

The First Moroccan Crisis

The First Moroccan Crisis is seen as one of the long term causes of World War One as it led to a breakdown in trust between the major European powers. Morocco became the centre of the world's attention between 1905 and 1906 and the crisis clearly indicated that Germany's relation with France was at best fragile.

In 1905 Morocco was one of the few African states not occupied by a European power. It had been ruled by Sultan Moulay al Hasan from 1873 to 1894 and he had carefully played off one European power against another to such an extent that in 1880 Morocco had been given what amounted to a guarantee of independence by the Madrid Convention. The Sultan was succeeded by Abdul Aziz who proved to be a weak ruler. He lost control over the Berber people in the Atlas Mountains and they fought to assert what they believed to be their rights. The Berbers were so successful that by 1903, Fez, the capital, was under attack and Aziz controlled only a small part of the country.

In 1899 France made its first claim to have control over Morocco. The French Foreign Minister of the day, Théophile Delcassé, made his own views very plain. In December 1900 and again in November 1901, Delcassé won the secret agreement of Italy that Morocco should come under the control of the French. However, the issue became public when Delcassé approached Spain over French claims to Morocco. The Spanish government insisted on informing the British government. With the matter now in the public domain, Delcassé formally approached the British government with his belief that France should take control over Morocco. The British government initially refused to support Delcassé but they changed their minds in April 1904 when the two governments agreed that France could have a mandate over Morocco as long as the French government publicly renounced any remaining interests in Egypt. In October 1904, Delcassé got the agreement of the Spanish government as well after offering Spain territories in the southwest of Morocco.

However, Delcassé had not got any agreement from one nation – Germany. Kaiser Wilhelm II had publicly stated that Germany was only interested in having equal economic rights in Morocco. This was a view not shared by his chancellor, Prince von Bülow and the German Foreign Ministry. The Kaiser's senior politicians were a lot more concerned that Wilhelm was about the projected expansion of French power in the Mediterranean Sea and North Africa. Von Bülow targeted the Sultan of Morocco – Abdul Aziz. He tried to encourage the Sultan to stand up to the French in an effort to appear a strong ruler to his people. In February 1905, Aziz gathered around him those Moroccan notables who still supported him. Aziz told them that he put his faith in Allah and his new-found German friendship in his stand against the French. In the same month a representative from France, Georges Saint-René Taillandier, told Aziz that the French had a programme of reform for Morocco and that it had the support of Spain, Italy and Great Britain. The German government then turned to the United States, which had also signed the 1880 Madrid Convention, and asked President Theodore Roosevelt for his opinion on the issue. Roosevelt said little and was non-committal. But this was interpreted differently by von Bülow who believed that Roosevelt had given his support to Germany in the matter. Bülow then decided to show Aziz that Germany was very much on his side. Wilhelm II was on a Mediterranean cruise holiday at the time. Bülow planned for the Kaiser to visit Tangier as part of his holiday. However, to von Bülow the visit was to have far more meaning than a mere visit. He saw it as a very visual demonstration of German support for Aziz.

In fact, Wilhelm II was not over-keen to visit Tangier as he believed that his life was in danger. He only actually visited the port once his head of security had personally visited the city and told him that such a visit was safe. Only then did Wilhelm land in Tangier. He rode to the German Legation where he addressed those who had assembled there – including the French. Wilhelm announced that he hoped Morocco would remain an independent state ruled over by Sultan Aziz. He also announced that Germany knew how to best safeguard her interests in Morocco and he expected everyone to recognise these interests and not threaten them. This remark was undoubtedly targeted at the French. It is known that the Kaiser was advised by his general staff that a pre-emptive attack on the French would be successful. However, Wilhelm's politicians though otherwise and their wise advice prevailed.

The national press in France was horrified by these events as they had assumed that French control over Morocco was a formality. Delcassé also openly spoke out against the German move in Tangier and the comments made by the Kaiser. In London the government was also angered by the German move and made it known that Great Britain would not accept a German port in Morocco as it could too easily be turned into a full-blown naval port that would threaten Gibraltar. Edward VII made it known that he was angered by what he saw as a cheap but potentially dangerous publicity stunt by his nephew, Wilhelm, in Tangier. Edward assured Paris that the government there had the support of Great Britain.

