Great Britain and the ‘Scramble for Africa’
Transcript

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GREAT BRITAIN AND THE 'SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA'

Professor Kathleen Burk

PICTURE 2: MAP OF AFRICA BEFORE ABOUT 1850 - Here is a picture of Africa which purports to show the continent before about 1850. The reason why I wanted to begin this evening's lecture on the colonisation of Africa with this map was to show you just how empty - in European terms - the continent was. Of course it was not; but in those days lands without fixed borders or familiar types of government were seen as empty and ripe for the imposition of European authority. For Great Britain, the colonial drive was as defensive as offensive: most politicians and officials wished for no political responsibility for a territory, until some other Power wanted it. By the end of the 19th century, there was no unclaimed land left in Africa. What I want to do this evening is to tell you about the carving up of Africa over the 19th century, paying particular attention to the British Empire, but necessarily not ignoring the empires of the other European Great Powers.

A word about geography. Environment has played a crucial role in the development of Africa. The Sahara Desert is the great divide: the lands to the north have always looked to Europe and the Near East. PICTURE 3: RIVER SYSTEMS - There are four great river systems, the Congo, the Niger, the Zambesi and the Nile, which were very difficult to navigate their full length; and there are the deserts. These barriers could define nomadic tribal lands; they could also determine the ease or difficulty of exploration. Not least of the reasons for past and current difficulties in Africa stem from the fact that colonial borders frequently cut across tribal lands.

It took quite a long time for the British Government to become interested in Africa. There was some vague interest in the late 18th century, when it was thought that African colonies might provide compensation for the loss of prestige and material wealth arising from the loss of the thirteen American colonies, or provide strategic positions during the French wars. Yet what little official interest there was declined during the first forty or so years of the nineteenth century, although Sierra Leone, founded by the British in 1787 as a home for freed slaves, sometimes required attention. Interest in Africa was not lacking, but it was a private matter, not an official one. Two groups who maintained a high level of interest were missionaries and explorers. PICTURE 4: MISSION BOATON LAKE NYASA - Missionaries were greatly responsible for the view of Africans as both brutal and barbarous, with before and after descriptions and pictures demonstrating the difference the attentions of Christians could make to the life and behaviour of the inferior race. This misrepresentation of African society stimulated the racial arrogance on the part of Europeans which seemed to make many feel that they could do what they wanted.

But what really stimulated interest in Africa were the stories of the great explorers, told through books and newspapers. PICTURE 5: DR DAVID LIVINGSTONE - Dr David Livingstone is a prime example. Trained as a doctor in Glasgow, he and his family went out to Africa as missionaries in 1840. He moved northwards over the years, until in 1851, having sent his family back to Britain, he embarked on his exploration of the course of the Zambezi River. He completed this in 1856, and then PICTURE 6: LAKE NYASA, NOW LAKE MALAWI - from 1858 to 1864, he explored the River Shire and discovered Lake Nyasa: the third largest in Africa, fourteen rivers flow into it, but only one, the Shire, flows out to the sea. This picture shows the lake from space; PICTURE 7: LAKE NYASA - this one from a more familiar vantage point. Livingstone's later years were taken up with an almost obsessive search for the headwaters of the Nile.

PICTURE 8: H.M. STANLEY - The man who really made Livingstone famous was the American H.M. Stanley, a journalist on the New York Herald, which in 1871 sent him to find Livingstone, who was believed to be missing near Lake Tanganyika. PICTURE 9: STANLEY MEETS LIVINGSTONE - His comment when they met - 'Dr Livingstone, I presume?' - reverberated across the Anglo-Saxon world. But Stanley was himself an explorer: in 1871, he tried to follow the River Congo for its length, whilst from 1874 to 1877 he made the first east to west crossing of the continent. Stanley's several books, such as In Darkest Africa, an extremely bad interpretation of Africa and Africans, sold hundreds of thousands of copies. PICTURE 10: STANLEY AS A POSTCARD - Here is a picture of Stanley on a postcard. His books, and those of other explorers, were long and vivid accounts, but they were not only red-blooded tales of exploring and derring-do: they conveyed the possibilities of these new lands. These were seemingly confirmed by the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley in the early 1870s and of gold in the Witwatersrand in 1886. The belief in endless possibilities was supported by 19th century technology - the steamship, the telegraph, and in particular, the railway - which could enable the opening up of the interior. A final push was Africa as the new frontier: the American frontier was closing, and Africa was sometimes spoken of as the 'new America'.

I want to begin by taking a brief look at Egypt, brief because I talked about it in my last lecture on the Middle East. The Suez Canal, which was opened in November 1869, was of great strategic interest to Britain, shortening considerably the route to India as well as to the Antipodes. PICTURE 11: PRIME MINISTER DISRAELI - In October 1875, Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli bought 45% of the shares in the Suez Canal Company, just a day before the French Government attempted to do the same. Seven years later, there was a nationalist uprising, the Orabi Rebellion of September 1881, with the slogan of 'Egypt for the Egyptians'. It was a revolt against the Turkish Khedive - Egypt was still nominally a province of the Ottoman Empire - but really against all foreign influence. Riots in Alexandria in June 1882 between Europeans fearing massacre and Egyptians fearing occupation resulted in the deaths of fifty Europeans and 170 Egyptians. The revolt raised British fears for the security of the Canal and worries amongst Europeans that the nationalists might cancel repayment of the huge
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In 1873 there was yet another Ashanti War. The immediate cause was another invasion of the protectorate

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the Ashanti ). It attracted a great deal more publicity than its predecessors - Stanley and G.A. Henty, he of the

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WOLVESELEY - The British were led by one of the ablest men in the British Army, General Sir Garnet Wolseley, who

was, less than a decade later, to lead the British suppression of the 1881 rebellion in Egypt. After Wolseley's

victory in 1874, the Disraeli government decided to constitute the vague Fanti protectorate into a crown colony,

the Gold Coast.

The fight for the territory of the Gold Coast was against a native

enemy, but this was uncommon - ordinarily, the competition was with another European power. In the next
case, it was France. In the 1850s, the French colony of Senegal began expanding, until it virtually engulfed the
British colony of the Gambia; the French were trying to develop a trade route, rather than to push the British
out, but the British were suspicious. There was some talk of exchanging the Gambia for another part of West
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PICTURE 12: PRIME MINISTER GLADSTONE - That most reluctant imperialist, Prime Minister William
Gladstone, authorised a military response. The Mediterranean fleet shelled Alexandria and British troops took it in
July 1882. Troops occupied the Canal in August, and in September defeated the rebel army. They then marched
to Cairo, and took control of Egypt. Should they remain? Army and Naval Intelligence were keen to maintain their
grip: they were becoming more and more convinced that the security of Imperial routes required direct control,
and the addition of a naval base at Alexandria, when added to those at Cyprus and Malta, would considerably
strengthen Britain's regional position. There would probably be economic benefits as well: Egyptian long-staple
cotton for Lancashire mills, markets for British exports, and opportunities for investments. There was also the
familiar British conviction that the Egyptians were unable to run their country effectively, and it would be a
kindness to remain and do it for them. Thus British advisers gradually took places in all government departments
to guide the Khedive; the Egyptian army was temporarily disbanded, and then refashioned under British officers;
and British forces, paid for by the Egyptians, were permanently stationed in the country. The man truly in charge
was the British Agent and Consul-General Evelyn Baring, later Lord Cromer. It became known as the 'Veiled
Protectorate'.

If the traditional interest in Egypt was based on strategic considerations, the traditional interest in West Africa
had always been trade. PICTURE 13: MAP OF WEST AFRICA - The Guinea coast - you can see the Gulf of
Guinea at the bottom of the map - was one corner of what was known as the 'triangular trade' with the West
Indies: Britain sent manufactured goods to West Africa in exchange for slaves, which were shipped to the West
Indies in exchange for sugar and other tropical goods, which were shipped back to Britain. After 1807, with the
end of the slave trade, palm oil took the place of slaves - the Niger River delta was known as 'Oil Rivers'; the
British did not harvest the oil themselves; rather, Liverpool merchants engaged in the trade with the native
chiefs.

British merchants were also developing commercial relations with the Fanti
people on the Gold Coast, now Ghana. The Fanti endured very precarious relations with their powerful inland
neighbours, the Ashanti Confederation. This had originally been formed by a few small tribes in order to defend
themselves against more powerful neighbours, but had grown on the profits of the slave trade into one of the
strongest states in West Africa. They had been trying throughout the century to extend their authority to the
coast, and after 1807 very much resented British influence against their slaving activities. There was a series of
more or less serious clashes between the British and the Ashanti beginning in 1820; in 1844 the British signed

treaties with a number of the Fanti chiefs, whose tribes could suffer in such conflicts, which afforded them some
degree of British protection. In 1863, when the British Governor refused to return a fugitive slave, the Ashanti
invaded the 'protectorate', and though they were beaten off, there were a number of British casualties.

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Congo Basin, which the British Government ignored, from about the mid-1870s, Leopold began to plan. He had little or no backing from the Belgian Parliament, and he planned alone. In 1876, he invited an extremely distinguished group of geographers and explorers to Brussels for a conference, during which there was established an organisation called the African International Association, devoted to suppressing the slave trade and opening up Central Africa, with Leopold as President. At first the British Government, and others, believed that his motives were scientific and humanitarian, but by about 1884, the Foreign Office began to receive private reports of unacceptable activities in the Congo. The International Association concluded commercial treaties with African chiefs, but when Leopold revealed them to the world in 1884, he represented them as political treaties which transferred sovereignty. In due course, the treatment of the native rubber workers in the Congo was to constitute the most horrific scandal of the colonial era in Africa. In the immediate term, his activities seem to have set off the Scramble for Africa.

