

ENTENTE CORDIALE

TREATY AT A GLANCE

Completed

April 8, 1904, at London

Signatories

Great Britain and France

Overview

This agreement ended antagonisms whose roots stretched back for centuries between Britain and France and paved the way for their diplomatic cooperation against growing pressures from Germany in the decade before World War I.

Historical Background

The French and British dislike for one another's foreign policies had a long historical pedigree, stretching back to the formation of both nations and fueled by centuries of imperial competition in the New World and Africa. But in 1901 Queen Victoria died, and her passing marked not merely the end of the up-to-then longest reign in England's history but the close of the era named after her, when Great Britain's imperial adventures reached their high-water mark. Gone with the Victorian Age was also the ability of the empire, on which the sun never set, to maintain its "splendid isolation" from continental Europe.

Kaiser Wilhelm II, one of Victoria's many grandchildren in the ruling houses of Europe, had launched an aggressive buildup of the German navy, threatening the basis of the British seaborne empire. The stale diplomatic world that Victoria and German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck had built was based on the Continent's Great Powers holding each other in check on land while Britain policed the seas. If Wilhelm's obsession with boats was to upset the balance of power, not only Great Britain but France, too, had cause for alarm. Thus, it was a happy circumstance, diplomatically speaking, that the man replacing Victoria on the throne was King Edward VII, who as the Prince of Wales had been a notorious francophile, loving Paris perhaps even more than London, and certainly open to warmer relations with his boon companions across the Channel.

Both Lord Lansdowne, replacing Lord Salisbury, who had resigned the foreign office the year Victoria died, and France's foreign minister, Théophile

Declassé, were anxious to exploit the diplomatic opening offered by Edward's pro-French inclinations. Since coming to office in 1898, Declassé had believed that a Franco-British understanding would give his country some security against the elaborate system of alliances Bismarck had created for Germany in western Europe, and he now put the French ambassador in London, Paul Cambon, to work hammering out an agreement with British foreign secretary Lord Lansdowne. The result was the Entente Cordiale.

Terms

The entente was certainly not in any sense a military alliance, and it scrupulously avoided entangling Great Britain with any French commitment to Russia, long England's *bête noire* among the Great Powers. Perhaps most importantly, the agreement granted Britain freedom of action in Egypt, and France freedom of action in Morocco—so long, that is, as French intentions there included a reasonable allowance for Spain's interest in the area. Great Britain gave up the Los Islands off French Guinea to France, redefined the Nigerian frontier to favor Paris, and accepted French control in the upper Gambia River valley. The French renounced their claim of exclusive rights to fisheries off Newfoundland. The treaty outlined French and British zones of influence in Southeast Asia and sought to allay the friction between British and French colonists in the New Hebrides.



**Declaration between the United Kingdom
and France Respecting Egypt and Morocco,
Together with the Secret Articles
Signed at the Same Time**

ARTICLE 1

His Britannic Majesty's Government declare that they have no intention of altering the political status of Egypt.

The Government of the French Republic, for their part, declare that they will not obstruct the action of Great Britain in that country. . .

It is agreed that the post of Director-General of Antiquities in Egypt shall continue, as in the past, to be entrusted to a French savant.

The French schools in Egypt shall continue to enjoy the same liberty as in the past.

ARTICLE 2

The Government of the French Republic declare that they have no intention of altering the political status of Morocco.

His Britannic Majesty's Government, for their part, recognize that it appertains to France, more particularly as a Power whose dominions are conterminous for a great distance with those of Morocco, to preserve order in that country, and to provide assistance for the purpose of all administrative, economic, financial, and military reforms which it may require.

They declare that they will not obstruct the action taken by France for this purpose, provided that such action shall leave intact the rights which Great Britain, in virtue of treaties, conventions, and usage, enjoys in Morocco, including the right of coasting trade between the ports of Morocco, enjoyed by British vessels since 1901.

ARTICLE 3

His Britannic Majesty's Government for their part, will respect the rights which France, in virtue of treaties, conventions, and usage, enjoys in Egypt, including the right of coasting trade between Egyptian ports accorded to French vessels.

ARTICLE 4

The two Governments, being equally attached to the principle of commercial liberty both in Egypt and Morocco, declare that they will not, in those countries, countenance any inequality either in the imposition of customs duties or other taxes, or of railway transport charges. The trade of both nations with Morocco and with Egypt shall enjoy the same treatment in transit through the French and British possessions in Africa. An agreement between the two Governments shall settle the conditions of such transit and shall determine the points of entry.

This mutual engagement shall be binding for a period of thirty years. Unless this stipulation is expressly denounced at least one year in advance, the period shall be extended for five years at a time.

Nevertheless the Government of the French Republic reserve to themselves in Morocco, and His Britannic Majesty's Government reserve to themselves in Egypt, the right to see that the concessions for roads, railways, ports, etc., are only granted on such conditions as will maintain intact the authority of the State over these great undertakings of public interest.