In May 1905 it was agreed that an international conference should be held on Morocco. Delcassé resigned from the French government in protest as he believed that Germany was now calling the tune. He believed that the issue would end not with French control over Morocco but with a situation whereby Germany would gain some influence over the country, when in the past she had very little if any.

There was an agreement that a conference should take place but it appeared as if Germany had the upper hand in the affair as they were dealing with an inexperienced French Prime Minister, Maurice Rouvier and the more calculating Delcassé was no longer in the French government.

But this was not the case. Rouvier's resolution was bolstered when he was given the support of Great Britain and America – Roosevelt stated that he would do nothing with regards to Morocco unless it first had the support of France. Italy also made it clear that they would do nothing unless it had the agreement of the French. Lord Lansdowne at the British Foreign Office gave the German ambassador in London a direct warning: that he could not give a guarantee how Great Britain would react if Germany attacked France. From a seeming position of strength, Germany was forced into negotiating with the French over the agenda for the conference. Germany also agreed to a pre-conference agreement: that Germany would recognise the "special interests" France had in Morocco and that Germany would not pursue anything that went against the "legitimate interests" of France in Morocco. Such an agreement could have been of great embarrassment to Bülow and could have deepened the problem as the more hard-line politicians in Berlin could have accused him of giving in to Paris and making Germany a laughing stock. However, it was glossed over when Roosevelt contacted Wilhelm II to congratulate him on his skilful handling of the crisis. Roosevelt knew that Wilhelm had a huge ego and if he was identified as the man who had brought both France and Germany together around a table he would ensure that von Bülow accepted the terms laid out even before the conference began. On July 8th 1905, Germany and France signed the pre-

conference agreement. The conference itself was scheduled for January 1906 and was to be held in Algeciras.

The Algeciras Conference of 1906

The Algeciras Conference was held as a result of the First Moroccan Crisis that started in 1905. The conference at Algeciras started on January 16th 1906 and all the major European powers were represented there as well as the Americans. The Algeciras Conference had one aim: to decide what was to be done with regards to Morocco, one of the few African nations that had not been taken over by a European power.

The two main protagonists at Algeciras were France and Germany. However, it soon became very clear to Germany that other European powers had sided with France – Britain, Spain and Italy had all come to a prior agreement as to what should happen to Morocco. These four nations had decided which Moroccan cities would be governed by which European power: Casablanca, Rabat and Larache. For example, Tangier was to be governed by a Franco-Spanish military force commanded by a Frenchman. None of this had been put before the Germans and their delegation felt as if it had been deliberately left out of the discussions – which, in fact, it had.

Ironically, this did nothing to harm European relations as Wilhelm II had a new idea as to how Europe should diplomatically proceed. Despite the obvious delicate relationship between Germany and France, Wilhelm wanted to bring France into an alliance. While Wilhelm may have had a huge ego which some in Europe knew how to play on, he was not a complete fool with regards to diplomatic niceties. Wilhelm's plan was simple. By agreeing to many of the French demands in Morocco, he would bring them into a full alliance with Germany. Coupled with this would be a third nation – Russia. At this time Russia had recently lost a war to Japan and had experienced the 1905 Revolution. Wilhelm believed, with some justification, that Nicholas II of Russia needed to be seen as a European 'big player' and that an alliance between Germany, France and Russia would satiate this desire and give the impression to the Tsar that Russia was still seen as an important ally by the major European players. So Wilhelm's conciliatory gestures at Algeciras had a purpose to them. But what was that purpose? Wilhelm wanted to diplomatically isolate Great Britain, which he believed was Germany's biggest rival in Europe – economically and militarily. If France and Russia were tied to Germany, Great Britain would be left with Spain and Italy – neither of whom were seen as major powers in the same league as France and Russia.

The German delegation at Algeciras was encouraged by Berlin to offer more than the French had asked for with regards to Morocco. Or they were ordered to agree to suggestions made by Rouvier. For example, Rouvier suggested that after three to four years after a signed agreement at Algeciras, France should get a police mandate over the whole of Morocco. The German delegation agreed with this but German Chancellor von Bülow did not as he was not privy to the fact that it had come from Rouvier. In fact, Wilhelm II criticised von Bülow when the Chancellor openly spoke out in favour of a more hard-line approach to France over the Morocco issue. By now Wilhelm was looking for a quadruple alliance as he wanted to bring Turkey into his plans. He did not want anything to endanger his plans and he believed that von Bülow's remarks about the French would do just this.

