

lie now as the record of what took place between the military and naval experts, and not binding engagements upon the Governments:

"My dear Ambassador:

"From time to time in recent years the French and British naval and military experts have consulted together. It has always been understood that such consultation does not restrict the freedom of either Government to decide at any future time whether or not to assist the other by armed force. We have agreed that the consultation between the experts is not, and ought not to be, regarded as an engagement that compels either Government to action in a contingency that has not yet arisen and may never arise. The disposition, for instance, of the French and British fleets respectively at the present moment is not based upon an engagement to co-operate in war. You have, however, pointed out that if either Government has grave reason to expect an unprovoked attack by a third Power it might become essential to know whether it could in that event depend upon the armed assistance of the other. I agree that if either Government had grave reason to expect an unprovoked attack by a third Power or something that threatened the general peace, it should immediately discuss with the other whether both Governments should act together to prevent aggression and to preserve peace, and if so what measures they would be prepared to take in common."

Commons Free to Decide.

Lord Charles Beresford: What date was that?

Sir Edward Grey: 22nd November, 1912. That is the starting point of the Government with regard to the present crisis. I think it makes it perfectly clear that what the Prime Minister and I have said in the House of Commons was justified, and that as regards our freedom to decide in a crisis what our line should be, the Government remain perfectly free and *a fortiori* the House of Commons remain perfectly free. That I say to clear the ground from the point of view of obligation, and I think it was due to prove our good faith to the House of Commons that I should give that full information to the House now, and say that we do not construe any thing which has previously taken place in our diplomatic relations with other Powers in this matter as restricting the freedom of the Government to decide what attitude they shall take now or the House of Commons to decide what their attitude should be. The situation in the present crisis is not precisely the same as it was in the Morocco question. Then it was primarily a dispute which concerned France, and we were obliged to side with France diplomatically in that question. The present crisis has originated in a dispute between Austria and Serbia. I can say this with the most absolute confidence, that no Government and no country has less desired to be involved in war over the dispute between Austria and Serbia than the Government and country of France. (Loud cheers.) France is involved in it because of her obligation of honor owing to her alliance with Russia. Well, sir, it is only fair to tell the House that that obligation of honor cannot apply in the same way to us. (Labor cheers.) We were not parties to the Franco-Russian Alliance—we do not even know the terms of that alliance.

Clearing the Ground.

That, I think, has cleared the ground, so far as the obligation of honor. What, then, is our position? We have had for many a year a long standing friendship

with France. (Cheers.) I remember well the feeling in this House, I remember my own feeling, when the late Government made that agreement with France—the warm cordial feeling resulting from the fact that these two nations which had perpetual differences in the past had cleared those differences away. (Cheers.) How far that friendship entails obligation it is for every individual member of this House to consider for himself. On this point the House must separately and collectively judge for itself. The French nation has a fleet which is now in the Mediterranean. The north and west coasts of France are absolutely undefended. With the French fleet in the Mediterranean the situation is very different from what it used to be so far as France is concerned. The friendship that has grown up between the two countries had given them a sense of security that there was nothing to be feared from us. My own feeling is this, that if a foreign fleet engaged in war which France had sought came down the English Channel and bombarded and battered the undefended coast of France we could not stand by. (Loud and prolonged general cheering.) With this thing going on under our very eyes we could not stand by with our arms folded looking on dispassionately doing nothing. That, I believe, is the feeling of the country. (Loud general cheers.) But I want to look at it from the point of view of British interests, and it is from that point of view that I am going to base and justify what I am presently going to say to the House.

Britain's Interests.

If we are to say nothing at this moment, what is France to do with her fleet in the Mediterranean, with her northern and western coasts absolutely undefended at the mercy of the German fleet coming down the Channel to batter her northern coast? We must remember that we are faced with a war of life and death. It may be that the French fleet will be withdrawn from the Mediterranean. We are in the presence of a European conflagration. Can anyone set limits to the consequences that may arise from it? Let us assume that we stand aside in an attitude of neutrality. Let us suppose that the French fleet is withdrawn from the Mediterranean. Let us assume that events may arise which would make it necessary in defence of vital British interests that we must go to war. Let us assume that Italy will not remain neutral, as she is at present because she understands that this war is an aggressive war—(loud and prolonged cheers)—and that the Triple Alliance is a defensive alliance. Let us assume that Italy must depart from her attitude of neutrality at a time when we are forced in defence of vital British interests to fight ourselves. What would be the position of the Mediterranean then? A clear trade through that area is vital. Nobody can say that within the next few weeks there is any particular trade route which may not be vital to this country. What would be the position if we had to keep a fleet in the Mediterranean? What risks, from the point of view of British interests, would we not run by maintaining our attitude of neutrality?

France Entitled to Know.

Well, Sir, we feel strongly that France is entitled to know, and know at once—(great cheers)—what our attitude is to be, whether or not in the event of an attack upon her unprotected northern and western coasts, she could depend upon British support. And in that emergency and under these compelling circumstances, yesterday afternoon I gave to the French Ambassador the following statement: