before returning to their homeland. As a result the State Department was repeatedly forced to investigate the validity of such claims – often for men who had made no attempt to assert their citizenship before their arrest – in order to ascertain whether they were entitled to the protection of the United States. The situation repeated itself so often in the first two years of the conflict that Cleveland spoke out specifically in his Annual Message of 1896 against those who "though Cubans at heart and in all their feelings and interests, have taken out papers as naturalized citizens of the United States--a proceeding resorted to with a view to possible protection by this Government," noting the indignation that this provoked from the Cuban authorities.¹² Even when American citizenship was clearly established the legal situation in Cuba made the assertion of treaty rights a difficult matter. Under their treaty of 1795, the United States and Spain agreed to guarantee the legal rights of each others' citizens unless

¹⁰ Gresham to Taylor, March 14, 1895, [Telegram], *FRUS 1895, Pt. 2*, p. 1177

¹¹ For two early examples of the variety of problems created by the arrest and detention of American citizens in Cuba see 'Arrest of Francisco Carrillo' and 'Expulsion of John A. Sowers, Joseph A. Ansley, Aurelio A. Ansley, and Maria Luis Ansley from Cuba', *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part 2*, pp. 1220-1228, 1229-1231

¹² Grover Cleveland, Fourth Annual Message (second term), December 7, 1896

they were captured with arms in their hands. In Cuba in 1895, however, the Spanish government experienced repeated difficulties in controlling the local authorities who were far more concerned with putting down the rebellion in any way possible than with the niceties of international diplomacy. Arrests were often made without charge and prisoners held for extended periods without trial. On one occasion in September, 1895, Olney was forced to complain to Minister Dupuy de Lôme that the Governor-General of Cuba was refusing the right of the U.S. consul-general in Havana to intervene on behalf of American citizens being held without trial despite this being an established function of consular representatives under international law.¹³

Beyond the arrest and detention of American citizens, the State Department also worked to protect American property in Cuba. This became a key priority as it became clear that the rebels intended to operate a policy of deliberate destruction of the island's agricultural and industrial infrastructure in order to increase pressure on the Spanish government. In the face of such attacks, however, there was little that the department could hope to achieve. From an early stage the message sent to property owners was that compensation could only be forthcoming if they could prove that the Spanish government had been in a position to protect their property, but had failed to do so.¹⁴ Undoubtedly, Cleveland and Olney were concerned by the prospect of widespread destruction of American property and investment in Cuba, but a letter from Olney to the President demonstrated the extent to which they felt their hands were bound. Referring to documents sent to Olney by a man claiming to represent the Cuban Republic the Secretary wrote:

They are serious principally as they show how the insurrection is affecting American citizens and American property. At the same time, it being their misfortune to reside and have invested their capital in a country in which a rebellion has broken out, it is not easy to see how this government can protect them from the inevitable consequences.¹⁵

Since this was the established position under international law in cases relating to the destruction of property of alien residents by insurgents beyond the control of the sovereign government it was a logical position for the State Department to adopt, but the general policy of the administration was also one of only gentle pressure on the Spanish government. In December, 1895, Olney forwarded to Dupuy de Lôme a detailed letter

¹³ Mr. Olney to Mr. Dupuy de Lôme, September 26, 1895, [No. 37], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part 2*, pp. 1209-1211

¹⁴ Mr. Uhl to Mr. Springer, July 1, 1895, [No. 1098], *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part 2*, p. 1216

¹⁵ Richard Olney to Grover Cleveland, March 21, 1896, Reel 51, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

from an American sugar company whose plantations in Cuba had been harassed by the rebels. In his accompanying note Olney simply declared:

I send it for your information, as well as for any suggestions and recommendations you may see fit to make either to the Spanish Government or to the local authorities in Cuba for the protection of American properties in Cuba from destruction by the Cuban insurgents.¹⁶

Clearly Olney believed that applying direct pressure for action from Spain would be unlikely to produce any concrete results and that American interests would best be served by maintaining a cordial relationship with the Spanish government.

A potential reason for this reluctance to exert pressure on Spain is that by the winter of 1895 it had become clear that the insurrection was a very serious matter. On September 25, 1895, Olney wrote a letter to Cleveland that demonstrated that the Secretary of State was beginning to have serious doubts about the administration's early interpretation of the situation in Cuba. Opening with the suggestion that the matter was "one calling for the careful consideration of the Executive" – a statement which itself suggests that up to that point the issue had not been the subject of serious discussion – Olney first set out the Spanish version of events. In this version the insurgents were a ragtag army comprised of Cuba's lowest orders "under the leadership of a few adventurers".¹⁷ These men "would be incapable of founding or maintaining a decent government if their revolution against Spain were to be successful" and any such triumph would lead to "anarchy and a repetition in Cuba of the worst experiences of other West India Islands." The latter point was primarily a reference to the racial violence that had characterised the Haitian revolution a century earlier and which, due to its capacity to terrorise white landowners in areas containing significant black populations, was regularly used as a means of reinforcing white support to the Spanish colonial government in Cuba. All this combined to form a vision of a conflict in which "it would be quite impossible to withhold sympathy from Spain or to doubt that she must ultimately prevail." Now, though, Olney was coming to question this view.¹⁸

¹⁶ Mr. Olney to Mr. Dupuy de Lome, December 12, 1895, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895, Part 2*, p. 1216

¹⁷ Richard Olney to Grover Cleveland, September 25, 1895, Reel 50, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁸ A fine example of the official Spanish portrayal of the situation in Cuba is provided by an article published in the September, 1895, issue of *The North American Review*. In the article the former Mayor of Havana, Senor Don Segundo Alvarez, attempted to depict the rebellion as anarchic and lacking in support from the majority of the Cuban population. He confidently predicted that the Spanish government would crush it after the end of the rainy season. Segundo Alvarez, 'The Situation in Cuba', *The North American Review*, Vol. 161, Issue 466, (September, 1895), pp. 362-365

The Secretary had recently been put in contact with a major Cuban landowner, “a man of great wealth, an employer on his estates of some eight hundred people,” an American who had served as a consular-agent for the United States and who had little interest in any specific type of government so long as it provided peace and stability for commerce. Olney declared himself to be impressed “both with his intelligence and his honesty” and so was inclined to believe his informant’s very different interpretation of the situation in Cuba.¹⁹ Briefly stated, that interpretation was that, far from being “the scum of the earth” the rebels had the sympathy of 90% of the Cuban population including virtually all of the prominent families, simultaneously challenging the Spanish argument that the rebels were in the minority and would be incapable of forming a permanent government. In reality, Olney’s source claimed, the majority of Cuban landowners were:

to a man disgusted with Spanish mis-rule, with a system which has burdened the Island with \$300,000,000 of debt, whose impositions in the way of annual taxes just stop short of prohibiting all industrial enterprise, and which yet does not fulfill the primary functions of government by insuring safety to life and security to property.²⁰

All this combined to form a serious problem for the Cleveland administration. In the space of a few lines Olney’s letter revealed a far greater strength to the rebellion, making U.S. recognition of the rebel cause a matter for serious consideration, and highlighted serious problems with Spanish rule which undermined all of the qualities – investment, commerce, and the security of life and property – that the administration’s foreign policy was designed to protect and facilitate as a first priority. Further to this, Olney’s informant raised the genuine prospect of a Spanish defeat, arguing that the 1895 rebellion was more formidable than that of 1868-78 and, unlike its predecessor, would not be placated by promises of reform, not least because the promises made in 1878 were not kept. This contrasted with Spanish power which “has visibly and greatly decreased.”

Having brought such concerns – as well as stories of the brutal treatment being meted out to those suspected of aiding the rebels – to Cleveland’s attention, Olney neatly summarised the plethora of difficulties that the administration now faced:

The Representatives of the two parties ... being wholly conflicting, and the true status being one of grave doubt -- Cuba lying at our very door -- the contest attracting the attention of all our people as well as enlisting their sympathies, if no other reason, then [sic] because the insurgents are apparently the weaker party -- politicians of all stripes, including Congressmen, either already setting their sails or preparing to set them so as to catch the popular breeze -- it being not merely probable but almost certain that next winter Washington will swarm with

¹⁹ Olney to Cleveland, September 25, 1895, Reel 50, Olney Papers, MD, LC

²⁰ Ibid

emissaries of the insurgents demanding at least recognition of their belligerency -- what duty has the Executive branch of the Government?²¹

The Secretary was content that, as far as Spain was concerned, the United States was doing all that could be expected in terms of respecting and preserving neutrality. He was less sure, however, that all was being done for the insurgents that they might be entitled to.

They have a right, I think, that we inform ourselves upon the point, whether they are merely gangs of roving banditti, or are a substantial portion of the community revolting against intolerable political conditions and earnestly and in good faith seeking the establishment of a better form of government.²²

Such an investigation would be a typically measured approach to a complex problem from an administration that had made it a habit not to act swiftly if it could possibly be avoided, but Olney did at least raise the prospect of more dramatic action if his informant's claims turned out to be true. While not categorically declaring himself in favour of either possibility he argued that the United States would be better placed to decide whether to recognise Cuban belligerency or even independence. A canny politician, Olney recognised that these were questions that were "sure to be raised and the decision of which sooner or later cannot be avoided."

The suggestion of sending an agent to Cuba appealed to Olney for a variety of reasons. As chief of the State Department he recognised that his subordinates would be called upon to handle many claims relating to the destruction of property and disruption of commerce and thus would be well served by a definitive picture of the situation on the ground. Once again, for a legally-minded administration the availability of clear evidence to guide actions was a high priority. Ultimately, however, the plan for sending a special envoy was not pursued. Olney and Cleveland certainly discussed the matter seriously, and Olney even spoke with Secretary of War Daniel Lamont about suitable candidates after it was decided that a man with military experience would be best suited to the role. Lamont suggested General John M. Schofield, recently retired as commanding general of the U.S. Army, an appointment which Olney favoured as a means of removing the matter from the political arena, while expressing reservations that the Spanish government might see it as granting the rebels too much credibility.²³ In his September 25 letter Olney had dismissed the possibility of the Spanish officials objecting to the arrival of an American investigator on the grounds that, by their own interpretation of the situation, any such mission "could

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Richard Olney to Grover Cleveland, October 8, 1895, Reel 50, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

have but the one result of demonstrating that both right and might are on their side.”²⁴ He presented the same argument in the letter of October 8 in which General Schofield’s name was proposed, but he may have underestimated Spain’s willingness to accept the suspicion that came with rejecting the proposal. Olney’s biographer, Gerald G. Eggert, claims that the Spanish government vetoed the plan and, although he unfortunately provides no evidence to support this statement, it would appear to be consistent with the recalcitrance of the Cuban authorities.²⁵ Certainly Cleveland was not entirely enthusiastic for the project, although his objections appear to have been more related to the choice of Schofield – on the basis that the President believed “that he would not see all that he ought to see.” – than to the idea in general.²⁶ In a letter of October 6 Cleveland had been sufficiently interested to name a candidate for the role – Major Davis who had worked with Lamont on delicate matters before – but had also informed Olney that he would make a final decision on the matter when he returned to Washington on the 15th so it is entirely plausible that the President decided in the intervening period that the potential rift the project might cause with Spain was too great a risk to run.²⁷ Whatever the case, the plan for sending a special envoy to investigate was dropped for the time being.

Despite prompting a dramatic reappraisal within the administration both of the nature and strength of the rebellion and of its prospects for success, the exposure of the flawed view being presented by the Spanish authorities had no discernible impact on Cleveland or Olney’s actions in the short term, even to the extent of abandoning the plan to send an envoy to investigate in person. Why this was the case is difficult to answer, not least because the correspondence between the men is very thin: presumably the President’s return to Washington meant that such matters were discussed in person. The first – and most likely – reason for this lack of action is Cleveland and Olney’s instinctive tendency to stand pat when presented with a volatile situation beyond their control and understanding. This would conform to the cautious precedent set as far back as the withdrawal of the Hawaiian annexation treaty in 1893 and chimes well with Olney’s suggestion that they urgently seek to acquire better information on the conflict. That said, the eventual decision not to send a special envoy to investigate the situation in Cuba suggests an alternative reason for not acting: the need to protect American property and commerce. The fact that such matters were at the forefront of the administration’s thinking is demonstrated by

²⁴ Olney to Cleveland, September 25, 1895, Reel 50, Olney Papers, MD, LC

²⁵ Gerald, G. Eggert, *Richard Olney: Evolution of a Statesman*, (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1974), p. 256

²⁶ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, October 9, 1895, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

²⁷ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, October 6, 1895, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Olney's direct references to "a large and important commerce" with Cuba, "large amounts of American capital in Cuba", and the likelihood that the U.S. government would be called upon to protect its citizens and property and to secure indemnities for damage done.²⁸ The Secretary of State was primarily concerned with providing himself with sufficient information to make legal claims of the Spanish government, but it did not require a great leap of reasoning to recognise the potential damage to such cases that would be done by recognising the rebels as belligerents. Under these circumstances the burden of protecting American lives and property in Cuba would fall upon the rebels, the same people that were waging a campaign of destruction against American plantations. Granting recognition might have brought such attacks to a halt, but there was little guarantee of that, especially if the rebel government could not be sure to control the actions of its various armies. It would seem strange if Olney and Cleveland had not considered such questions as soon as the revolution broke out, but the letter of September 25, with its suggestion that recognition of either belligerency or independence might be feasible, could be construed as suggesting otherwise. Beyond the loss of protection for American property any move that was deemed by Spain to be supporting the rebel cause risked creating a diplomatic rift and even raised the prospect of war between the two nations. With the experiences of the Brazilian Naval Revolt and the Sino-Japanese War behind them the administration cannot have failed to realise this fact – indeed it was openly acknowledged by Cleveland later in the term – and once again the instinct to stand pat may well have taken control. Beyond this, it is possible that Cleveland and Olney believed that they did not need to act. In both Brazil and China the instinct to maintain a cautious neutrality had ultimately proved to be correct as both conflicts came to a natural conclusion of their own accord – although the role of the U.S.S. *Detroit* in bringing the Brazilian Naval Revolt to an end formed a salutary lesson in the power of minor actions from the United States to effect major changes in conflicts – and, if Olney's source was to be believed, a similar natural resolution might occur in Cuba very soon. Indeed, the situation in Cuba in the winter of 1895 was such that if the administration received further accurate reports from the island they would have been confirmed in this belief since by January 1896 the rebels were in possession of most of the hinterland and had advanced to the outskirts of Havana.²⁹ It was only the arrival from Spain of General Valeriano Weyler in that same month that brought the rebel advance to a halt and began the stalemate that characterised the next two years of the conflict.

Cleveland's annual message of 1895 illustrates the position taken by the administration after the first 9 months of the rebellion as well as highlighting one of the

²⁸ Olney to Cleveland, September 25, 1895, Reel 50, Olney Papers, MD, LC

²⁹ Gott, *Cuba*, p. 93

key issues they were facing. Having informed the nation that an insurrection “in some respects more active than the last preceding revolt” – that of 1868-78 – was raging in Cuba, the President set out his vision of the United States position:

Besides deranging the commercial exchanges of the island, of which our country takes the predominant share, this flagrant condition of hostilities, by arousing sentimental sympathy and inciting adventurous support among our people, has entailed earnest effort on the part of this Government to enforce obedience to our neutrality laws and to prevent the territory of the United States from being abused as a vantage ground from which to aid those in arms against Spanish sovereignty.³⁰

In short, while recognising that a very serious insurrection was taking place that was harming the economy of the United States, Cleveland was still devoted to maintaining international obligations, a position he directly reiterated twice in the subsequent paragraph. His determination to maintain his non-interventionist stance was demonstrated by another passage worth quoting at length:

Though neither the warmth of our people's sympathy with the Cuban insurgents, nor our loss and material damage consequent upon the futile endeavors thus far made to restore peace and order, nor any shock our humane sensibilities may have received from the cruelties which appear to especially characterize this sanguinary and fiercely conducted war, have in the least shaken the determination of the Government to honestly fulfill every international obligation, yet it is to be earnestly hoped on every ground that the devastation of armed conflict may speedily be stayed and order and quiet restored to the distracted island, bringing in their train the activity and thrift of peaceful pursuits.