The Algeiras Conference became a lot more than a conference on Morocco. The historian D C Watt believes that Morocco actually became of secondary importance as the major powers jockeyed to get alliances wrapped up. On paper, Wilhelm's plan of either a triple or quadruple alliance made sound sense as if either of them ever came to fruition, Great Britain would have undoubtedly become diplomatically isolated. However, the plan had two weaknesses. The first was the constant lack of trust between the players; after the numerous verbal battles between France and Germany, it must have come as something of a shock for the French to find that they had a prospective ally in Germany and that Germany was actively courting this. The second was Great Britain who in January 1906 got a new Liberal government. The new Foreign Secretary was Sir Edward Grey, who from 1892 to 1895 had gained great experience as to how German foreign policy worked when he was an Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office.

Grey realised that Britain would be isolated from the European great powers if Germany's plan worked out. Grey also knew that France was the key player in the plan. Therefore he approached the French ambassador in London, Jules Cambon, and told him that France could expect British help if the Algeiras Conference broke down with all issues unresolved and Germany threatened France. Grey would not give a specific statement that this support equated to military support but he did inform Cambon about the secret contacts between the British and French military staffs that had been occurring – meetings that were kept secret from the whole British Cabinet until 1911. Cambon informed Paris that France could expect full British support throughout the negotiations at Algeiras. This was the first breakdown in the German plan to bring France into an alliance.

The conference itself did not go well. Three camps appeared: France, Britain, Russia and Spain against Austria-Hungary and Italy while Germany appeared isolated by herself. Wilhelm's plan disappeared during the conference. Even Austria-Hungary told Germany to act less like a bully as to them the Germans wanted every decision on their terms.

It is now known the von Bülow believed as early as February 1906 that there would be no successful outcome at Algeiras and that the only thing he had to do was to save Germany's prestige. On March 27th, he accepted an Austrian proposal that the policing of Moroccan ports should be left to the French and Spanish who, in turn, would be overseen by a Swiss inspector who would report back to the Sultan. The Algeiras Conference ended on April 7th 1906.

The Germans got very little out of the conference. The plan to create a triple alliance or even a quadruple alliance to isolate Great Britain failed. Arguably, by the end of the conference, Britain and France had even closer ties to one another. A German presence in North Africa had also failed to materialise. In France, many nationalists saw Algeiras as a triumph. The French media portrayed Germany as an inferior nation, much to the concern of the more experienced politicians in Paris. In Germany, there was a belief that they had been outplayed by the British and French and blame was heaped on von Bülow. The German High Command revised the Schlieffen Plan accordingly and pushed for the government in Berlin to adopt a more aggressive stance if only to redeem Germany within Europe. It is probable that the failure of the German politicians at Algeiras led to an increase in the influence the military had over the Kaiser at the expense of politicians. Great Britain realised that she had to continue cultivating relations not only with France but with other European powers.

The Algeiras Conference may have 'resolved' the crisis in Morocco but it had another far more important impact: the outcome clearly defined Europe into certain camps. At this

conference Germany publicly lost out. There were many in Berlin who promised that it would be the last time that this would happen. In future a diplomatic resolution would not even be considered as there were those who believed that Germany's military strength was such that diplomacy would not be needed in any future European disagreements.

The Bosnian Crisis

The Bosnian Crisis of 1908-09 was very much the precursor of the events in the Balkans that spilled over into the assassination of Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo in June 1914. In this sense the Bosnian Crisis needs to be analysed within the same context as the assassination that was to trigger World War One.

The Bosnian Crisis was a very complicated issue that involved nine nations. In 1878, Austria-Hungary occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina with the agreement of the rest of Europe (Treaty of Berlin). Bosnia-Herzegovina were the two most northwesterly provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Austria-Hungary signed an agreement that the Sultan's sovereignty over the area would be upheld but few expected Austria-Hungary to adhere to this. In fact, Austria-Hungary quickly made plans to annex the provinces. However, annexation had not been agreed at the Berlin meeting of Europe's powers and the whole question remained dormant until after 1900.