ARTICLE 5

His Britannic Majesty's Government declare that they will use their influence in order that the French officials now in Egyptian service may not be placed under conditions less advantageous than those applying to the British officials in the same service.

The Government of the French Republic, for their part, would make no objection to the application of analogous conditions to British officials now in the Moorish service.

ARTICLE 6

In order to ensure the free passage of the Suez Canal, His Britannic Majesty's Government declare that they adhere to the treaty of the 29th October, 1888, and that they agree to the same being put in force. The free passage of the Canal being thus guaranteed, the execution of the last sentence of paragraph 1 as well as of paragraph 2 of Article of that treaty will remain in abeyance.

ARTICLE 7

In order to secure the free passage of the Straits of Gibraltar, the two Governments agree not to permit the erection of any fortifications or strategic works on that portion of the coast of Morocco comprised between, but not including, Melilla and heights which command the right bank of the River Sebou.

This condition does not, however, apply to the places now present in the occupation of Spain on the Moorish coast of the Mediterranean.

ARTICLE 8

The two Governments, inspired by their feeling of sincere friendship for Spain, take into special consideration the interests which that country derives from her geographical position and from her territorial possessions on the Moorish coast of the Mediterranean. In regard to these interests the French Government will come to an understanding with the Spanish Government. The agreement which may be come to on the subject between France and Spain shall be communicated to His Britannic Majesty's Government.

ARTICLE 9

The two Governments agree to afford to one another their diplomatic support, in order to obtain the execution of the clause of the present Declaration regarding Egypt and Morocco.

In witness whereof his Excellency the Ambassador of the French Republic at the Court of His Majesty the King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, Emperor of India, and His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, duly authorised for that purpose, have signed the present Declaration and have affixed thereto their seals.

Done at London, in duplicate, the 8th day of April, 1902

(L.S.) LANSDOWN
(L.S.) PAUL CAMB

Secret Articles

ARTICLE 1

In the event of either Government finding themselves constrained, by the force of circumstances, to modify their policy

respect to Egypt or Morocco, the engagements which they have undertaken towards each other by Articles 4, 6, and 7 of the Declaration of today's date would remain intact.

ARTICLE 2

His Britannic Majesty's Government have no present intention of proposing to the Powers any changes in the system of the Capitulations, or in the judicial organisation of Egypt.

In the event of their considering it desirable to introduce in Egypt reforms tending to assimilate the Egyptian legislative system to that in force in other civilised Countries, the Government of the French Republic will not refuse to entertain any such proposals, on the understanding that His Britannic Majesty's Government will agree to entertain the suggestions that the Government of the French Republic may have to make to them with a view of introducing similar reforms in Morocco.

ARTICLE 3

The two Governments agree that a certain extent of Moorish territory adjacent to Melilla, Ceuta, and other presidios should, whenever the Sultan ceases to exercise authority over it, come within the sphere of influence of Spain, and that the administration of the coast from Melilla as far as, but not including, the heights on the right bank of the Sebou shall be entrusted to Spain.

Nevertheless, Spain would previously have to give her formal assent to the provisions of Articles 4 and 7 of the Declaration of today's date, and undertake to carry them out.

She would also have to undertake not to alienate the whole, or a part, of the territories placed under her authority or in her sphere of influence.

ARTICLE 4

If Spain, when invited to assent to the provisions of the preceding article, should think proper to decline, the arrangement between France and Great Britain, as embodied in the Declaration of today's date, would be none the less at once applicable.

ARTICLE 5

Should the consent of the other Powers to the draft Decree mentioned in Article 1 of the Declaration of today's date not be

obtained, the Government of the French Republic will not oppose the repayment at par of the Guaranteed, Privileged, and Unified Debts after the 15th July, 1910.

Done at London, in duplicate, the 8th day of April, 1904.

(L.S.) LANSDOWNNE
(L.S.) PAUL CAMBON



Consequences

The Entente Cordiale helped bring both powers out of the virtual isolation into which they had of late withdrawn, the French involuntarily and the British with typical complacency, as they eyed each other suspiciously in Africa. Great Britain's only ally was Japan, useless in a war in Europe. France had just Russia, which was soon to be utterly discredited in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 (see the TREATY OF PORTSMOUTH).

Not surprisingly, the new arrangement upset Germany, which had relied before on the bitter rivalry between the two new allies. Consequently, Wilhelm tried to check the French and unhinge the entente in Morocco in 1905. Such maneuvers only forged new bonds between Great Britain and France, sparking discussion even of a military alliance between their general staffs, and both reaffirmed their new solidarity in the 1906 ALGECIRAS CONVENTION. Thus was the stage set for Germany, in attacking France in 1914, to bring the once aloof Great Britain into a general war in Europe.