Beyond his desire to have the Spanish government solve its own problems, this passage illustrates Cleveland's awareness of the major problem that was facing his administration: that of public opinion. Where in the early days of his second term Cleveland and Gresham had expressed hopes of leading public opinion and building support for their position, it is clear from the annual message of 1895 and Olney's letter of September 25, 1895, that such hopes were not extended to the situation in Cuba. While the annual message did present a call to the American people not to breach their country's neutrality – going so far as to remind them of their duty as patriotic citizens to honour the obligations of their national government – this was in itself almost an admission that public opinion was overwhelmingly in favour of the rebels. Further proof of this attitude can be gained from the September 25 letter when Olney declared that the rebels were gaining the sympathy of the American people “if for no other reason, then [sic] because the insurgents are apparently the weaker party”.³¹ If the Secretary of State was resigned to the fact that public opinion was irreversible despite admitting that much of it was based on the flimsiest of

³⁰ Grover Cleveland, Third Annual Message (second term), December 2, 1895

³¹ Olney to Cleveland, September 25, 1895, Reel 50, Olney Papers, MD, LC

reasoning then clearly the administration was seeking to manage the problem rather than to solve it. This latter point is crucial to the understanding of the administration's Cuba policy – or lack of one – at the end of 1895. Unlike in Hawaii – the previous incident to elicit strong public feeling over a lengthy period of time – Cleveland and his advisors did not have a set policy that they wished to sell to the electorate, they simply hoped to limit the extent to which the actions of American citizens forced their hand. Cleveland and Olney were well aware of public opinion and the potential difficulties it could bring them if influential members of Congress attempted to harness it, but in the wake of the crushing Republican victory in the 1894 Congressional election – or perhaps after the death of Gresham – there appears to have been less concern that the administration should have a public mandate for their actions. The hope of leading informed opinion in the United States had gone, but there was no corresponding move to bow to public whim; Cleveland would continue to enact a foreign policy that he believed to be morally and legally right. As the Cuban revolution continued through 1896 this belief in the independence of Executive power would come to be a major issue and one that would have far-reaching consequences for the evolution of American foreign policy.

The long period of inactivity came to an end in early April, 1896, when Cleveland and Olney launched two new policies in a matter of days which had the potential to profoundly alter the United States' stance on Cuba. On April 4 Olney wrote a letter to Minister de Lôme that ended the administration's policy of non-involvement in the Cuban crisis. After a lengthy exposition on the calamitous state of affairs on the island and the consequent damage being done to American commerce and investment the Secretary declared the need for a solution before the island was ruined or a Spanish defeat resulted in the outbreak of a race war.³² What Olney proposed was a cooperative effort between the two nations which would see the United States extend its good offices to promote any reforms that the Spanish government proposed which, while maintaining Spanish sovereignty, "shall yet secure to the people of the island all such rights and powers of local self-government as they can reasonably ask."³³ This proposal, while vague in itself, revealed a great deal about the administration's thinking. It declared a preference, under the circumstances, for the continuation of Spanish rule over Cuba rather than the creation of an independent Cuban republic. By taking such a stance the administration was demonstrating its willingness to ignore the calls of popular opinion in preference of a

³² Mr. Olney to Mr. Dupuy de Lôme, April 4, 1896, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1897*, pp. 540-544

³³ *Ibid*, p. 543

policy which they believed to be better for the United States. It may also, however, have revealed a naivety in Cleveland and Olney's reasoning and a failure to understand the nature of the rebel cause.

The decision to suggest reforms aimed at granting Cuba autonomy was a logical one for Cleveland and Olney, conforming with their stand pat instincts. An autonomous Cuba still existing under Spanish sovereignty appeared, in many respects, to be an ideal solution from the position of the United States. Olney's note had spoken of his concern at the continuing destruction of the island's industry and the indiscriminate nature of these attacks which saw American investors suffer equally with their Spanish counterparts. It had also raised the prospect of the island being engulfed in a civil war between the white and black communities. Both these issues could only be secured against by existence of a sound governmental authority and, since by Olney's own admission the rebels seemed incapable of creating one for themselves, the continuation of Spanish rule was the most viable means of providing it. Olney was aware, however, that the continuation of Spanish rule in its current form was unlikely to be acceptable to the rebels and so real political reform amounting to autonomy was the only potential means of bringing peace while keeping Spanish sovereignty. In this case, though, it seems that Olney had misjudged the rebels. In his letter to de Lôme the Secretary had referred to the fact that the 1868-78 insurrection had only been pacified by promises of political reforms which were subsequently not fulfilled, but his suggestions to the Spanish government were predicated on such a policy being successful for a second time which, given the greater strength of the 1895 insurrection and the sense of betrayal harboured by the rebels after the previous promises, was highly unlikely. This raises doubts about the seriousness of Olney's whole proposal, not least because his own note repeatedly emphasised the strength of the rebel forces and the inability of Spain to bring it to an end through military force. Given the vagueness of Olney's plan – lacking in any specific detail and placing the entire burden of creating a policy acceptable to the rebels on the Spanish government – it is tempting to question whether it was indeed a serious proposal or rather a thinly veiled hint that the United States desired that the situation be resolved quickly. On balance, though, Olney's proposal should be considered a serious one. Throughout their time in office Cleveland and Olney had preached a reluctance to interfere in the internal affairs of other nations and while their record had perhaps not always perfectly conformed to this position even in Hawaii – the most flagrant case of interference – they had only interfered to correct damage already done by the United States. In many respects the entire foreign policy history of the second Cleveland administration is one of minor interference with the

internal affairs of other nations and a willingness to interfere with Spanish policy in Cuba would be demonstrated again only two weeks after Olney's letter to de Lôme. On April 18 he wrote a private letter to the Spanish minister questioning the wisdom of the arrest by the Spanish authorities of Bishop Diaz, even going so far as to state:

I venture to suggest the inexpediency of holding him. To hold him as a prisoner for any length of time will be certain to excite the religious sentiment of the country unless the reasons for so doing are very plain and are publicly manifested.³⁴

Two days later he was even more explicit declaring:

If you realize where your interests and mine lie, you will have Diaz and his brother landed in the United States within the next twenty-four hours. It makes little difference what they have done or what they have not done. A more troublesome and dangerous hornets' nest could not have been stirred up than has been by the arrest of Diaz.³⁵

These were not merely disinterested expressions of concern, they were powerful suggestions of the direction which the American government desired Spanish policy to take and thus an indication of a new determination within the administration to make its feelings known on Cuban matters. The suggestion of a fully formed policy aimed at solving the entire conflict to a European power such as Spain was, however, still a step too far. As Olney himself declared in the April 4 note: "the United States has no designs upon Cuba and no designs against the sovereignty of Spain."³⁶ Undoubtedly Cleveland and Olney were serious in their desire to see peace restored to Cuba and the plan Olney suggested promised to fulfil all of their wishes: a restoration of peace, a stable government providing a safe market for trade and investment, the expansion of democratic rights within the American hemisphere, and a resolution that avoided the prospect of racial violence. That Olney was not certain of success is demonstrated by his advice to Spain to act swiftly before the rebels could attribute any such negotiation to Spanish weakness or defeat, but the autonomy policy matched so well with the administration's stand pat instincts it seems he and Cleveland considered it worth proposing.³⁷

At the same time that Olney was preparing his note to Minister Dupuy de Lôme, he and Cleveland were also planning another move that demonstrated the increased interest the administration had in the Cuban conflict and its resolution. On the evening of April 7, Cleveland – with Olney probably in attendance – met with Fitzhugh Lee of Virginia, son of

³⁴ Richard Olney to Dupuy de Lôme, April 18, 1896, Reel 51, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

³⁵ Richard Olney to Dupuy de Lôme, April 20, 1896, Reel 51, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

³⁶ Olney to Dupuy de Lôme, April 4, 1896, *FRUS*, 1897, p. 544

³⁷ *Ibid*

the legendary Civil War General Robert E. Lee. The purpose of the meeting was to offer Lee the position of Consul-General in Havana and the correspondence between Cleveland and Olney leaves no doubt that the appointment was more than simply filling a vacant diplomatic post. On April 7 Cleveland expressed his hope that a private meeting might mean that “the matter may be settled without newspaper nonsense and he might return home without comment.”³⁸ Two days later he wrote again saying “I suppose the Havana matter must wait, now that we have entered upon it by way of Virginia.”³⁹ While it appears that the exact nature of the “Havana matter” – or what alternative measures may have been considered relating to it – must remain tantalisingly unknowable, it is clear that Cleveland had a definite purpose in mind for Lee beyond normal consular duties. In light of the more assertive posture adopted with the April 4 letter to Minister Dupuy de Lôme, it is logical to assume that the appointment was a revival of the proposal to send a representative to directly investigate the true situation in Cuba, but that could have been achieved simply by sending a special envoy. It is entirely plausible that Cleveland and Olney hoped to avoid the potential rift with the Spanish government that might have been created by sending an envoy with the sole remit of investigating whether Spain’s own reports of the situation were reliable. The appointment of a new Consul-General would not cause such diplomatic issues, especially if his secondary purpose were kept secret. The fact that Lee was given the position of Consul-General may suggest another intention from the President, however. As the senior American diplomat in Cuba Lee would become a key figure in the implementation of American policy. By placing a man specially recruited for the role in that position it appears Cleveland and Olney were seeking to ensure greater control over events in Havana. This would be a logical reaction to growing concern at the treatment of American citizens and property in Cuba, but would also be a sensible move if the administration anticipated implementing a more assertive policy in relation to Cuba. Indeed, the move may have been made in anticipation of a favourable response to Olney’s suggestion of the United States providing its support to Spanish proposals of political reform.

In the event neither the proposal to Spain nor the appointment of Lee would have the consequences Cleveland and Olney desired, but before discussing why the two moves failed it is necessary to examine why they came about at all. A variety of causes, both foreign and domestic, can be identified that may have played a role in convincing the administration to change its stance on Cuba. The simplest of these relate to the situation in

³⁸ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, April 7, 1896, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

³⁹ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, April 9, 1896, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Cuba and two of them derive from the letter to Minister Dupuy de Lôme on April 4. In it Olney reported that “competent authority” had predicted to him that Cuba’s usual annual product of \$80m to \$100m was likely to fall in 1896 to at most \$20m with that figure set to decline still further as crops were not replanted and plantations and industries destroyed.⁴⁰ With capital fleeing the island and no indication of further investment replacing it, Olney was clearly concerned by the prospect of one of the United States’ vital trading partners suffering complete economic ruin. This prospect would be raised again in Cleveland’s annual message of 1896 when he suggested that the damage to the Cuban sugar industry was in danger of becoming so great as to make it uneconomical to rebuild it in the future.⁴¹ Clearly the preservation of American trade and investment was the central motivation for Cleveland and Olney and it is possible that the continuing destruction of Cuba’s agriculture and industry was what prompted them to act, but this alone does not explain the timing of the action. One possible explanation is revealed by an earlier section of Olney’s April 4 letter. Having explained the purpose of the letter – the President’s desire that the rebellion be settled – the Secretary of State opened his summary of the administration’s position by reminding de Lôme of their conversations the previous year:

It is now some nine or ten months since the nature and prospects of the insurrection were first discussed between us. In explanation of its rapid and, up to that time, quite unopposed growth and progress, you called attention to the rainy season which from May or June until November renders regular military operations impracticable. Spain was pouring such numbers of troops into Cuba that your theory and opinion that, when they could be used in an active campaign, the insurrection would be almost instantly suppressed, seemed reasonable and probable.

It is impossible to deny that the expectations thus entertained by you in the summer and fall of 1895, and shared not merely by all Spaniards but by most disinterested observers as well, have been completely disappointed.⁴²

In Olney’s own words, therefore, the United States had accepted Spain’s assurances that the rebellion would be swiftly crushed once the rainy season ended and was now, with the dry season nearly over and a new rainy season in sight, disappointed to observe that nothing of the kind had happened. By itself, this failure would not justify interfering with Spanish policy, but the continuing destruction of property, both Cuban and American, and the subsequent damage to trade with the United States was sufficient cause to intervene, at least in the limited manner that Olney proposed.

Olney’s letter to Minister Dupuy de Lôme still does not fully explain why the administration chose to act in early April, 1896, rather than waiting for the start of the next

⁴⁰ Olney to Dupuy de Lôme, April 4, 1896, *FRUS, 1897*, p. 542

⁴¹ Cleveland, Fourth Annual Message (second term), December 7, 1896

⁴² Olney to Dupuy de Lôme, April 4, 1896, *FRUS, 1897*, pp. 540-541

rainy season or acting a month earlier and thus giving Spain more time to consider the implications of the change while still being in a position to make decisive moves militarily. It can be argued that the timing was of no further significance than that outlined by Olney, but it appears likely that other factors also played a part. On a technical level, Lars Schoultz has argued that the change of stance coincided with the British agreement to negotiate over the Venezuelan Border Dispute which freed the administration to adopt a more active stance towards the Cuban revolt.⁴³ Such a theory is difficult to either prove or disprove: the Venezuelan situation had only rarely taken up sizable portions of Cleveland and Olney's time due to the almost total lack of urgency with which it was treated by their British counterparts and, if anything, the opening of negotiations on the subject gave Olney considerably more work to do from April, 1896. From a position of international politics, however, it is not impossible that Cleveland wished to be entirely certain that the Venezuelan matter would be settled in a manner agreeable to the United States before acting on Cuba in order to ensure that the British government was not granted a new opportunity to exert leverage over the United States. Beyond the logistics of the war and other calls on the State Department's time one other development stands out as a potential reason for the administration's decision to develop a more active policy on Cuba. Beginning in December, 1895, members of both houses of Congress began proposing resolutions that sought, in a variety of ways, to influence the policy of the United States toward the conflict. Through the winter of 1895-96 a concerted effort evolved aimed at securing recognition of the Cuban insurgents as belligerents; a movement which reached a shambolic climax in the early days of March, 1896. On March 4 the *New York Times* reported that the mood in Congress had dramatically shifted after a flurry of activity so precipitous it had left Senators uncertain as to which chamber's resolutions were under consideration. In the cold light of day, the paper reported, "Not one man in ten of those who voted in favor of recognition of the belligerency of the Cubans could tell why he voted to afford those rights, except that he sympathized with the people who were endeavouring to get rid of Spanish rule in Cuba."⁴⁴ The article closed by suggesting that public sentiment in favour of the resolutions was declining and that Cleveland, who had been rumoured to support the resolutions, now wanted them shelved with the result that any resolution passed would simply result in making the United States look foolish since the President would not act on it. On these last points there is reason to believe that the *New York Times* was mistaken. While it is not possible at this distance to distinguish