If Austria-Hungary wanted to annex Bosnia-Herzegovina, she would have needed the full agreement of other European powers, especially Russia. In 1906, Austria-Hungary was generally experiencing problems among the people in the Balkans that it ruled over. The Austro-Hungarian Empire principally contained Croats, Slovenes, Serbians, Albanians and Macedonians and the whole issue of independence for these peoples reared its head.

Russia had lost a great amount of international prestige when she was defeated by Japan in the 1905 war in the Far East. The destruction of the Russian Navy at Tushima Bay was seen as a humiliating defeat. Russia, therefore, needed to restore her standing in Europe and in Foreign Minister Alexander Izvolsky they had a man who was determined to do just this. The Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Baron Lexa von Aehrenthal, also wanted to show that his nation was more than a mere satellite of Germany. He was willing to negotiate with Russia on their issues and the two men met in September 1908. Austria-Hungary wanted Russian support for the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina while Russia wanted Austrian support for the ending of the 1841 convention that banned men-of-wars from using the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, effectively trapping the Russian Navy in the Black Sea. If Russia had broken this convention with no support it would have provoked Britain who had a major naval presence in the Mediterranean; however, with support from Austria-Hungary, this would have been less of an issue for the Russians, though still provocative to Europe's major naval power.

When both men met they put forward each nation's aspirations. What actually happened at the meeting is open to dispute, as the Russians never released their official minutes of the meeting. The Austrians did and claim that an agreement was reached that each would support the other. Later the Russians did not dispute this but Izvolsky did claim that Austria gave no hint that the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina would be "imminent" and he interpreted what was said as meaning that annexation would take place but that it would be sometime in the future.

Bosnia-Herzegovina was annexed on October 6th 1908. This occurred before Izvolsky had sounded out Britain and France with regards to Russia's desire to fully use the Bosphorus/Bosporus. Izvolsky believed that Aehrenthal had tricked him – Russia had declared her support for the annexation but got nothing in return.

Ironically, Britain had been willing to discuss the naval use of the Straits in 1907, including Russian capital ships using it. However, in 1908, Sir Edward Grey decided that the annexation had made the whole region too volatile (Bulgaria had also announced her independence from Turk rule in October 1908) for any further changes.

To spite Austria-Hungary, Izvolsky then suggested that Serbia should receive territorial compensation from Austria-Hungary to balance up the land annexed from Bosnia-Herzegovina. This Austria refused to even consider. Germany, though irked by the annexation, supported Austria-Hungary and Russia had to climb down. By the end of 1908, Russia had achieved nothing – no concessions for the use of the Straits and a powerful neighbour expanding her territory. It had also bonded Germany and Austria-Hungary even more and to all intents Russia appeared alarmingly isolated. The only thing Izvolsky achieved was to push Russia and Serbia together. Serbia had been against the annexation, as she wanted Bosnia-Herzegovina for herself. In late 1908, there was even talk of Serbia declaring war on Austria-Hungary and the press in Belgrade stirred up a great deal of public anger – not that it had to try too hard. While Serbia received no support from West European states, Nicholas II of Russia met with the Serbian Foreign Minister, Milovanovich, and while the tsar did not offer Serbia his full support in terms of military aid, he made it clear that he supported what the Serbs hoped to achieve but advised a patient approach.

Secretly – and this only became known in 1918 – Austria-Hungary and Germany's chiefs-of-staff were in contact with regards to the declining situation in the Balkans. In January 1909, Conrad von Hötzendorf wrote to Helmuth von Moltke, the German chief-of-staff, that

“The possibility must be reckoned with that in the event of an Austro-Hungarian war in the Balkans (that is, against Serbia) Russia will enter upon warlike action in favour of the opponents of the monarchy.”

Hötzendorf asked Moltke what military support Germany would offer to Austria-Hungary in the event of a war in the Balkans. Moltke replied – and stated very clearly that what he wrote was fully supported by Wilhelm II – that

“At the moment Russia mobilises, Germany will also mobilise and mobilise its entire army.”

When Aehrenthal knew about the contents of this letter he safely assumed that he did not have to make any concessions to Izvolsky or Serbia.

The matter was further complicated when Turkey demanded to be compensated for the loss of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Their demand was supported by Britain. After much haggling, the Austrians agreed to pay the Turks a sum of about £2 million, which the Turks accepted and recognised the annexation. However, a matter that had initially involved Austria-Hungary and Russia had now dragged in Germany, Serbia (though Serbia was always going to be involved), Turkey and Britain.

In January 1909, the Serbian Foreign Minister Milovanovich made such an inflammatory speech against the Austrians in the Serbian Parliament that he was forced to write an apology to Aehrenthal. It was symptomatic of how the situation was degenerating.

In an attempt to pacify what was emerging in the Balkans, Sir Edward Grey asked Aehrenthal bluntly via telegram what Austria's intentions were with regards to Serbia. He had first gained approval from Paris and Moscow about the contents of this telegram. Grey also asked Germany to support his quest to pacify the region but with no luck. Germany put the emphasis on Serbia to appear to be more peaceful rather than condemn Austria-Hungary. Grey decided to ask Izvolsky to put pressure on Serbia to be more willing to come to an agreement with Vienna. To complement this, he asked Aehrenthal to offer Serbia aid to stimulate Serbia's economic growth. Grey also got France to support his move and Paris made it clear to Izvolsky that he had to inform Belgrade that Serbia had to start being more conciliatory and less provocative. On February 27th 1909, Izvolsky telegraphed Belgrade that they had to be more open to conciliation and that Russia did not support their desire for territorial compensation and that Serbia "must not insist on this".

Given the circumstances of what had emerged in the previous twelve months, it would appear strange that Serbia agreed to this. However, a newly appointed coalition government appeared to hint at the desire for a fresh start. In a letter sent to Belgrade, the Serbian government stated that it had neither desire for war nor any intention of starting one and that Serbia's relation with Austria-Hungary remained "normal". Izvolsky was very influential in drafting this letter, which finished with a stated desire for the great powers of Europe to restore order in the Balkans.

The letter was not well received in Vienna. What irked Aehrenthal was the comment made by Serbia that she was content for the great powers of Europe to resolve the Balkan issue. Aehrenthal believed that only Austria-Hungary had a right to be involved in a dispute between neighbours and that the great powers had no right to be involved. Vienna informed Berlin that she was prepared to invade Serbia if the government in Belgrade failed to make an unequivocal declaration towards "peaceful intentions". Germany rejected the letter because it failed to mention anything about Serbian disarmament. Aehrenthal, probably buoyed by Germany's stance, declared the letter unacceptable because it was addressed to Europe's great powers and not directly to Austria-Hungary. A date was set – March 16th 1909 – for Serbia to have addressed all of the concerns expressed by Vienna. On March 14th, the Serbian government sent a note to Austria's representative in Belgrade. The note was primarily concerned with commerce between Serbia and Austria-Hungary. It was quickly rejected.

However, on the previous day a conference took place in Russia that effectively meant that Serbia would be isolated if war occurred. On March 13th Russian army and naval senior officers met at Tsarskyoe Selo. They all agreed, along with the Minister of War, that Russia could not go to war and that military support for Serbia was "out of the question". This decision was reaffirmed on March 20th. There were those in Berlin who believed that this decision was a clear indication that Russia's military might was not as great as some thought.

To what extent the decision at Tsarskyoe Selo made politicians in Berlin more hawkish is difficult to know, but historians have assumed that this was the case. It may well have had the same impact on Aehrenthal. Grey did what he could to rein in the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister but with little success. Aehrenthal planned to announce his desire that the ruler of Serbia should be the 'King of Croatia' (Emperor Franz Josef) who should take over from the

dynasty that ruled Serbia in March 1909 – the Karageorge's. Grey cautioned Aehrenthal that Serbia would not accept this and that what he was doing was bound to lead to friction.

However, Aehrenthal had gauged the situation correctly. He believed that there was no desire for war among the Triple Entente (Russia, France and the United Kingdom). Russia had clearly expressed her position while Britain's naval might would have had little impact in the area. France's large army would have had little direct impact on Austria and would have had to attack via Germany to get to the region. This was not going to happen in 1909. On March 29th 1909, Germany reaffirmed its support for Austria and condemned Serbia for its warlike attitude. Two days later, Serbia accepted Austria's demand that she recognise Austria's annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Serbia also announced that she would be a "good neighbour" to Austria-Hungary.