⁴³ Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy toward Latin America*, (Cambridge MA., Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 127

⁴⁴ *New York Times*, March 4, 1896

whether there truly was a change in American public opinion in early 1896, if there was it did not last long. More importantly there is no evidence that Cleveland ever welcomed the prospect of Congressional resolutions which were intended to dictate his course of action. Equally, if Congressional leaders really believed that passing resolutions would be rendered pointless by the President's refusal to act then they had changed their minds by the time the next session of Congress opened in December when the question of Congressional control of foreign policy would become one of the key debates of Cleveland's second term. Whatever the case, the debating of the resolutions continued throughout the spring during which time it seems that Cleveland's feelings became clearer to both Congress and the media.⁴⁵ On May 21, the *New York Times* published another article which predicted that Cleveland's supporters in Congress would be able to postpone action on any resolutions until the session was adjourned. Cleveland, the article declared, "does not care to be bullied or worried into the recognition of Cuban belligerency, or to appear to be influenced by Congress" and was instead awaiting reports from Lee and the coming of the rainy season which would allow the rebels to demonstrate their capacity for self-government before acting.⁴⁶ This latter point, the *New York Times* reported, was key since "The President and Secretary Olney have never lacked sympathy with the insurgents; but they have not proposed to violate international law and the rules of neutrality before it appeared that the Cubans were capable of maintaining an independent government." This was a fine definition of Cleveland and Olney's position – and indeed of much of their foreign policy – but presumably the author was unaware of the proposal made by Olney to Minister Dupuy de Lôme in the letter of April 4. In the light of the debates in Congress – and especially given the volatility of mood among members being reported by the *New York Times* – the April 4 letter takes on further significance. It appears likely that Cleveland was not as unmoved by Congressional pressure as was reported and that the timing of the change of policy was no coincidence. It is highly likely he and Olney were motivated to act by the fear that if they did not Congress might force their hand. This is borne out further by Olney's language in the April 4 letter. His opening words described the continued failure to express the President's concern at the situation in Cuba as "a dereliction of duty to the Government of the United States" and, more importantly, he went on to note that the conflict had "led many good and honest persons to insist that intervention to terminate the conflict is the immediate and imperative duty of the United States."⁴⁷ This implied that the

⁴⁵ In April both houses passed a resolution calling on the President to use his good offices to secure Cuban independence. Since it was a concurrent, rather than a joint, resolution it did not require the President to acknowledge it and Cleveland ignored it. Welch, *Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, p. 196

⁴⁶ *New York Times*, May 21, 1896

⁴⁷ Olney to Dupuy de Lôme, April 4, 1896, *FRUS, 1897*, pp. 540, 543

President was feeling pressured to act, even if only by his own sense of duty to his government.

It is reasonable to assume that the agitation in Congress in the spring of 1896 played a significant part in motivating Cleveland and Olney to alter their stance on Cuba, but it is also fair to say that the policy change was not simply the result of domestic politics. In both Olney's April 4 letter and in Cleveland's Annual Message of 1896 a great deal was made of the permanent damage being caused to Cuba's economy by the war while both messages also painted a similarly bleak picture of the long term prospects of victory for either side. The April 4 letter in particular raised the possibility that the insurrection might become bogged down in another 10 year quagmire as had happened in the 1868-78 rebellion.⁴⁸ Since the April 4 letter was not intended for public view and the Annual Message came several months after Spain had rejected the offer of American good offices – and weeks after a decisive Republican victory in the Presidential election of 1896 – there was nothing to be gained politically from either statement. Cleveland and Olney were genuinely concerned by the prospect of Cuba being ruined by the war and the potential effects this might have on the American economy. Pressure from the discussions in Congress may have been a trigger for the change in administration policy, but it was events in Cuba - and concern for the future - that motivated it.

If the events of April, 1896, had given Cleveland hope that progress might be made in Cuba then the summer was to prove one of disappointment. In a matter of weeks in June and July the administration had their proposal for reforms rejected by Spain and began to experience trouble with Fitzhugh Lee in Havana. Compounding these problems, however, was a domestic political disaster for Cleveland which would have profound consequences for his policy in Cuba.

Minister Dupuy de Lôme's reply to Olney's offer of American good offices with the rebels in support of Spanish proposals of reform was dated June 4, exactly two months after Olney's letter.⁴⁹ Given the delay in replying it is reasonable to assume that the Secretary of State must have been disappointed to discover that his suggestion was being rebuffed with a mixture of diplomatic courtesy and pointed advice as to the United States' conduct. De Lôme himself put the delay down to the seriousness of the matter under discussion before launching into a vindication of Spanish rule in Cuba, declaring it to be "one of the most liberal political systems in the world".⁵⁰ In brief the Spanish reply was a

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 543

⁴⁹ Mr. Dupuy de Lôme to Mr. Olney, June 4, 1896, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1897*, pp. 544-548

⁵⁰ Ibid, pp. 545, 546

reiteration of their long-standing policy that there would be no negotiation until the rebels laid down their arms, but the Spanish government also took the opportunity to lecture Olney on American actions and how best the United States could assist in bringing about peace. The reply declared that the American proposal could not succeed since the rebels did not believe that the United States was genuinely neutral and instead believed that the U.S. wanted to take possession of the island for itself. It went on to suggest that if the United States government really wished to help in bringing the insurrection to an end then it should further step up its efforts to counter filibustering expeditions - offering to provide any intelligence that might possibly be of help in this endeavour - before closing with a declaration that came close to accusing the U.S. government of negligence in their support of Spain's legal rule:

When the Government of the United States shall at once be convinced of our being in the right, and when that honest conviction shall in some manner be made public, but little more will be required in order that all those in Cuba who are not merely striving to accomplish the total ruin of the beautiful country in which they were born, being then hopeless of outside help and powerless by themselves, will lay down their arms.⁵¹

Minister de Lôme's reply thus combined to disappoint Olney's hopes both for an immediate change in Spanish policy in Cuba and for any prospect of cooperation between the United States and Spain to bring about change in the future. Of more interest than a fairly predictable insistence on maintaining established policy by a Spanish regime that had long since resorted to stubbornness in the face of a problem that could not be solved to its liking is the fact that the June 4 reply also made use of the Cleveland administration's own predilection for legality in its argument against offering the rebels reforms. In his letter of April 4 Olney had called the question of whether the rebels could be legally considered belligerents "immaterial" on the grounds that the only reason why they could not be was that they had not established a central government.⁵² Olney's point had been that, even if the rebels were not legally belligerents, they were militarily powerful enough to warrant an attempt at a negotiated peace. De Lôme, however, insisted that the rebel's inability to form a central government was anything but immaterial since it demonstrated that they were not in a position to negotiate political reforms and would not be capable of enacting any that they were offered.⁵³ Hammering his point home, he also noted that "their systematic campaign of destruction against all the industries on the island ... keep them without the pale of the universally recognized rules of international law." Not only was Minister de

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 548

⁵² Olney to Dupuy de Lôme, April 4, 1896, *FRUS, 1897*, p. 541

⁵³ Dupuy de Lôme to Olney, June 4, 1896, *FRUS, 1897*, p. 545

Lôme rejecting Cleveland and Olney's proposal, he was also employing the legal framework that had been such a vital part of their foreign policymaking to fundamentally question their actions.

The hope of working with Spain to bring about a conclusion to the conflict in Cuba had been dashed and the appointment of Fitzhugh Lee proved to be equally disappointing. The new Consul-General had taken to his work enthusiastically, but it quickly became apparent to Cleveland and Olney that their man in Havana was not working to their agenda. In June Lee's dispatches became increasingly enthusiastic in their advocacy of U.S. intervention in Cuba with the ultimate goal of annexation. His reports to the War Department proved similarly lacking in useful detail, but enthusiastic in their suggestions of how the United States might seek to benefit from the conflict.⁵⁴ This prompted Olney to call the wayward consul back to his duties. In a lengthy instruction written on June 29 Olney called attention to the fact that Lee had not left the confines of Havana. Reminding him that the State Department required more from him than simple representation with the Spanish authorities, Olney wrote "it is quite material to ascertain what sort of civil government and administration, if any, prevail in that large part of the island which is under the control of the insurgents."⁵⁵ What followed left no doubt that the Secretary was unhappy with Lee's efforts to that date. In rapid succession Olney listed twelve questions relating to the rebel government. These questions ranged widely from simply establishing whether any de facto government existed - and, if so, where it met - to seeking to ascertain whether the government was enforcing and administering the law, collecting taxes, and delivering the mail. For Olney to not simply request more information, but to painstakingly list all of the questions his subordinate was not answering was an unmistakable rebuke to Lee and an order to focus on the task in hand and leave policymaking to Washington. It may even be that Olney was seeking to force Lee to leave the confines of Havana in order to remove the temptation and opportunity to meddle in matters of policy. Whatever the Secretary of State's exact objectives they were not fulfilled; Lee's unwanted suggestions of intervention - perhaps in the form of the purchase of the island from Spain by the United States - continued to arrive. By the second week of July the consul was reporting that feelings were running high in Havana and recommended that the U.S. government offer to buy the island and, if refused, declare Cuban independence.⁵⁶ In preparation for this, Lee recommended stationing a warship at Key West, Florida, from where it could be rapidly deployed at the consul-general's request. As Eggert notes, this proposal raised troubling

⁵⁴ Eggert, *Richard Olney*, p. 260

⁵⁵ Richard Olney to Fitzhugh Lee, June 29, 1896, Reel 51, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁵⁶ Eggert, *Richard Olney*, p. 261-262

memories of Minister Stevens' actions in Hawaii in 1893, but even without that precedent it was never likely to prove popular with Cleveland or his advisors. On July 14 Olney reluctantly wrote to Secretary of the Navy Hilary A. Herbert asking for his views on Lee's proposal.⁵⁷ On the same date Olney mentioned the matter in a letter to Cleveland who had left Washington for his summer house at Buzzard's Bay, Massachusetts.⁵⁸ Both letters informed their readers – in nearly identical phrases – that “at first blush” Olney was not in favour the plan and clearly he did not require a great deal of convincing that his first blush was correct since his reply to Lee was dispatched without waiting for Cleveland to comment. In a reply that carefully avoided the subject of Lee seeking to gain direct control over a warship, Olney was still pointed enough in his reasoning to leave little doubt as to his low opinion of the scheme. Informing the consul that the U.S.S. *Maine* – “which is far more powerful than any vessel the Spanish fleet have” – was already stationed at Key West and that the Navy could assemble a sufficient fleet to command the waters around Cuba in a matter of days, he closed with an observation that demonstrated the administration's position while also bordering on sarcasm by suggesting that the Spanish navy should have little trouble providing security since the rebels had no navy.⁵⁹

Although Olney did not wait to hear Cleveland's views before replying to Lee they are still of interest for what they tell us of the President's thinking in the summer of 1896. On July 13 a letter to Olney ranging across a wide variety of subjects, both foreign and domestic, had included the statement “I am thinking a great deal about Cuba but am as far as ever from seeing the place where we can get in.”⁶⁰ His reply to Olney's reporting of Lee's proposal demonstrated that this search for options was genuine and that the President was indeed taking a variety of suggestions seriously:

I am a little surprised at Consul General Lee's dispatch. He seems to have fallen into the style of rolling intervention like a sweet morsel under his tongue. I do not think the purchase plan would suit at all though it is perhaps worth thinking of. Many of the fairest talkers in favor of intervening (Sherman for instance) are opposed to incorporating the country into the United States system and I am afraid it would be entering upon dangerous ground. It would seem absurd for us to buy the Island and present it to the people now inhabiting it, and put its government and management in their hands.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Richard Olney to Hilary A. Herbert, July 14, 1896, Reel 51, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁵⁸ Richard Olney to Grover Cleveland, July 14, 1896, Reel 51, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁵⁹ Richard Olney to Fitzhugh Lee, July 15, 1896, Reel 51, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁶⁰ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, July 13, 1896, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁶¹ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, July 16, 1896, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Clearly Cleveland was unimpressed by the consul-general's conduct, but he was not dismissing his ideas – all of which had been proposed by others in Washington or the press before – out of hand. This brief extract alone demonstrates the plethora of competing voices which Cleveland believed he had to satisfy; small wonder then that – with the President lacking a positive agenda of his own on Cuba – American policy reached stalemate. This dilemma was neatly illustrated by Cleveland's direct response to Lee's proposal:

I do not like the suggestion of a Man of War &c though of course prudent measures might well be taken to provide in good faith for the safety of our people and interests in case Spain failed in that behalf; but I do not want now anything of that kind made a convenient excuse for trouble with Spain.⁶²

Cleveland, with impressive foresight, was concerned about the potential consequences of introducing American warships into the volatile situation in Cuba, even if it seems that his concern was more related to the potential insult to Spain than to any specific fear that the warship might itself become a flashpoint for conflict.⁶³ That same volatility, however – coupled with the difficulty of obtaining reliable information from men like Lee who clearly had agendas of their own – made him wary of the risk to the safety of Americans in Cuba and unsure of how best to proceed.

Lee's attempts to influence policy in the summer of 1896 had little long term effect, but they are indicative of a larger problem facing the Cleveland administration. Throughout his second term Cleveland and his advisors had attempted to develop a new template for American foreign policy, one based on non-interference, international law, and moral probity. In Cuba it became clear that their attempts to convince the broader public to follow them had failed. Fitzhugh Lee is a prime example of a key difficulty they faced in enacting the new policy: the need for reliable subordinates who could be trusted to follow orders from Washington without seeking to expound their own agendas either for personal gain or for the perceived benefit of the nation or their party. Lee – like many members of Congress and leaders of the press – had his own opinions on how best the situation in Cuba might be managed for the United States' benefit. This in itself made him an unfortunate choice for the role Cleveland and Olney desired him to perform, but a greater problem was his eventual revelation to Olney that his proposals had been made

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Richard Watson Gilder, *Grover Cleveland: A Record of Friendship*, (New York: The Century Co., 1910), pp. 198-99

with a view to domestic political considerations.⁶⁴ Failure to convince the country to follow them on matters of foreign policy was only a minor facet of a far greater problem facing the administration. By the summer of 1896 the continuing struggles of the American economy and the ongoing controversy over the methods adopted by Cleveland to counter it were hotly debated topics. More importantly for the President, his actions in forcing through the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act and in insisting on the introduction of a new tariff bill – then allowing it to become law without his signature after the bill was savaged by amendments – had lost him support in Congress and opened damaging fissures in the Democratic Party. These fissures had only deepened as Cleveland's attempts to stabilise the economy and protect the position of gold as the basis for the currency continued in 1896. Since the economic disasters of 1893 commentators had been deeply concerned by the declining gold reserves in the U.S. Treasury with a particular fear that if the reserves fell below \$100,000,000 it would cause lasting damage to investor confidence. In a bid to rebuild that confidence Cleveland authorised the sale of government bonds to investors. In all, four such sales took place, but the failure of the first two to stem the outflow of gold from the Treasury prompted a change of tactic. With public subscribers largely exhausted by the first two sales and a pressing need not just to restore the Treasury's holdings, but to curtail future withdrawals, Cleveland opted to negotiate directly with the nation's financial community in the hope of bringing in gold from overseas and gaining the bankers' support in stabilising the Treasury. A third issue of \$65,000,000 of bonds restored the gold reserve to above the \$100,000,000 mark and ended gold exports to Europe, but when the financial syndicate who had bought the bonds almost instantly sold them on for a profit there were howls of protest from the Republican press as well as newspapers allied to the Populist movement of the South and West.⁶⁵ When a fourth and final bond issue was made in February, 1896, Cleveland and Secretary of the Treasury Carlisle were determined not to repeat the public relations disaster of a year earlier and the bonds were sold by public subscription, but the damage to the Democratic Party was already done. The bond issues saved the gold reserve, but in a party increasingly split between those dedicated to a currency based on silver and those still loyal to gold Cleveland had opened himself to accusations that he was a creature of New York's financiers and further alienated supporters of silver. The Democratic National Convention met in Chicago on July 7. By the time it had closed on July 11 any lingering hopes that Cleveland might be called upon to serve a third term of office had been dashed. Far worse, the man who was chosen to be the Democratic candidate for the 1896 Presidential election