In Vienna and Berlin there was a universal belief that Aehrenthal had been successful. There was also a shared belief that both Britain and Russia had shown a very clear desire to avoid war, almost at all costs. It was also assumed that France would be unwilling to go to war over Serbia without the support of the other two members of the Triple Entente.

What had the Bosnian Crisis solved? Arguably nothing. Austria-Hungary had developed an inflated opinion as to her relative strength in Europe. Hawks in Berlin had witnessed what they deemed to be the weakness of Russia. In Russia itself, many believed that Izvolsky had humiliated the country and resolved that it would never happen again. Serbia was also in a position whereby she wanted revenge.

The Agadir Crisis of 1911

The Agadir Crisis is seen as one of the medium terms causes of World War One. The Agadir Crisis occurred in 1911 just four years after the First Moroccan Crisis. What happened in Agadir is sometimes called the Second Moroccan Crisis. Events in North Africa were once again going to destabilise the relationships between the major European powers and while Europe was not taken to the brink of war by the Agadir Crisis, it was symptomatic of how fragile diplomatic relations had become.

Between 1905 and 1906 Morocco had been a major cause of diplomatic ructions in Europe. By the end of the Algeiras Conference of 1906, it was generally accepted that France had come out of the First Moroccan Crisis well while the opposite was true for Germany. Consequently, German politicians lost a lot of influence in Berlin while their place was taken by senior military figures. In France a more nationalistic outlook developed based upon French 'élan vitale'. In 1911 a repeat performance took place when it became even more obvious that the ante had been upped. Consequently, Europe became a far more destabilised entity that required just one single incident to spark off war. This occurred in Sarajevo in June 1914.

Agadir was a port in Morocco in the southwest of the country. The 1906 Act of Algeiras had never really sorted out the problems of Morocco. However, Germany's attention was diverted after the 1905-06 crisis by other issues, mainly building up her navy so that it rivalled the

Royal Navy. As a result France spent five years having far more influence in Morocco than Germany. They backed the corrupt Sultan, Abdul Aziz, who was accused by some of his countrymen of selling out Morocco to the French. The half-brother of Aziz, Mulay Hafid, took a stand on behalf of the Moroccan people who proclaimed him Sultan in January 1908.

It was around this time that the German government wanted a better share of the economic potential that they believed Morocco offered. The influential Mannesmann Company wanted to get what it believed would be lucrative mining concessions in southern Morocco. In February 1909, Germany and France signed an agreement whereby Germany recognised the 'special interests' France had in Morocco while France agreed not to hinder Germany's commercial and economic interests there. All seemed well between the two powers until it became clear to the Germans that France was not going to allow Germany to have any input into the building of two vital railway lines in Morocco. The German Foreign Minister, Alfred von Kiderlen-Wächter tried to work out an agreement with his French counterpart. However, the French Foreign Minister, Jean Cruppi, viewed all of Kiderlen-Wächter's suggestions with alarm.

While there was diplomatic discord with regards to Morocco, there were also internal problems occurring that the new Sultan, Mulay Hafid, could not deal with. The general dislocation that Morocco was experiencing encouraged certain tribes to rebel against Hafid and those who were supporting him, including the French. Rebel tribesmen attacked French forces stationed near Casablanca from January 1911 onwards. Fez also came under attack. Germany believed that if France sent more troops into Morocco to restore order, they would not leave the country and would be used to assert French authority throughout the country. This, they believed, would threaten German mining interests in the south of Morocco.

As the situation in Fez became more and more threatening, a decision was taken in Paris to send in more French troops. In April 1911 a decision was made to send troops to Fez to support the foreign contingent living there. In May 1911, 20,000 French, Colonial and Moroccan soldiers arrived in the city and their presence had an impact as the rebels became less active.