⁶⁴ Eggert, *Richard Olney*, p. 262

⁶⁵ Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, pp. 656-666, 684-688

was the charismatic young exponent of silver currency, William Jennings Bryan. Any doubt that his nomination was anything but a repudiation of Cleveland's record was comprehensively dispelled by an election platform that "[damned] the administration and its works, virtually read Cleveland out of the party, condemned the administration's monetary policy, ... [and] denounced 'government by injunction,'".⁶⁶ Given the obvious fractures that had developed within the Democratic Party during Cleveland's term in office it is a little odd that he himself seems to have been surprised by the development.⁶⁷ He wrote to Olney that he was "so dazed on the political situation that I am in no condition for speech or thought on the subject."⁶⁸ Olney himself clearly suspected betrayal from within the administration stating that "The culmination of events at Chicago shows us what Secretary [of Agriculture] Morton has been doing all this time in that city. Doubtless he was one of the enthusiastic individuals who helped carry Bryan about on their shoulders."⁶⁹ In this sense of betrayal, if not the specific allegation of it, he may well have been joined by Cleveland. Certainly the President was clearly both hurt and angered by the rejection, adopting a fatalist satisfaction in the troubles ahead for those who had wronged him:

It is certainly an ill wind that blows no good to anyone. Has it occurred to you that in view of the outcome at Chicago no one can be fool enough to charge against this administration the disasters that await the Democratic party?⁷⁰

The 1896 Democratic National Convention has long been seen as a pivotal moment in American political history for the changes it produced in the structure and balance of the Democratic Party. What has been less well acknowledged is that the repudiation of Cleveland's record as President also resulted in the repudiation of his nascent plan for American foreign policy. In the summer of 1896 – and, indeed, throughout his second presidency to varying degrees – Cleveland found himself in a position where he was simultaneously losing out by attempting to implement a foreign policy that did not seek to garner him domestic political support and also battling with members of his own party – exemplified by Fitzhugh Lee, but also including members of Congress such as John T. Morgan – who had their own ideas on how American foreign policy should be conducted, sometimes for the benefit of the Democratic Party, sometimes for the benefit of their regions or themselves. It would be dramatically overstating the case, however, to suggest

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 261

⁶⁷ Welch suggests that Cleveland continued to believe that the Convention would not nominate a pro-silver candidate right up until the opening of the Convention itself. He also argues that Cleveland's failure either to categorically reject any speculation that he might run again or to rally support behind a chosen successor made Bryan's victory even more certain. Welch, *Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, pp. 209-210

⁶⁸ Cleveland to Olney, July 13, 1896, Reel 59, Olney Papers, MD, LC

⁶⁹ Richard Olney to Grover Cleveland, July 11, 1896, Reel 51, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁷⁰ Cleveland to Olney, July 13, 1896, Reel 59, Olney Papers, MD, LC

that a more flexible approach to foreign policy might have saved Cleveland's position on other matters. The fractures within the Democratic Party – always a coalition subject to internal contradictions due to its powerbases in the Northeast, South and Southwest – were far too serious, and the destabilising influence of the arguments over monetary policy and the tariff too strong, to be overcome by the relatively cosmetic benefits that might have been gained through foreign policy. Only by openly seeking to annex Cuba, and thus prompting war with Spain, might Cleveland have united his party and the nation behind him and neither prospect was guaranteed to win significant support from all sections of the party without alienating others (in particular the Eastern financiers that were virtually the only remaining constituency whose support the President could rely on). In any case, such policies were anathema to Cleveland personally. Ultimately, the Democratic National Convention resulted in the rejection of Cleveland's template, but only as a secondary casualty to the rejection of his financial policies.

There have been few U.S. presidents, if any, who have found themselves in as weak a position politically as Grover Cleveland did in the final nine months of his second term. His period as a lame duck president began nearly four months before the presidential election of November, 1896, after the Democratic National Convention confirmed that, whatever the outcome of that election, the victor would not be seen as Cleveland's political successor. It was only natural that this development affected the administration's actions for the remainder of the term. Cleveland was presented with a variety of options. If he had had any designs on Cuban independence or annexation then he might have taken this lack of a successor as an opportunity to act decisively to secure it, in the knowledge that should it fail the next man in the White House would be left to pick up the pieces. Conversely he might have washed his hands of the entire affair knowing that there was nothing for him or his few remaining supporters to gain from any success and glad to be rid of a vexing problem. In the event he took neither option, but instead chose a middle course even if it veered more towards inaction than action.

There is no evidence to suggest that Cleveland ever seriously contemplated intervention against Spanish rule in Cuba. For the most part this can be attributed to his fundamental opposition to American interference in the affairs of others, but the continued cost of policing the United States' shores against filibusters and the ongoing destruction of the island's industry and agriculture meant that alternative solutions must have been open to consideration. One such solution – as presented by Fitzhugh Lee among others – was to purchase the island, but this option had been dismissed by Cleveland in July, 1896 – days

after the Democratic Convention – on the grounds that it would be “dangerous” for the U.S. to seek to integrate Cuba into its political system and “absurd” to buy the island and then present it to its inhabitants.⁷¹ Presumably the absurdity to which Cleveland referred was the notion of buying the island only to instantly give it away, but no less a reason for his reluctance to countenance such a move was the continuing failure of the Cuban rebels to establish a viable government. The lack of a stable governmental authority that Olney had acknowledged in his April 4 letter to de Lôme – and which the Spanish minister had subsequently seized upon in his reply – was not rectified in 1896. Instead the military commanders became even more dominant, ignoring the calls of civilian leaders and financial backers to end the campaign of destruction.⁷² In his Annual Message to Congress of 1896, Cleveland – already aware that new attempts were being made in Congress to force him to recognise Cuba’s independence – declared that the commander in chief of the rebel forces had demanded that the civilian government cease to make any attempt to exercise authority leaving it “a government merely on paper.”⁷³ Outside the limited enclaves of Spanish rule, Cleveland declared, “the entire country is either given over to anarchy or is subject to the military occupation of one or the other party.” For Cleveland and Olney this was conclusive, international law did not justify the recognition of a military insurrection that lacked a civil authority capable of upholding the rule of law and any attempt at recognition would be recklessly irresponsible toward the Cuban population (and American investors) just as it had been in Brazil three years earlier. It may well be that, had Lee been able to categorically demonstrate that the rebels deserved American recognition, even Cleveland would have overcome his stand pat conservatism and granted it, but with fresh reports suggesting that, if anything, the insurgency in Cuba was becoming less worthy of such recognition that path was closed. Later in the annual message the President noted the various calls for recognition first of Cuba belligerency, then of full Cuban independence, but directly rejected them on the grounds that “imperfect and restricted as the Spanish government of the island may be, no other exists there”. In this instance the suggestion of buying the island was deemed “possibly worthy of consideration”, but accompanied by the caveat that there was no evidence that Spain was willing to sell. Whether this constituted a greater openness to the idea than had been displayed in July or simply a less frank appraisal of the difficulties is open to debate. Finally, Cleveland raised the possibility of an arbitrary intervention by the United States’ military forces to end the rebellion. He made no comment on the likelihood of an

⁷¹ Cleveland to Olney, July 16, 1896, Reel 59, Olney Papers, MD, LC

⁷² Gott, *Cuba*, p. 95

⁷³ Cleveland, Fourth Annual Message (second term), December 7, 1896

American victory if the intervention, as seemed likely, resulted in war with Spain, but instead made a declaration that might have characterised the foreign policy of his entire second term:

The United States has, nevertheless, a character to maintain as a nation, which plainly dictates that right and not might should be the rule of its conduct. Further, though the United States is not a nation to which peace is a necessity, it is in truth the most pacific of powers and desires nothing so much as to live in amity with all the world. Its own ample and diversified domains satisfy all possible longings for territory, preclude all dreams of conquest, and prevent any casting of covetous eyes upon neighbouring regions, however attractive.

In their immediate context these words can be seen as Cleveland seeking to vindicate his position on Cuba, but in a larger sense they can also be viewed as a final attempt to present a vision for how the United States should utilise its new grown power. From a man who had often openly venerated the past in his formulation of foreign policy there are unmistakable echoes of Washington's Farewell Address as, a century later, Cleveland sought to counsel the next generation of politicians on the direction the nation should take.

The combination of the perceived unworthiness of the Cuban rebels to receive independence and the clear deficiencies in all of the obvious courses of action he might have taken suggests that Cleveland was not so much unwilling to act as paralysed by his own belief, best summed up by the statement from the letter of July 13 already quoted, that he could not "[see] the place where we can get in."⁷⁴ This is almost certainly the dominant factor in his reasoning on Cuba, but it is very possible that two other factors supported him in his decision not to act. The first is the simple fact that, as a President without even a potential political heir, he saw little incentive to begin a course of action which almost certainly would not reach fruition before he left office and therefore would potentially serve to provide the next occupant of the White House with a victory for which the Cleveland administration was unlikely to be credited. By contrast it might also be more charitably argued that, with time for decisive action rapidly running out before the end of his term in office, Cleveland was seeking to avoid setting the United States on any course that might have created difficulties for the next President. This might be to grant him too much credit, but the man known for his courageous honesty and probity may also have had personal reasons for not wishing to present the man who came after him with a situation from which they would wish to extract themselves. In both of his presidencies Cleveland had found some of his first acts to be reversing foreign policy positions set by his predecessor. Upon taking office in 1885 he withdrew the Frelinghuysen-Zavala Treaty

⁷⁴ Cleveland to Olney, July 13, 1896, Reel 59, Olney Papers, MD, LC

from Senate consideration as it formed an entangling alliance with Nicaragua and declined to send the Berlin Convention (which sought to maintain the Congo Basin as a neutral territory for international trade) to the Senate on the grounds that it bound the United States to uphold the neutrality of a “remote valley” thus constituting “an alliance whose responsibilities we are not in a position to assume”.⁷⁵ Far more seriously, of course, Cleveland’s second term began with the decision to reverse the Harrison administration’s attempts to annex Hawaii in 1893. Both moves had forced Cleveland to begin his presidencies with a negative decision that was bound to alienate sections of Congress and the public and, in the case of Hawaii, left him with an unsolvable problem that lasted the better part of a year. It is quite possible that Cleveland considered that it would be in the best interests of the nation for him to ensure that such a volatile issue as Cuba did not become a similar impediment to the next President. Ultimately, though, the fact that President McKinley took over a year after his inauguration to act decisively on Cuba – during which time the sinking of the U.S.S. *Maine* in Havana harbour introduced a powerful impetus to act – would suggest that the difficulty of choosing how best to act was the major reason for delay.

From this we might conclude that Cleveland must have been tempted not to act at all on Cuba after the summer of 1896, but the final months of his presidency still saw some efforts to bring about a resolution. In July Cleveland accepted a request by the Spanish government that he make a new, stronger proclamation against filibusters although Olney’s concern at what he perceived as Spain’s suggesting policies to the U.S. President caused the request to be toned down before the final version was sent and therefore resulted in a proclamation which, while stronger than its predecessor of 1895, did not satisfy the Spanish government’s wishes.⁷⁶ More significantly, the winter of 1896-97 saw a new effort to convince Spain to grant reforms in Cuban rule. This effort saw its clearest demonstration in the Annual Message to Congress of 1896 which Cleveland and Olney chose as the opportunity to apply fresh pressure to the Spanish government. It appears that the section of the message relating to Cuba was originally drafted by the Secretary of State before being polished by Cleveland. Several drafts exist in the Olney Papers that closely match the final message, but carry some significant differences which grant a fascinating insight into the Secretary’s thinking and Cleveland’s moderating influence. In the message’s final form direct pressure on Spain was limited to criticism of the Spanish government’s insistence that any negotiations be contingent on the rebels first laying down their arms and

⁷⁵ Grover Cleveland, First Annual Message (first term), December 8, 1885

⁷⁶ Eggert, *Richard Olney*, p. 263; Richard Olney to Grover Cleveland, July 18, 1896, Reel 51, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

the revelation that the United States had offered to guarantee any offer of reforms leading to autonomy and awaited Spain's reply.⁷⁷ Also significant was the fact that the message laid the administration's chosen policy of reforms aimed at granting Cuba autonomy under Spanish sovereignty before the public and the press, simultaneously further increasing the pressure on Spain and forestalling the growing calls in Congress for the United States to directly intervene. Besides these revelations the message contained a strange mix of flattery and warnings to the Spanish government. Having declared that the need to maintain the United States' high character as a nation prevented it from forcibly intervening to end the conflict the message proceeded to inform readers that, given the provocation of the rebellions of 1868-78 and 1895, "No other great power, it may safely be said, under circumstances of similar perplexity, would have manifested the same restraint and the same patient endurance." It is interesting to observe here the strong correlation between this statement and Cleveland's insistence that the United States showed restraint in its dealings with Hawaii in 1893. Once again Cleveland's policy was not simply based upon the assumption that resisting the temptation to intervene for American gain was the best policy, but that the simple act of resisting that temptation was in itself an admirable act. Having praised the noble self-restraint of the United States the annual message continued with a rather strange salute to Spain in the form of a declaration of the continuing respect and regard of the American people to Spain due to their role in the discovery of the Western Hemisphere and "the great qualities of the Spanish people" including their patriotism and their chivalry. One can only assume that such flattery – which, considering the actions of Congress and the American press, not to mention the fact that President had stated previously that the American people naturally supported any people who struggled for "better and freer government", was clearly not well supported by fact – was hoped to make Spain more pliable to Cleveland's request. This interpretation is supported by the President's salute to "the cheerful resolution with which vast bodies of men are sent across thousands of miles of ocean and an enormous debt accumulated that the costly possession of the gem of the Antilles may still hold its place in the Spanish crown" – a pointed reminder that the war in Cuba was damaging Spain almost as much as it was damaging the island.

Presumably it was hoped that such flattery and reminders of the United States good faith would induce the Spanish government to see reason, but Cleveland and Olney also offered a more concrete incentive to seek to bring matters to a resolution. The message declared that, while the United States had shown restraint and was offering its good offices

⁷⁷ Cleveland, Fourth Annual Message (second term), December 7, 1896

to help secure a resolution, there could be no guarantee that this would continue indefinitely. The bleak picture of destruction presented earlier in the message carried the obvious connotation that the United States was concerned for its trade and investments; that being the case Spain had to show evidence that it could solve the conflict by its own means or the United States would feel obliged to intervene. From the early drafts it appears that Olney wanted to make a bold statement of American intent with one suggestion being that progress needed to be evidenced by the New Year. Since this would have given Spain only three weeks to bring about a notable change it was never a realistic proposal and, either due to this fact or simply due to an unwillingness to pressure the Spanish government unnecessarily, the ultimatum was replaced by the warning that American patience had its limits.⁷⁸

Also considered, but ultimately rejected was a reference to the Monroe Doctrine. It is unclear who made the decision not to raise the subject of the Monroe Doctrine or why, but it would be consistent with Cleveland's long-standing reluctance to invoke a topic which he felt he did not completely understand. It is also indicative of a dilemma which confronted the administration after their aggressive handling of the Venezuelan Border Dispute: having invoked the Monroe Doctrine once in relation to a European power's actions in the American hemisphere, were they now obliged to do so again? Some members of the public clearly believed that the forceful stand taken on Venezuela should be adopted again in relation to Cuba - an editor of a German-language newspaper wrote to Cleveland during Congress' first flurry of resolution drafting in the spring of 1896 declaring that "Your prompt and decisive course in the Venezuela matter which electrified this whole nation from sea to sea is undoubtedly the cause of this sentiment."⁷⁹ For many of those similarly electrified - as well as politicians and newspaper editors who agreed with them - the Monroe Doctrine appeared to be a convenient tool for justifying American engagement in Cuba while the conflict itself simultaneously formed an opportunity to confirm the United States' new assertive policy against interference in the affairs of the Americas. For Cleveland, however, neither of these perceived benefits was desirable. For the legally-minded President the Monroe Doctrine conferred upon the United States no right to interfere since the Spanish colony of Cuba predated the doctrine and Spain's actions there were clearly not designed to interfere with independent American states. Olney's corollary and the declaration that "the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition" did

⁷⁸ Eggert, *Richard Olney*, pp. 265-266

⁷⁹ E. Helber to Grover Cleveland, March 2, 1896, Reel 93, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

potentially raise the possibility that the U.S. would intervene in any matter it chose, but clearly Cleveland was not keen to do so in a situation from which he saw little potential benefit to the United States.

Invoking the Monroe Doctrine, therefore, was a step too far in December, 1896, but the annual message still carried a warning to the Spanish government. While the President had decided against presenting Spain with an ultimatum his annual message still made a firm declaration that this situation could not be counted on to continue indefinitely:

It should be added that it can not be reasonably assumed that the hitherto expectant attitude of the United States will be indefinitely maintained. While we are anxious to accord all due respect to the sovereignty of Spain, we can not view the pending conflict in all its features and properly apprehend our inevitably close relations to it and its possible results without considering that by the course of events we may be drawn into such an unusual and unprecedented condition as will fix a limit to our patient waiting for Spain to end the contest, either alone and in her own way or with our friendly cooperation.

The warning was clear, but it was not as direct as it first appeared. With less than three months remaining in Cleveland's term of office the Spanish government were undoubtedly aware that the likelihood of the lame duck president making a dramatic late shift in his policy was negligible. The warning can be taken at face value as a fear that future events might drag the United States into events unwillingly - a scenario which Cleveland obviously considered possible as demonstrated by his prescient reluctance to station a warship in Havana harbour at the request of Fitzhugh Lee - but it might also be argued that it formed a message to Spain. With the presidential election of the previous month having confirmed the return of the Republicans to the White House - on the basis of a platform that promised to be considerably less patient regarding affairs in Cuba - Cleveland and Olney were reminding their Spanish counterparts that they might never have a better opportunity to exploit the good offices of a sympathetic U.S. government in order to bring about a peaceful settlement. The message had repeatedly declared the wisdom of a policy that would bestow autonomy and the blessings of democracy on the Cuban people under "the most favorable conditions" - Spanish rule. Now it offered a reminder that a time was fast approaching when the American government might demand a more radical solution. This interpretation is supported by the paragraph immediately following the warning that events might draw the United States into the conflict which simultaneously warned Spain that if the situation degenerated to such a point that it "means nothing more than the useless sacrifice of human life and the utter destruction of the very subject-matter of the conflict" then "the sovereignty of Spain will be superseded by higher obligations" and also gave a thinly veiled message to the President's successor and members of

Congress by suggesting that any action taken by the United States “should not be determined upon without giving careful heed to every consideration involving our honor and interest or the international duty we owe to Spain.” Once again Cleveland was attempting to balance the competing needs of national honour, international law, and human and economic loss.

On that note, one final aspect of the Annual Message of 1896 that deserves mention is the general lack of discussion of the humanitarian costs of the Cuban conflict. Cleveland’s message contained almost no reference to the human suffering resulting from the destruction of property, with only brief mention of the reconcentrado policy which would famously become the focus of much press attention in the United States in the build up to the War of 1898. What mention there was of the new policy focused exclusively on the extra damage the removal of the rural population from the countryside would cause to the island’s agricultural productivity and was followed by a paragraph relating the estimated level of financial investment by American capital in Cuba and the volume of trade between the two. Even when declaring the reason for the United States’ interest in the conflict the key concern was for the destruction of the island and its resources and financial concerns were at the root of the matter:

The spectacle of the utter ruin of an adjoining country, by nature one of the most fertile and charming on the globe, would engage the serious attention of the Government and people of the United States in any circumstances. In point of fact, they have a concern with it which is by no means of a wholly sentimental or philanthropic character. It lies so near to us as to be hardly separated from our territory. Our actual pecuniary interest in it is second only to that of the people and Government of Spain.

While Cleveland made numerous references to the wanton plunder and destruction of the island by forces loyal to both sides it is clear that for him the United States’ involvement in the conflict was still firmly a financial matter.

In truth this interpretation is consistent with Cleveland’s established tendency to place issues of law and the protection of personal property over more human questions, but an argument can be made for a more sympathetic interpretation. Writing nearly 15 years after the event, Richard Watson Gilder suggested that the President was deeply concerned by the humanitarian costs of the conflict. He described a discussion he had had with Cleveland, during a trip that took place between July 31 and August 4, 1896:

The President went on to tell me all the difficulties of the position. He was willing to go a great way in insisting upon humanity - in fact, he feared there were some outrages on both sides, if the truth were known. But in a general way he felt it incumbent upon him to be extremely careful, as the public mind seemed to be in an

inflammable state and a spark might kindle a conflagration. He said there seemed to be an epidemic of insanity in the country just at this time.⁸⁰

While doing little to further his reputation for courageously doing what was right over what was politically expedient, the theory that Cleveland was afraid to truly speak his mind on the humanitarian cost of the war for fear of creating a public demand for intervention that he simply could not ignore is a plausible one.

This interpretation is supported by another foreign policy incident which saw Cleveland come under pressure from Congress and the press to intervene on humanitarian grounds. Between the autumn of 1894 and August, 1896, the Armenian Christian community in the Ottoman Empire was subjected to a series of attacks from both regular troops and Kurdish militia acting with the support of the Ottoman government.⁸¹ With American missionary societies active in the region the incident was of great interest in the United States and was immediately raised Congress. As news of the attacks trickled back to the United States, Republican Senator George Frisbie Hoar responded by introducing a resolution on the first day of the Senate's new session calling on the President to provide any information he had on the situation in Turkey and asking him whether he intended to protest or coordinate his actions with other Christian nations. Cleveland – struggling with confused reports from the diplomats in the region – replied that he only knew what he read in the newspapers.⁸² Neither Cleveland nor Secretary of State Gresham were keen to involve the United States in what they perceived to be a European matter and when an invitation was received to have an American consul join a Turkish commission investigating the violence it was first rejected and then reluctantly accepted at the request of Great Britain, perhaps as a result of the evident concern of some in Congress. When the Sultan refused a proposal to have a consul accompany the commission without participating officially a secretly relieved Gresham issued only a token complaint.⁸³ In a personal letter to Ambassador Thomas F. Bayard in London Gresham declared that, with Britain, France and Russia willing to conduct the investigation, the United States was “better out of the matter than in it.”⁸⁴

The reasoning behind Cleveland and Gresham's reluctance to involve the United States in a European problem was explained in his Annual Messages of 1895 and 1896. In the former the President declared that his aim was the protection of American missionaries

⁸⁰ Gilder, *Grover Cleveland*, p. 138

⁸¹ Donald A. Ritchie, 'Congress Confronts the Armenian Genocide', *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 278

⁸² *Ibid*, pp. 278-279

⁸³ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 183

⁸⁴ Walter Q. Gresham to Thomas F. Bayard, December 24, 1894, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

and their property while also seeking to reassure his audience that the offer to participate in the investigation was “in no sense meant as a gratuitous entanglement of the United States in the so-called Eastern question”.⁸⁵ A year later the focus was again placed on the possible danger to American citizens in the region, but the administration’s hesitation in intervening directly was justified on the grounds that it might interrupt the plans of “the great nations” of Europe who held the “exclusive right” to intervene in Turkey.⁸⁶ While the administration did consider sending warships to Constantinople – resulting in a strange inversion of gunship diplomacy whereby Olney mulled over the legality of the United States’ dispatching naval vessels to the region – it seems clear that Cleveland’s thinking was still dominated by the Monroe Doctrine’s division of the world into separate European and American spheres of influence.⁸⁷ Throughout the crisis there was a marked willingness to rely on British vessels to defend American citizens in an emergency.

Cleveland’s caution was not widely shared in the United States. In an article in *Forum* magazine of March, 1895, entitled ‘Our Blundering Foreign Policy’ Henry Cabot Lodge declared the administration’s half-hearted offer of participation to be “enough to be laughed at and too little to be effective.”⁸⁸ When the announcement of political reforms by the Sultan as a result of the findings of the investigatory commission led to renewed attacks against Armenians in September, the *New York Times* ran the headline ‘Armenian Holocaust’.⁸⁹ Much of the American press was united in calling for urgent action on behalf of the Armenians, joined by the Armenian immigrant community centred in New England and phil-Armenic societies across the nation.⁹⁰ Inspired by such rhetoric and a steady flow of stories of the atrocities being committed against Armenian civilians, the American public rallied to the cause and charitable societies for relief of the victims sprang up in practically every major city with the fledgling American Red Cross proving instrumental in the distribution of the aid received.⁹¹ In a nation well-used to racial stereotypes the situation quickly came to be viewed as a clash between brutal heathen Turks and oppressed Christian Armenians. In addition to the Armenian voices calling for action the administration was also receiving pressure from missionary groups seeking protection both for their activists overseas and for the Armenian Christians. These groups provided a

⁸⁵ Cleveland, Third Annual Message (second term), December 2, 1896

⁸⁶ Cleveland, Fourth Annual Message (second term), December 7, 1896

⁸⁷ Richard Olney to Grover Cleveland, November 20, 1895, Reel 91, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Richard Olney to Grover Cleveland, December 31, 1895, Reel 92, Grover Cleveland Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁸⁸ Calhoun, *Gilded Age Cato*, p. 184

⁸⁹ Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), p. 293

⁹⁰ Ritchie, ‘Congress Confronts the Armenian Genocide’, p. 278

⁹¹ Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, pp. 294-296

double headache for the Cleveland administration as they were simultaneously the source of the most detailed accounts of the situation unfolding within the Ottoman Empire and also the American citizens most in need of protection - not least because they often employed Armenian Christians in mission schools, thus increasing the distrust of Muslim communities in the region. Much of Cleveland's information on conditions in the Empire came from his communications with John Stewart Kennedy, a wealthy New York philanthropist who was in direct contact with several missionary leaders in Anatolia. While Kennedy himself was often remarkably restrained in his calls for American intervention, he forwarded several letters from missionaries on the scene and strongly supported their requests for American warships to be sent to the region. Understandably, given this weight of public interest, the crisis impacted on domestic politics within the United States. With their state containing one of the largest concentrations of Armenian immigrants the involvement of Senators Hoar and Lodge from Massachusetts was not coincidental, but the general level of interest in the situation was demonstrated by bipartisan calls for action in Congress. A sign of the attention gained by the matter was the inclusion by William McKinley of saving the Armenians as one of three foreign policy priorities in his election platform of 1896 - alongside annexing Hawaii and securing Cuban independence from Spain.⁹² In his Annual Message of 1896 Cleveland abandoned the traditional alphabetical format to discuss the Turkish situation before any other, including the situation in Cuba.

Although Cleveland declined to bring direct American pressure on the Turkish government, events in 1896 did conspire to bring the worst of the massacres to an end. When Armenian radicals, seeking to force European intervention, occupied the Imperial Ottoman Bank in Constantinople on August 26, organised mobs – apparently with the backing of the Turkish police – attacked the capital's Armenian community, killing between 5,000 and 6,000 people in 24 hours.⁹³ Once again the European governments pressured the Sultan to restore order and the worst violence subsided for the next two decades. Politically, however, damage had already been done for Cleveland. Faced by stories of atrocities carried out against Christians by an Islamic nation he had resisted calls to act, falling back on older prerogatives like the Monroe Doctrine and deferring to the European powers. As would be the case in Cuba, Cleveland's policy was correct in a strictly legal sense, but it was considered insufficient by the majority in the more emotive press and was exploited in Congress. Ultimately, it was not the end of the violence which brought respite to the Cleveland administration over Armenia. By the summer of 1896

⁹² Ibid, p. 293

⁹³ Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide*, (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2005), p. 25

interest in the crisis had subsided, but it had only done so because the unfolding situation much closer to home in Cuba had taken its place.

The annual message of 1896 demonstrated that President Cleveland did not believe that his lame duck status meant that he could simply ignore the issue of Cuba and that he still hoped that Spain might be convinced to accept his help in granting political reforms in order to bring the rebellion to an end. As the administration entered its final weeks in 1897 further initiatives were still being made. Olney dispatched Oscar B. Stillman, former manager of the East Boston Sugar Refining Company, to the island to gauge the opinion of the rebel leaders, receiving the promising news that the majority – with the notable exception of Maximo Gomez, the rebel’s military commander and de facto leader by 1897 – were in favour of autonomy guaranteed by the United States. Olney brokered meetings between Stillman and Minister de Lôme at the end of January and may well have used negotiations for a new commercial treaty between Spain and the United States as a further opportunity to apply pressure to the Spanish government. In February the reforms were finally announced, but despite satisfying the Cleveland administration they proved insufficient to win the backing of the insurgents in Cuba.⁹⁴

Cleveland and Olney were not alone in hoping that the Cuban revolution might be settled before the end of their time in office. In February, 1897, Fitzhugh Lee once again began agitating for American intervention. The initial cause was the death in Spanish custody of a naturalised American citizen named Ricardo Ruiz who, Lee reported, had been kept in solitary confinement for 315 hours before dying from a head injury which was either self-inflicted due to madness brought on by his incarceration or the result of a beating delivered by his captors. Declaring Ruiz to be innocent of the charges made against him or of any involvement in the insurrection, Lee suggested that the State Department should immediately demand that the Spanish authorities release all American citizens imprisoned in Cuba.⁹⁵ Olney was undoubtedly concerned by the case – instructing Lee to demand an official investigation from the Governor-General while informing him the State Department would be applying pressure in Madrid – but when the Consul-General reported that he had discovered another American, Charles Scott, who had been held incommunicado for 264 hours with the words “Cannot stand another Ruiz murder and have demanded his release” followed by a query as to the number of American warships stationed at Key West, Florida, that might be dispatched to sustain the demand if it was

⁹⁴ Eggert, *Richard Olney*, pp. 267-269

⁹⁵ Fitzhugh Lee to W.W. Rockhill, February 19, 1897, Reel 60, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

refused, the Secretary of State's patience evaporated.⁹⁶ Olney first upbraided Lee for his failure to protect Ruiz before his death and then queried whether Ruiz's American citizenship was valid before reminding the Consul-General that any protection from the United States was forfeited by the dead man's return to permanent residence in Cuba, the exact facts of which he requested Lee to provide.⁹⁷ At last Olney called Lee to task directly with the questions "Will you explain further what you mean by suggestion that demand by now made for release of all Americans imprisoned in Cuba? Is it the idea that such demand, which must be refused, can be made hostile intervention or demonstration?" Once again the difference between the interpretation of Olney and Cleveland and that of Lee in how American power should be deployed in foreign affairs was clearly displayed as the Secretary of State declared "The United States makes demands only when prepared to enforce them and therefore only on assured grounds, and in the complete uncertainty as to the facts, the suggestion as to war-ships is most surprising." While one might question whether the Cleveland administration always was prepared to enforce the demands it made, the demand for assured grounds and certain facts neatly sums up the foundations of their foreign policy. Chastened, Lee responded by defending his actions in relation to Ruiz and denied that he wanted to provoke a war, declaring that he had "Seen too much of it."⁹⁸ Two days later the Consul-General went some way to admitting the reasons for his actions when he wrote "Nothing can prevent Cuban matter very soon settling itself. I am deeply interested that Administration should participate."⁹⁹ Like Olney and Cleveland, Lee hoped that the Cuban revolution might be concluded before the Democrats left the White House; unlike his political masters he was happy for matters to be settled by conflict between the United States and Spain and was not overly concerned over how that conflict might come about. Somewhat strangely given that they no longer needed to worry about losing friends in domestic politics Cleveland and Olney chose not to recall Lee from Havana, despite at least one and possibly two (if a cryptic reference to Olney holding the "remedy" in his hands if he did not approve Lee's actions is construed as a challenge to the Secretary to sack him) suggestions by the Consul-General that he might be withdrawn if he did not

⁹⁶ Richard Olney to Fitzhugh Lee, February 20, 1897, Reel 60, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Fitzhugh Lee to W.W. Rockhill, February 20, 1897, Reel 60, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁹⁷ Richard Olney to Fitzhugh Lee, February 21, 1897, Reel 60, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁹⁸ Fitzhugh Lee to Richard Olney, February 22, 1897, Reel 60, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁹⁹ Fitzhugh Lee to Richard Olney, February 24, 1897, Reel 60, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

have their support.¹⁰⁰ Nevins describes how the President met with the international lawyer Frederic R. Coudert and asked him to act as a special peace envoy to Spain in order to counteract the machinations of Americans, led by Lee, in Cuba who were seeking to bring about war.¹⁰¹ Despite this belief, Cleveland contented himself with merely warning President McKinley at his inauguration that Lee was untrustworthy. Why he chose to do so is unclear, perhaps he did not wish to present his successor with a vacant post at a time of critical uncertainty or perhaps he did not want to appear to be interfering with a personnel decision that rightly belonged to the incoming administration, but his pain that his advice was subsequently ignored is evident in a letter written to Olney shortly after the declaration of war against Spain in 1898 in which he described the new President as a victim of “amiable weakness” who had surrendered to the Senate and “given his confidence” to Lee.¹⁰² It was a bitter irony that a man who Cleveland himself had, through an error of judgement, appointed and who had practically come to personify the sort of buccaneering approach to foreign affairs that he had spent four years counselling against as President was still ensconced in a critical position when Cleveland’s vision of how the United States should conduct itself in relation to Cuba was categorically rejected by his successor in the spring of 1898.

While the administration’s attempts to broker a last minute settlement in Cuba eventually amounted to nothing, events taking place in domestic politics during the winter of 1896-97 held far greater long-term significance for the evolution of U.S. foreign policy. In the wake of Cleveland’s 1896 annual message members of both houses of Congress, disappointed that the message did not go further toward ending Spanish rule in Cuba, once again moved to apply pressure to the Executive. Senate leaders introduced a new resolution in mid-December; unlike the resolutions of the previous session the Cameron Resolution, as it became known, called directly for the recognition of Cuban independence by the United States. Also unlike the situation twelve months previously, the Resolution received the united backing of the administration’s opponents in both houses raising a real concern that it might be not only passed, but also sustained over a presidential veto. Faced by this determined challenge to the Executive’s authority, which risked unsettling foreign governments and provoking renewed anxieties on Wall Street, Olney made his response directly to the press. In a statement to newspapers he made clear that if the resolution was

¹⁰⁰ Lee to Olney, February 22, 1897, Reel 60, Olney Papers, MD, LC; Allan Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage*, (1932, reprint New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1966), p. 719

¹⁰¹ Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, p. 719

¹⁰² Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, April 26, 1898, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

passed it would “be regarded only as an expression of opinion by the eminent gentlemen who vote for it...” before going on to declare

The power to recognize the so-called Republic of Cuba as an independent State rests exclusively with the Executive. A resolution on the subject by the Senate or by the House, by both bodies or by one, whether concurrent or joint, is inoperative as legislation, and is important only as advice of great weight, voluntarily tendered to the Executive, regarding the manner in which he shall exercise his Constitutional functions.¹⁰³

For all the respectful language, Olney was well aware of the gravity of this question. Despite disingenuously calling for the simultaneous offering of American good offices to achieve a peaceful settlement in Cuba as well as the recognition of Cuban independence by the United States, the supporters of the Cameron Resolution knew that any such recognition was highly likely to result in war between Spain and the USA.¹⁰⁴ Such a series of events would have profound consequences for the future of American foreign policy: if the Cameron Resolution passed and the President was forced to act upon it then control over the nation’s foreign policy would be permanently altered, with the Executive bowing to the will of Congress. The seriousness with which the Secretary of State was treating this threat is evidenced by his decision to ask the Assistant Attorney General, E.B. Whitney, to prepare a brief on the subject of the control of foreign policy and the separation of powers. On December 26 Olney wrote an 8 page letter to Whitney setting out a detailed legal defence of Executive control based on the language of the Constitution itself, the debates surrounding its framing and adoption, state constitutions of the same period, and a century of judicial support and historical precedent.¹⁰⁵ The fact that Olney had this defence prepared – obviously devoting serious attention to it himself – and that his immediate response to the proposal of the resolution was directed at the press clearly demonstrate that he believed that a serious question was at stake and that public opinion – which had not been widely acknowledged in the administration’s decision making relating to Cuba before – would potentially be decisive. In the event, despite Olney preparing an elaborate legal defence in readiness for a Congressional assault on Executive power, the administration’s opponents in the Senate chose not to dispute the point and the resolution did not come to a vote. With Cleveland’s term rapidly drawing to a close, and the prospect of a more agreeable occupant of the White House in William McKinley, calmer heads – perhaps cognisant of a surge of approval for Olney’s stance in the press – once again prevailed to

¹⁰³ *New York Times*, December 20, 1896

¹⁰⁴ *New York Times*, December 22, 1896

¹⁰⁵ Richard Olney to E.B. Whitney, December 26, 1896, Reel 50, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

avoid a constitutional crisis.¹⁰⁶ Thus Olney asserted executive power in defence of a minimalist foreign policy from attacks by the legislature and, in doing so, somewhat ironically helped to secure for the president the power to lead policy which would be so vital for the development and enacting of the activist foreign policies of Cleveland's 20th Century successors.

This victory saved the administration from a final challenge to its authority, but it did not end debate on the subject entirely. One speech in the Senate is worth noting simply for the illustration it provides of the contrast between the methods and rhetoric of the administration and of their opponents. The Cameron Resolution had cited a great deal of historical precedent in Europe and the Americas to justify American interference in a war of independence – ignoring the fact that Cleveland had stated in his Annual Message that the lack of a viable rebel government meant that legally it could not be regarded as anything more than an insurrection. It had also attempted to use the Monroe Doctrine as justification for the involvement of the United States in the affairs of an American republic, no matter how embryonic it may be. On January 26, 1897, the *New York Times* reported a speech in support of the Cameron Resolution delivered on the Senate floor by Senator David Turpie, a Democrat from Indiana.¹⁰⁷ In this speech Turpie made a series of claims that far outdid the already inventive reasoning of the Resolution itself, among them that, since the 1821 treaty that had ceded Florida to the United States had contained a clause prohibiting Spain from selling Cuba to another European power, Spain's title to Cuba was not total and so the Spanish government could not now deny Cuba's people their claim of independence; that Congress' power over commerce and control of the process whereby new states were admitted to the Union gave it the authority to recognise new nations; and that Spain herself had tacitly acknowledged the rebels as belligerents by fighting them – a claim which, while sound in a literal sense, was hardly well-founded in international law. With the Cameron Resolution already being gently pushed to one side by Senate leaders, Turpie's speech is of no significance in itself, but it is indicative of the kind of creative reasoning which Cleveland and Olney's insistence on a foreign policy founded upon legality utterly rejected. The fact that these ideas were being spoken by a Democrat was a double blow; by the winter of 1896-97 foreign affairs had become practically the only area of policy in which the administration could still be considered to be in sole control, but the inauguration of a new President on March 4, 1897, was likely to herald a new policy direction and Cleveland's own party would not be defending his ideas in opposition.

¹⁰⁶ Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, p. 718

¹⁰⁷ *New York Times*, January 26, 1897

Among the various factors affecting the Cleveland administration's handling of the Cuban revolution of 1895-98 one of the most significant was the disagreements it provoked with Congress over who controlled the direction of U.S. foreign policy. While a full constitutional crisis was avoided, the President's authority was challenged on several occasions and the stubborn refusal to bow to the will of Congress undoubtedly played a part in the repudiation of Cleveland by his own party in the Democratic National Convention of 1896. This being so, it is interesting to observe that, in one significant respect, Cleveland, Olney and Gresham were not completely out of step with their Congressional opponents. Despite initial desires not to interfere with Spanish internal affairs, the course of events over two years showed an increasing willingness to do so. The administration was criticised not for the actions that it made, but for those it did not make, and the strong rhetoric of the annual message of 1896 was widely applauded even if many in Congress did not believe it went far enough. If anything, the message of the Cuban revolution was that the United States considered itself entitled to meddle in Cuban affairs and – as both the 1895 and 1896 annual messages demonstrated multiple times – Cleveland and Olney were not immune from such a belief.

It is clear that the administration's policy was too passive to hold the support of many members of Congress, despite sharing some preconceptions with the more active stance they proposed. In this respect Cuba marks both the culmination of Grover Cleveland's foreign policy and also its point of collapse. Between February, 1895, and March, 1897, the Cleveland administration maintained a calm and steady posture in the face of an extremely volatile situation. In so doing, it has been suggested, they may have helped to preserve peace by “[damping] the jingoism raging about them.”¹⁰⁸ Beyond this, however, the legalist framework that Cleveland, Gresham and Olney had attempted to apply throughout their time in office must be considered a failure in regard to Cuba. In the immediate case of the revolution itself the legalist policy once again provided a convenient template for the initial American response to the insurrection. As in Brazil in 1893, the studious application of international law allowed the administration to categorically reject any claims to belligerent status held by the rebels and undoubtedly Cleveland derived some satisfaction from the gradual revelation that, far from establishing a functioning governmental apparatus, the rebels' civilian government was increasingly undermined by the military throughout 1896. However, while the administration's decisions may have been proven to be justified in hindsight, the framework within which those decisions were

¹⁰⁸ Nevins, *Grover Cleveland*, p. 719

taken offered no assistance in bringing about a resolution to the problem. This was the key flaw in the legalist template: if the situation demanded American neutrality then the administration's options in bringing matters to a resolution were extremely limited. In both the Brazilian Naval Revolt and the Sino-Japanese War it had been possible to maintain a policy of neutrality since both conflicts resolved themselves relatively quickly and without impacting heavily on public opinion in the United States – even if popular support for Japan did cause the administration some discomfort in the latter case. In Cuba Cleveland and Olney were confronted with a conflict that was both seemingly never-ending – since neither the rebels nor the Spanish government had the military might to defeat the other – and also of enormous popular interest due to the island's proximity to the United States and the strong human and economic ties between the two. President McKinley would ultimately confront this issue by taking the nation to war, but even he did not rush into war and in fact followed a policy not dissimilar to Cleveland's for over a year. Indeed, his War Message of April 11, 1898, is notable for its expression of the exact dilemma that had faced Cleveland between acting within the constraints of international law and intervening in order to end the destruction and loss of life. It is notable though that McKinley's War Message placed a considerably greater emphasis on the humanitarian costs of the rebellion, while also directly arguing that “victory for either side seems impracticable.”¹⁰⁹ This difference would prove crucial. Where Cleveland had repeatedly refused to intervene on the grounds that it constituted a breach of Spain's sovereign rights, McKinley used the humanitarian argument to justify intervention as beneficial both to Spain and Cuba in ending the violence.¹¹⁰ McKinley thus was willing to override the constraints of international law on behalf of a higher duty to humanity. This was by no means the only reason McKinley declared to justify war – not to mention those reasons which remained undeclared – but it is an important difference between his stated policy and that of Cleveland while its popularity indicates that popular sentiment had clearly settled behind factors that transcended the bounds of the law.

Welch has argued that “Cleveland's Cuban policy was deeply flawed by an anti-Cuban bias.”¹¹¹ This is open to debate: undoubtedly Cleveland and Olney distrusted the rebels and were deeply troubled by their policy of destroying the island's agricultural and industrial infrastructure. Indeed, in 1898, Cleveland described them as “the most inhuman and barbarous cut-throats in the world”.¹¹² However, it might be fairer to suggest that both

¹⁰⁹ William McKinley, ‘War Message’, April 11, 1898, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898*, pp. 757, 754

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 754

¹¹¹ Welch, *Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, p. 198

¹¹² Cleveland to Olney, April 26, 1898, Reel 59, Olney Papers, MD, LC

men were less biased against the rebels than distrustful of any situation which might result in widespread disorder. Olney, in particular, certainly contemplated the prospect of a civil war fought along racial lines in the wake of a Spanish withdrawal. Beyond this, though, the administration's methods may give an unfair impression of bias against the rebel leadership. The decisions to concentrate efforts at achieving a settlement on negotiations with the Spanish government and the refusal to acknowledge rebel belligerency should not be taken as signs of anti-Cuban bias, but purely as the result of the legalist foreign policy which necessitated working with the sovereign power and did not allow interaction with the rebels after their failure to establish a viable government. It could also be reasonably suggested that the failure to establish a viable government may have itself resulted in the ever-conservative President, who was never likely to look kindly upon those who attacked the existing social order without attempting to create one of their own, hardening his stance against the rebels. Welch also states that "[n]either Cleveland nor Secretary Olney understood the sources and strength of Cuban nationalism," and in this case he is undeniably correct.¹¹³ Having refused to intervene either directly with American force or indirectly through the recognition of Cuban belligerency, Cleveland fell back on a plan for political reforms aimed at granting autonomy which was always unlikely to gain the approval of the rebels and became less likely to do so as the conflict continued. Thus the administration found itself trapped by its own methods: unwilling to intervene and unable to play the honest broker between two irreconcilable opponents.