Technically, this should have improved the situation as there were many foreigners living in Fez including Germans who now seemed a lot safer. However, the mere presence of 20,000 French troops in the city was too much for the German government in Berlin. However, Kiderlen-Wächter had to tread carefully. He knew that there were those in Berlin who were sabre-rattling. He did not share their enthusiasm for taking on the French as he believed it was simply a matter of time before France took over Morocco and that it was a fait accompli that Germany could do nothing about. However, Kiderlen-Wächter was well aware of the clout of the military over the Kaiser, Wilhelm II. He had to persuade the Kaiser that he knew what he was doing without appearing to support the sabre-rattlers while at the same time ensuring that the French believed that he was not going to tamely let them keep a further 20,000 troops in Morocco. His plan was to send German warships to Agadir and Mogador ostensibly to defend German citizens in Morocco. He hoped that such a move would placate the hawks who seemed to be surrounding Wilhelm. But Kiderlen-Wächter also knew that it would provoke a French response which he hoped would not be aggressive. Kiderlen-Wächter gambled that his move of sending warships to Morocco would result in a positive French reaction that would ironically allow him to curb the excesses of the hawks in Berlin. Wilhelm expressed concern about the plan but he did not refuse to support it.

Kiderlen-Wächter found an unlikely ally in Jules Cambon, the French ambassador in Berlin who wanted to take the sting out of the Agadir crisis before it got out of hand. Cambon was also aware that hawks existed in the government in Paris – men who were all too prepared to push the crisis to the limit. With hindsight, it is possible to label both Kiderlen-Wächter and Cambon as the doves in the proceedings.

Despite this a gunboat was sent to Agadir. This was the ‘Panther’ which arrived at Agadir on July 1st 1911. On July 5th, the ‘Panther’ was replaced by the larger ‘Berlin’. However, the French and the British were aware that the Germans were simply making a statement and neither was prepared to respond in an aggressive manner. On July 9th 1911, Kiderlen-Wächter and Cambon met to discuss the situation. Both clearly stated their nation’s intentions in Africa. Kiderlen-Wächter expressed Germany’s interest in the French Congo in exchange for French control in Morocco. While the French were not keen on this, they were prepared to keep the discussions going. In Britain there was no desire for war over Morocco. On July 20th 1911, Grey sent out a note that stated that a war with Germany over Morocco was not worth it.

However, on the same day “The Times” published an article about Germany’s desire for French Congo. It was an alarmist report that also stated that no British government worth its salt would allow such a move as it would threaten British interests in sub-Saharan Africa. On July 22nd the Germans complained about the ‘Times’ article, which claimed that the Germans acted like Dick Turpin. The British Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George, upped the ante when he gave a speech in which he stated that if Germany gained what she wanted in Africa “it would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure.”

Kiderlen-Wächter continued with his policy of seemingly placating the French while convincing the Kaiser that Germany was making a resolute stand against them. Franco-German talks continued with regards to Morocco and the French Congo right through to September. However, the British media presented a more hawkish front. It was reported that Churchill had completed plans for a British expeditionary force and that he had ensured the protection of the Royal Navy’s cordite supply against suspected German sabotage. It was also reported that the Royal Navy had been put on full alert. This approach by the British media forced Foreign Secretary Grey into announcing that he would not send Royal Navy warships to Morocco but that he would monitor what was happening in Africa with great care and caution so that British interests were not threatened.

On September 1st 1911 negotiations between France and Germany came to an abrupt halt. This resulted in the stock market in Berlin crashing. It showed just how sensitive the situation had become as the only reason the negotiations had halted was because of an illness to French diplomatist Cambon. Others misread the situation. By November 1911, both Germany and France had come to a conclusion over their particular stance in Africa. France handed to Germany over 107,000 square miles of land, which the French media portrayed as “a few acres of swamp”. Germany handed over to France 6,450 square miles of land in the Upper Cameroons. But neither the Congo nor Morocco turned out to be economic goldmines.

What part did the Agadir Crisis play in the outbreak of World War One? There were those in the British government who believed that the episode proved that Germany was hell-bent on trying to dominate Europe as a whole. Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George were among those who believed this. The irony is that diplomatic negotiations ended the Agadir Crisis. But it was the media that stirred it up into a ‘crisis’ and politicians had to respond to

the media such was its influence. The approach of Kiderlen-Wächter was criticised in Berlin and the more aggressive approach of Tirpitz, especially with regards to naval expansion, became popular and then the norm. The French belief in 'elan' was reinforced and the approach of Jules Cambon rejected. But the work done by Kiderlen-Wächter and Cambon was recognised by themselves when they sent each other signed photographs after the end of the 'Agadir Crisis'. Cambon wrote on his to Kiderlen-Wächter: "To my dear friend and terrible enemy" while Kiderlen-Wächter wrote on his to Cambon: "To my terrible friend and dear enemy."