By comparison, the administration's domestic opponents were much freer in their approach to policymaking. For the most part they were far less concerned than the President by the niceties of international law and even by the prospect of war. The latter possibility was clearly a major concern for Cleveland and Olney – as shown by their efforts to rein in Fitzhugh Lee and quash his suggestions for stationing warships in Cuban waters – but the fear was considerably more complex than simple anxiety at the possibility of American defeat. As Cleveland stated in a letter to Olney at the outbreak of the War of 1898

My only relief from the sick feeling which these thoughts induce consists ... in the hope, almost amounting expectation, that we shall find Spain so weak and inefficient that the war will be short and that the result may not be much worse than a depreciation of national standing before the world abroad, and at home - - demoralization of our peoples [sic] character, much demagoguery and humbug, great additions to our public burdens and the exposure of scandalous operations.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Welch, *Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*, p. 198

¹¹⁴ Cleveland to Olney, April 26, 1898, Olney Papers, MD, LC

From a modern viewpoint this reluctance to go to war, even when victory seemed likely from the outset, is admirable, but popular opinion of the 1890s did not necessarily agree. While the administration's policy gradually evolved to the extent where the annual message of December 1896 contained a warning that American neutrality could not be guaranteed to continue indefinitely, the wishes of Congress – as expressed in the resolutions debated in the House and the Senate – were always for an entirely different level of action. Perhaps the most striking example of this difference is that while the wisdom of Cleveland's refusal to acknowledge Cuban belligerency on the grounds that they had not proven their capacity for self-governance was born out by the assumption of governmental functions by the rebel military the Cameron Resolution sought to proclaim Cuban independence in the winter of 1896-97 without regard to the legal niceties of such a move (or, for that matter, the fate of the Cuban people who would be left with a military dictatorship of dubious governmental capacity). Thus Cuba marks not simply a failure of the legalist approach to foreign policy, but also its repudiation. As Senators rejected such a constricted approach to policymaking, the Democratic party rejected Cleveland and disowned his works. Foreign policy issues only played a relatively minor role in this decision, but the legalist approach to foreign policy was one of the resultant casualties since no one would remain to carry on its adaptation and evolution even in opposition.

The question is often asked whether Cleveland would have gone to war in 1898 had he still been President. Leaving aside the combination of factors that rendered any such possibility hugely unlikely, the question is unhelpful for other reasons. A major factor in the outbreak of war was the destruction of the U.S.S. *Maine* in Havana harbour on February 15, 1898, which a subsequent investigation blamed on a Spanish mine. This calamity was precisely what Cleveland had resolutely avoided by refusing to send a warship to Cuba in the previous two years. Without that trigger it seems highly unlikely that Cleveland would have changed his resolute stance against what he considered to be illegal intervention while there is little to suggest that the rebels would alter their policies sufficiently to justify a recognition of their belligerency. Indeed, even if we were to include the destruction of the *Maine* in such a scenario it may not have been sufficient to bring about war since as late as March 27, 1898, Cleveland wrote “[n]otwithstanding warlike indications, I cannot rid myself of the belief that war will be averted. There would be infinitely more credit and political capital in avoiding war when so imminent than to carry it on even well.”¹¹⁵ The President's hope that the insurgents might be convinced to accept political reforms as a basis for a peace settlement was naive in 1897, but there was little

¹¹⁵ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, March 27, 1898, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

else that he could do within his own template for action. It is doubtful, therefore, that Cleveland would have taken the United States to war, but how the conflict would have been resolved under such circumstances is unknowable. By contrast, it is often forgotten that Cleveland's policy towards Cuba presented a useful foundation for President McKinley for his first year in office. It was not lost on Cleveland who ruefully noted the irony in a letter to Olney: "How differently the present administration is treated though pursuing the same policy as the last."¹¹⁶ Similarly, on February 16, 1898, he wrote that "if the President's back bone holds out our Cuban policy will I believe be fully justified".¹¹⁷ Ultimately Cleveland's verdict on McKinley – a victim of "amiable weakness" – would place him as a critic of his successor's character in a debate which has continued among historians for over a century. Regardless of the truth of this assessment, McKinley was able to use his predecessor's policy as a base from which to take up his own course. Any pride that Cleveland may have taken from this, however, was undoubtedly marred by the subsequent course of events which saw the declaration of war against Spain, the dispatching of American troops to Cuba, and the eventual annexation of the Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico. The knowledge that many members of his own party were loudly applauding some, if not all, of these developments left a bitter taste.

¹¹⁶ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, November 11, 1897, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹¹⁷ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, February 16, 1898, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Conclusion

Foreign policy was not a priority for Grover Cleveland when he returned to the Executive Mansion on March 4, 1893. His first term in office had demonstrated that he was a domestic-minded president and the ever-increasing financial calamity afflicting the United States in 1893 ensured that there would be no shortage of domestic problems that would require his attention. While Cleveland might have preferred to have devoted the entirety of his second term in office to dealing with these domestic problems, a series of incidents in global affairs provided constant distraction. The fact that Cleveland felt obliged to involve the United States in these incidents is indicative of the nation's growing stature as a world power and the breadth of its interests and contacts overseas, but it also refutes any suggestion that Cleveland himself was purely an isolationist. Although his opposition to American imperialism would remain unwavering until his death, he was not himself purely in favour of isolation and much of the administration's foreign policy would be decidedly internationalist in its attempts to formulate new frameworks through which international disputes might be resolved through methods short of war. Despite these views, however, the formulation of foreign policy was still a decidedly ad hoc affair and, while the same might be said for much of the administration's domestic policy as well, it is clear that domestic issues held priority. It is somewhat ironic then, that Cleveland's domestic troubles would ultimately leave him so bereft of support that foreign relations became the only area in which executive authority remained largely undiminished, if not unchallenged. Perhaps as a result of this repudiation, or out of concern at the growing jingoism in American politics and the press evidenced during the Cuban revolution, it was only in his final months as President that Cleveland sought to put forward a definitive statement of his vision for the future of U.S. foreign policy. That said, his conduct of foreign policy during the preceding three years evidenced clear themes of legalism, morality, and even exceptionalism – in terms of the belief that the United States should hold itself to a higher standard than the great powers of Europe – which were the central planks of this framework for the formulation of policy. In each of the series of foreign policy incidents that took place between March 1893 and February 1897 he attempted to put these ideas into practice and, in so doing, to set out a template for policymakers in the future.

This template came about due to factors – the growth of American industry and commerce, the rise of jingoist sentiment in the American public and the press – which have been identified and debated for decades, but Cleveland's policy itself has been largely

overlooked. In a time of profound change it is easy to dismiss Cleveland as the last of the old guard of 19th Century presidents who enacted policy based on limited interaction with the rest of the world because the nation did not have the power or influence to enact any other. For Cleveland the creation of a policy based around legality and moral justice was a matter of choice, as much rejecting the possibility of a more active policy as embracing a limited one. Cleveland and his Secretaries of State recognised the changing place of the United States in global affairs and aimed to produce a new form of foreign policy which acknowledged and made use of that newfound power without fundamentally abandoning what they perceived as the nation's mission. Perhaps due to the failure of the legalist template to outlast Cleveland's presidency, its distinctiveness has not been previously acknowledged by historians who have tended to either justify Cleveland's actions as part of a larger policy movement the entire late 19th Century period or dismiss them entirely.

The second Cleveland administration's first involvement in foreign affairs began even before the inauguration with the revolution against the native monarchy in Hawaii. The stance taken by the president and Secretary of State Gresham set the tone for all the incidents that followed: a principled insistence that the United States should not interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign nations and that it should not seek to profit from such unauthorised actions even if they had proven successful. It also, however, demonstrated the limits to which the administration was willing to go in order to uphold its principled stance and, ultimately, showed that pragmatism – in the form of recognition of the Hawaiian Republic – would be the final resort if confronted by an unyielding opponent. Similarly, the administration's tentative efforts to extricate the United States from its commitments in Samoa demonstrated a personal wish from Cleveland and Gresham that they might reduce American entanglements abroad, but ultimately proved fruitless. In perhaps the only serious attempt to enact a policy they had desired before the inauguration, lack of political and popular support – and a somewhat half-hearted approach from the administration – meant the attempt to extricate the United States from its commitments in Samoa made little headway.

The Brazilian Naval Revolt set out a framework for how the administration would approach foreign conflicts which affected American interests without directly involving the United States' itself. Specifically it declared that the United States would seek to remain neutral regardless of its interests (although in the case of Brazil the status quo appeared to favour those interests) and only operate within the limits of international law. This policy was confirmed during the Sino-Japanese War in which the administration resisted the

urgings of popular opinion to back Japan and the appeals of other powers to work with them to create a settlement that would be mutually beneficial. In both Brazil and the Sino-Japanese War the administration also balanced the calls of American business to protect trade and the temptation to exploit the situation for commercial gain with their desire to act in a manner which they considered to be both legally and morally right. That said, by seeking in both conflicts to maintain the status quo ante as far as was possible Cleveland and Gresham were to a large extent still acting on behalf of American business even if their scruples regarding direct intervention overseas meant that they rejected any opportunity to actively seek to obtain new markets or more favourable trade deals. Similarly, while the administration's actions in offering American good offices in order to help bring about a peace treaty between China and Japan are evidence of the moral basis to their policy previously seen in Hawaii, it might also be suggested that these efforts ensured that the situation in China remained stable enough to facilitate American trade while also generating good will with both powers which might subsequently generate commercial benefits which did not contradict the president's scruples over intervention in the affairs of another nation. While Cleveland resisted any suggestion of acquiring an area of American influence in China the United States' actions were consistent with his belief in free trade and the power of U.S. industry to compete effectively in the international marketplace.

Closer to home, the Brazilian Naval Revolt had already shown hints of concern at the prospect of European interference in the affairs of American nations and this played a role firstly in Nicaragua and then, more forcefully, in the administration's actions over the Venezuelan Border Dispute. Events in Nicaragua demonstrated both Cleveland's desire to limit direct U.S. involvement in the affairs of other nations and also his readiness to accept limited European intervention if it was justified by international law – possibly due to the recognition that any failure to uphold the law might lead to more damaging interference on a larger scale. They also demonstrated that there was no desire within the Cleveland administration to push for the construction of a trans-isthmian canal. By comparison with Nicaragua the Venezuelan Border Dispute saw the abandoning of cautious diplomacy, but this may have given a false impression of the Cleveland administration's intentions. Regardless of how the dispute came to a head the real aim of American involvement was to protect Venezuela from European encroachment and, by so doing, defend the Monroe Doctrine. While the dispute can be seen as evidence of an increased assertiveness in foreign affairs, the administration's intentions were to uphold the law and shield American nations from European interference, not to expand American control in the region.

Finally, the Cuban revolution of 1895 exposed the limits of the administration's legal and moral framework for foreign policymaking to manage events or bring about a settlement to an intractable problem without direct interference. In an area of great interest to American business and to the American public the administration proved itself to be incapable of exerting the necessary influence to protect American interests or end the suffering of the Cuban population. Similarly, the Cleveland administration's muted response to the attacks on Christians in the Ottoman Empire exposed the inconsistency of a policy which simultaneously sought to uphold the values of morality and legality while minimising American involvement in the affairs of other nations and the Old World in particular.

While the failure to produce a satisfactory outcome to the crises in the Ottoman Empire did not prove costly to the United States in material terms, it did prove costly to the Cleveland administration in terms of public opinion. While gauging public opinion in an age before polling is extremely difficult it is still possible to gain an understanding of the interest of the public in each of these incidents through various means. In particular, while the question of whether the press has the power to form public opinion or merely to reflect it is one that has been the subject of long debate, it seems clear that the events in which the American press showed the greatest interest were, in one form or another, also of interest to the general public. Just as importantly as gauging public opinion directly, it is also possible to discern changes in the administration's attitude toward the cultivation and manipulation of that opinion, from early optimism to final resignation. Cleveland and Gresham entered office with the belief that "public opinion [was] made and controlled by the thoughtful men of the country", but over time this belief was challenged by the rise of jingoism and the power of the press until the point was reached where the administration's actions in Cuba were conducted in the hope that, at best, a silent majority would prove to be in favour and that, at worst, history would judge their course to be the right one.¹ The strength of public interest varied depending on the area of the foreign policy incident in question and the drama surrounding it. There was little press interest in the Brazilian Naval Revolt since it involved relatively few American interests and, more importantly, occurred in a region which was of little interest to the majority of Americans. Brazil and the United States may have shared a hemisphere, but it lacked the immediacy of events in Mexico or the Caribbean. By comparison, while the Sino-Japanese War was a conflict that took place in a distant land, between alien peoples, the longstanding American fascination with East

¹ Walter Q. Gresham to Carl Schurz, October 6, 1893, Reel 2, Walter Quintin Gresham Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Asian culture, and the decades-old dream of China's markets, combined with the excitement of an international war to provoke greater interest from both press and public. Although the administration's approach to the Sino-Japanese War was little different to their approach to the Brazilian Naval Revolt – both being mainly characterised by an insistence on maintaining neutrality even if China and Japan received the benefit of American good offices in achieving a peace settlement where the Brazilian rebels received nothing – the vast difference in public interest made it necessary to take steps to stop American businesses selling arms to the warring parties and even to discourage American citizens volunteering to fight for Japan.

Cleveland demonstrated his ability to inspire popular support during the Venezuelan Border Dispute when his special message to Congress of December 17, 1895, produced a wave of support for his strong stance against Great Britain. If this was an attempt to play to the gallery, however, it was not one which he would repeat during the remainder of his term; while it is impossible to judge his intentions, it seems likely that this unleashing of jingoistic opinion was an unintended – or at least underestimated – consequence of a momentary rashness born out of frustration. If Cleveland did truly aim to use a public mood of which he himself deeply disapproved in order to achieve what he believed to be a just objective, then it would appear that he was sufficiently unnerved by the forces unleashed to ever attempt it again and his later actions were almost studious in their refusal to bow to popular pressure.

In his handling of the Armenian massacres between 1894 and 1896 Cleveland once again rejected the calls of the press and Congress – as well as missionary societies – to intervene in what he perceived to be a European matter. These events showed that the American press were becoming increasingly interested in humanitarian issues, but also demonstrated that, fundamentally, Cleveland still had sufficient support to justify his reluctance to involve the United States in affairs of the Old World. Any satisfaction he may have gained from this, however, must have been of little comfort when the Armenian crisis was subsumed by the unfolding situation in Cuba in 1895 and 1896. In their handling of Cuba it is clear that Cleveland and Olney were fully prepared to act in the manner which they believed to be correct in spite of public opinion. While to some extent admirable leadership, this refusal to intervene in events which combined both drama and immediacy left the administration isolated and besieged by the press and Congress while not providing any concrete course of action that might have brought the conflict to an end. The administration may have been guilty of a failure to fully educate the public of their intentions and objectives, but it is highly unlikely that better information would have

produced a swell of support. This is not to say that Cleveland was completely bereft of popular or media support in 1896 – in a nation strongly divided along both partisan and regional lines his policies would always find some element of support, a fact illustrated by the letters of support which appear in the Cleveland Papers after every major decision – but, with the Republican party and press implacably opposed to almost any move he made, the failure to carry significant support from his own party outside the North East eventually robbed him of political capital. Somewhat ironically, the administration's own actions in raising the Monroe Doctrine in the public consciousness may have helped to undermine its position in Cuba by creating a popular sentiment strongly opposed to any move seen as facilitating the extension of European colonialism. Ultimately, though, Cleveland was able to maintain a rigid adherence to his chosen position because, in the wake of his repudiation by his own party, he had nothing to lose. That said, there is little evidence that public opinion would have prompted him to change a position which he believed to be mandated by international law, while it should be remembered that, in the end, it was domestic factors that played the deciding role in destroying Cleveland's standing in the Democratic Party, not his international policies.

The increasing public interest in how the United States conducted itself in world affairs was bound up in a range of factors which stemmed from – and helped to fuel – the nation's rise to the position of a world power. As a growing industrial economy devoured more raw materials and demanded new markets for its products, the United States found itself with commercial interests and citizens in an ever-increasing number of far-flung locations, all demanding some measure of protection by the government. The expansion of the navy in order to facilitate the protection of these commercial interests led to the problem of fuelling and supplying warships around the world and raised the possibility – largely, but not entirely, rejected by Cleveland – of acquiring bases in strategic locations which would then themselves require protection. The United States' economic power also served to create foreign policy problems, with the revolutions in both Hawaii and Cuba being directly related to changes to U.S. tariffs; a clear sign that the nation was now incapable of remaining a passive observer of world affairs. Meanwhile the century-old tradition of American missionary evangelism continued, placing more American men and women in situations of serious potential danger. All of these factors combined to give the United States a direct stake in far more incidents – a few of which American interests played a direct role in creating – in a much more diverse variety of places with public demand for action – fuelled by the increasingly powerful press – ensuring that problems

could not simply be ignored. All things considered, Cleveland and his cabinet acquitted themselves well to the series of problems with which they were presented. Despite following a largely reactionary policy the administration succeeded in its primary goals of protecting American lives overseas, avoiding unnecessary entanglements, preventing increased European interference in the Americas, and not being sucked into any conflict. Secondary goals such as the moral duty to help resolve the Sino-Japanese War could also be seen as a success although there were also humanitarian failures in Turkey and Cuba. These latter two cases were the result of the administration's successful efforts not to interfere in the internal affairs of other nations, but correspondence of Cleveland and Olney suggests that neither man was entirely satisfied with upholding principle in the face of human suffering.

Cuba also marks the major failure of another of the administration's key priorities: the protection of American property overseas. While the rigid adherence to conservative principles served the administration well for the most part, it proved to be fundamentally flawed when it came to protecting American property in Cuba due to the inability of the Spanish government to fulfil its own obligations. Indeed, it could be argued that the Cleveland administration's greatest foreign policy successes came from its rare moments of activism: the actions of the U.S.S. *Detroit* in Rio de Janeiro harbour – which were not directly orchestrated by Washington – and the firm intervention in the Venezuelan Border Dispute. This raises a question as to whether the fundamental successes of the administration's policy were indeed a result of that policy or simply an inevitable consequence of the United States' circumstances as a new world power. While Cleveland's minimalist handling of the incidents in Brazil and Nicaragua produced the desired result to such an extent that his actions might reasonably be called adroit, the failure to bring about his preferred solution in Hawaii, and inability to create any form of settlement in Cuba suggest that more assertive action was necessary. In Brazil and Nicaragua European powers were willing to acknowledge the United States' passive regional authority – at least to the extent of not attempting to interfere in New World affairs directly – while in the Venezuelan Border Dispute Great Britain showed itself to be willing to acknowledge, at least tacitly, that same regional authority in order to allow it to focus on more pressing matters in Europe and Asia. Throughout the administration's time in office the question of European interference was a constant factor, being seen in Hawaii, Brazil, China, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba. In Hawaii, Venezuela, and Cuba direct warnings of varying degrees of hostility were made to European powers that the United States would not look kindly upon any attempt to interfere in events which were perceived to be within

American jurisdiction. Significantly, while little idea was given of the potential consequences of ignoring these warnings (with the partial exception of the Venezuelan Border Dispute), none of the European powers considered it wise to risk a challenge.

In this way Cleveland, placed in a strong position by burgeoning U.S. power and the increasingly complex situation in Europe can be argued to have been playing with the deck stacked in his favour. That said, increased assertiveness in itself could not be said to have been a magic bullet; the administration was also frustrated in its more activist efforts to alter the United States' involvement with other world powers, firstly in the failure to extricate the nation from its agreements in Samoa, and secondly in the failure to promote an internationalist system of legal resolution of disputes through the General Arbitration Treaty. In these cases a more active stance was not backed with public or political support. Overall, therefore, while the administration might be accused of not fully exploiting a geopolitical and strategic situation which strongly favoured the United States to achieve their aims, the fact that those aims did not always carry the support of either the American electorate or, perhaps more significant, that of Congress meant that such achievement was always going to be limited. In addition, it should be noted that this increased national power carried an unexpected price in the form of a growing willingness of other nations to seek to court – and even to exploit – the United States' support in their disputes with European powers. This issue, while not a new one in the 1890s, was particularly evident in the incidents in Nicaragua and Venezuela and one of the administration's minor successes came in establishing a clear policy which protected American nations against arbitrary European interference while insisting that those same nations lived up to their responsibilities. Cleveland, Gresham and Olney had notable success in reaffirming the United States' authority over the Americas – even if that authority was exercised by them in a profoundly passive manner – and otherwise maintained a principled foreign policy which had limited goals and, for the most part, achieved them. As with so many other Cleveland policies, however, it could be argued that this strong stance formed the basis for the more assertive Caribbean policies of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson.

While it would be wrong to say that Cleveland had no interest in foreign affairs, it is clear that his first priority throughout his second term in office was battling the nation's economic troubles. While these efforts occasionally had bearing on foreign relations – tariff reform in particular – there is no evidence to suggest that foreign policy was ever enlisted to attempt to combat the economic depression. Cleveland acted repeatedly to protect American commerce and its assets overseas, but efforts to expand trade were

largely rhetorical. This being the case, it is somewhat ironic that, by the summer of 1896, Cleveland's failures in handling these domestic issues – and the severe loss of political capital involved in passing the Wilson-Gorman Tariff and the government bond issues – had left him so bereft of political support that foreign policy was virtually the only area in which he had freedom of action. Indeed, one significant success of Cleveland's foreign policy was in maintaining that presidential control of foreign policy. Olney's actions in bluntly rejecting any notion of Congress' right to dictate aspects of foreign policy to the President may have been something of a pyrrhic victory at the time – given that one reason why Congress retreated was that Cleveland was entering his final months in office and had lost so much political credibility that there was little to be gained by attacking him – but it can be seen as a significant event in the creation of the imperial presidency. While Olney's defence of presidential authority did nothing to enlarge the powers of the office, it did confirm the primacy of the executive in foreign affairs, thus paving the way for the more expansive interpretations of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson.

Given this disinterest in foreign policy matters it is perhaps surprising that Cleveland could be said to have set out a template for the United States' approach to foreign affairs in a changing world. In this vein, it is important to recognise the distinction between template and grand strategy. Cleveland undoubtedly held strong views about how, when, and where the United States should conduct itself in world affairs, but the template his administration created had little to do with specifics. The Cleveland template set out a foundation of legal rights and obligations, like the observation of neutrality in foreign disputes, and a recognition (and defence) of certain key pseudo-legal principles such as the Monroe Doctrine while also going some way towards promoting peaceful methods of conflict resolution, most notably arbitration. It should be particularly noted that the template was not a coherent project throughout Cleveland's second term, but instead came together on an ad hoc basis as each new crisis was addressed. Indeed it might be argued that the template was only promoted to the public as the best course for American policy in future after the repudiation of the administration at the Democratic National Convention in 1896. Undoubtedly some elements were intended to lay the foundations for future policy. The General Arbitration Treaty was negotiated with a clear hope that it might be an example to other nations and in February, 1896, Olney persuaded Congress to appropriate the necessary funds to produce a new digest of international law for the nation.² It was only in regards to the Cuban problem, however, that Cleveland specifically suggested the direction that American foreign policy should take after his departure from office.

² Richard Olney to William H. Phillips, February 22, 1897, Reel 50, Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Of course, Cleveland's template did not form the foundation to American foreign policy that he may have hoped. Having retired to Princeton, New Jersey, after leaving office, the former president became something of a political outsider, expressing disappointment – often to Olney, who remained a close friend – with both his Republican successor and his former colleagues in the Democratic Party. It was a situation that frustrated him, at one point writing that “... I have an idea that there are not many people who care to hear from me at this time. That's why I stay at home and mope.”³ While in the immediate aftermath of leaving office Cleveland was able to inform Olney that he was “on the whole much gratified by the apparent conviction among the people, that the new administration after all could find but little to amend” in American policy toward Cuba, his battle between hope and scepticism is illustrated by an extract from a letter to Olney in the summer of 1897 which stated:

Did you ever see such a preposterous thing as the Hawaiian business? The papers I read are mostly strongly opposed to it and there ought to be soberness and decency enough in the Senate to save us from launching upon the dangerous policy which is foreshadowed by the pending treaty; but I am prepared for almost anything.⁴

Cleveland's bitterness at the manner of his departure from office is similarly displayed by another letter to Olney two months later in which he denounced “the silly exhibition our government is making in its conduct of foreign affairs,” before declaring:

I am willing however to confess to enough of the “old Adam”, to feel a little bit of satisfaction in a situation that crowds this bitter dose down the throats of the dirty liars who attempted so hard to decry and depreciate your dignified, decent and proper management of our foreign relations.

The present administration must soon find that the Executive Department cannot drift through public duty on a wave of applause and adulation and that the day comes when popular tickling and humbug will not do.⁵

By February, 1898, Cleveland was happy to note that, in his opinion, “popular sentiment seems to be vindicating our ideas on certain unfinished public business” such as Hawaii and even Cuba, but he also noted, rather mournfully, that “[a]s parties are now organised however neither side is inclined to even whisper approbation of our work.”⁶ Any good

³ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, January 16, 1898, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁴ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, April 6, 1897, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, June 9, 1897, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁵ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, August 12, 1897, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁶ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, February 16, 1898, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

cheer was dashed by the declaration of war against Spain. While he did not accuse President McKinley of anything worse than “amiable weakness”, he declared it to be “the old story of good intentions and motives sacrificed to false considerations of complaisance and party harmony.”⁷ He also specifically took issue with the “strut” of both Fitzhugh Lee and Theodore Roosevelt and feared the consequences of siding with the “inhuman and barbarous cut-throats” among the Cuban insurgents. Typically, he took refuge in the hope that:

we shall find Spain so weak and inefficient that the war will be short and that the result may not be much worse than a depreciation of national standing before the world abroad, and at home - - demoralization of our peoples [sic] character, much demagoguery and humbug, great additions to our public burdens and the exposure of scandalous operations.

In the event, he would be disappointed in this hope, being prompted by the acquisition of the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico to join the Anti-Immigration League, referring to the annexation of Hawaii as an “outrage”, and bitterly bemoaning the actions of the American army against Filipino rebels before noting “anybody who says this is not a Christian nation or that our President is not the very pink of perfection of a Christian, is a liar and an un-American knave.”⁸

Cleveland’s disappointment with the Democratic Party would be, if anything, greater than that with McKinley’s foreign policy – not least because he believed McKinley’s conduct of foreign affairs, among other things, meant that he could be beaten. He despaired of the still divided Party being able to put up a strong challenge and his lingering anger at his treatment in 1896 is evident from his declaration almost three years later that “I am afraid [the Party] will never be in winning condition until we have had a regular knockdown fight among ourselves, and succeeded in putting the organization in democratic hands and reviving democratic principles in our platform.”⁹ Personally, though, he had little confidence of such an outcome, stating:

I don’t believe our people, notwithstanding the disgust the Administration is breeding, are ready to accept Bryan and the Chicago platform and if they are, what comfort is there in that for decent, sound, democrats?

⁷ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, April 26, 1898, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁸ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, April 26, 1898, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, April 12, 1899, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁹ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, March 19, 1899, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

He saw no reason to predict anything other than another Bryan candidacy in 1900, and he would be right. By the summer of 1900 his response to a suggestion that he should run for President again was bitter: “Let them that got into this scrape, get out of it.”¹⁰

The 1890s was the last time when it could be said that the foreign policy of the United States was directed by only a handful of men. Subsequently, the spreading of American commerce and the acquisition of overseas territories necessitated an increase in both the size and the professionalism of the State Department and the diplomatic corps as a whole. Having grown to become a great power, the United States needed a bureaucracy capable of handling its newfound responsibilities. While this professional bureaucracy did produce the welcome effect for government of having more reliable and better qualified representatives overseas in greater numbers – an increasing number of whom would be contactable by telegraph – thus making flights of individualist foreign policymaking much less common than had been the case in the 19th Century, it also increased the complexity in foreign policy formulation making any final policy less clearly the work of any one person or group of people. American enthusiasm for international involvement would fluctuate over the next half century – when the Second World War and its aftermath would comprehensively change the manner in which foreign policy was created – the machinery of government would always be larger and more complex than that of the 1890s. In many respects, however, the possibility for a political elite to control American foreign policy was already coming to an end in the 1890s as business interests and the press exerted an ever-increasing influence on policy. As events in Brazil in 1893-94 and Nicaragua in 1894-95 indicated, American business interests served to provide an extra dimension to U.S. involvement in foreign crisis. Similarly, the response of American business to the Sino-Japanese War demonstrated that old dreams of Far Eastern markets were still very much alive, while the enthusiasm for a trans-isthmian canal confirmed the existence of a widespread belief that the Pacific offered a new marketplace to be exploited. Perhaps more importantly, events of Cleveland’s second term demonstrated the changing disposition of the public and the press. Whether the press is considered to reflect public opinion or to shape it – or some combination of the two – it is clear from the reaction to the administration’s policies in relation to Armenia and Cuba that the popular mood was increasingly in favour of an active American involvement in world affairs. In an early manifestation of what would a century later be termed the ‘CNN effect’ the revolution in communications technology allowed the press to provide the public with daily coverage of

¹⁰ Grover Cleveland to Richard Olney, June 25, 1900, Reel 59, Richard Olney Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

events taking place thousands of miles away thus generating greater interest both in the specific events in question and in the wider world generally. With a domestic political arena divided by lines of both party and region – and including highly opinionated figures such as Senators John Tyler Morgan of Alabama and Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, both of whom pursued agendas beyond the limits of party loyalty – Congress too expressed a strong interest in foreign affairs. All this combined to place considerably greater pressure on the President and the Secretary of State to alter their foreign policy. Cleveland may have bemoaned the decision to go to war with Spain as a failure for the nation, but it seems doubtful that even he would have been able to withstand the pressure to act that emanated from Congress, the press, and the public after the destruction of the *Maine* in Havana harbour.

This growing power of non-governmental influences on foreign policy would undermine Cleveland's new template for American foreign policy, but it would not be the ultimate cause of its downfall. By comparison with the disastrous loss of support for the administration's domestic policies even the refusal to act in Cuba was only charged as a secondary failing. That said, the failure to harness the power of the press and public opinion in support of the legalist template was a major reason why it did not long survive under the McKinley administration. While it might be argued that Cleveland's basic approach to affairs in Cuba proved to be a useful foundation to McKinley's own policy, there was little that could be done to avoid war as events spiralled out of control. Just as damaging, the failure to generate public support for the General Arbitration Treaty – the most concrete element of Cleveland's legacy – before leaving office meant that there was little opposition to the Senate's rejection of the treaty.

In the final analysis, the effort by Cleveland, Gresham, and Olney to provide a new direction for United States' foreign policy was a noble one, but doomed to failure from the beginning. While the template came into being through a series of ad hoc decisions, it developed in an essentially coherent manner throughout the term, and by 1896 had clearly become a matter of some importance to a President alarmed at the rising jingoist sentiment in Congress and the press. It would be this changing public opinion that ensured that the legalist approach to foreign policy did not survive the Cleveland administration's devastating eviction from office in March, 1897, with the United States adopting a very different course of colonial acquisition and military intervention shortly afterwards. For a brief period a handful of policymakers had been able to formulate and enact a new approach to foreign policy, but ultimately the same forces that had combined to make that new approach necessary combined to reject it.

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