**PICTURE 21: MAP OF THE CONGO BASIN** - This is a modern map of the Congo Basin. Since 1841, the French had had a colony, Gabon, to the north of the mouth of the Congo River. There were Frenchmen who believed that the way to tap the great potential wealth of the Congo Basin was not via the river itself - **PICTURE 22: CONGO RAPIDS** - the rapids near the mouth was only one of the problems - but by the river Ogooué, which would channel the trade into Gabon. **PICTURE 23: MAP OF GABON** - If you look at this map of Gabon, you can see the mouth of the Ogooué and the way the river arches up and comes down on the right, into the Congo.

**PICTURE 24: PIERRE SAVORGNAN DE BRAZZA** - One of the men who believed in this route was the French explorer, Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, who undertook an expedition up the Ogooué to the vicinity of Stanley Pool. In fact, the whole expedition became something of a race with Stanley himself, who was now employed by Leopold. In October 1880, de Brazza concluded a series of treaties which purported to cede large chunks of territory to de Brazza as the representative of France, but they were vague and a bit dicey in legal terms. The French government in fact pigeonholed them for two years, but then in November 1882 accepted them as valid. One reason for the change was that the French were angry at the weak role France had played in Egypt against Great Britain, and public opinion responded to the powerful press campaign orchestrated by de Brazza and his associates.

The British Government then became alarmed by the new interest France was showing in the area. She had been engaged in low-key negotiations with Portugal to settle some colonial questions, including ones dealing with the Congo, and they were now accelerated. An Anglo-Portuguese treaty was signed in February 1884, by which Britain recognised Portugal's ancient claim to jurisdiction over the mouth of the Congo, and agreed that navigation of the river should be regulated by an Anglo-Portuguese Commission. There was much adverse reaction in Britain, especially by commercial interests whose requirements had not been taken care of in the negotiations. It was going to be difficult to have it ratified by Parliament, but the British Government was saved by the anger of other powers at the idea of an Anglo-Portuguese settlement, rather than an international one. The French and German governments persuaded the Portuguese to put the question of the Congo to an international conference of all interested parties, and this was held in Berlin from November 1884 to February 1885.

I want to pause here for a moment to consider the European context. A good place to start is with Franco-German relations. In 1871, France lost the war with Prussia, at the end of which the German Empire was proclaimed in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. France lost the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany. **PICTURE 25: OTTO VON BISMARCK** - The Chancellor of Germany and the most powerful political figure on the Continent was Count Otto von Bismarck. Central to his diplomatic manoeuvres was the need to divert France from going to war to regain the lost provinces, and thus he encouraged and usually supported France in her colonial schemes. Beyond diverting France's attention from her eastern border, Bismarck hoped that it would entangle her in conflict with Great Britain. Bismarck himself had always believed that Germany should not go whoring after colonies, but should concentrate on her position in Europe. However, pressure was growing within Germany for colonial expeditions of her own: by this time, part of the definition of a a Great Power was having colonies, and thus Germany needed to acquire a colony or two somewhere. As it happened, the only substantial area of land still unclaimed lay in Africa. As for the other Powers: the Austro-Hungarian Empire had eyes only for desirable parts of the Balkans, Russia was expanding eastwards towards China and southwards towards India, and the Dutch were entirely satisfied with the Dutch East Indies. Italy, however, newly unified in 1871, was certainly a candidate, and made an unsuccessful bid for Abyssinia: her defeat at the Battle of Adowa in 1896 was the worst defeat suffered by any of the colonial powers in Africa. However, in 1911 she annexed Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, and renamed them Libya, the ancient Greco-Roman name for this region of North Africa. Spain, too, wanted colonies, and in 1905 gained her foothold in what became Spanish Morocco. What increasingly happened was that these countries grabbed land wherever they could, even if it seemed of little value, and not least so as to keep it from falling into the hands of another Power.

**PICTURE 26: THE BERLIN CONFERENCE** - This was the situation which the Berlin Conference was called to try to settle. The main item on the agenda was the Congo, but the Niger and the so-called 'new occupations' of the coast of Africa were also discussed. Britain's main motive in signing an Anglo-Portuguese treaty had been to prevent France from becoming the dominant power in the Congo, so she was quite happy to have the question internationalised. The settlement of the Congo by the Berlin Act of 1885 was unprecedented in international law. There was to be freedom of navigation of the river and freedom of commerce for all in the 'Conventional Basin' of the Congo, much larger than the geographical one. Administrative control of a large part of the area passed to Leopold's Congo Free State, which was recognised as a sovereign state. Before the conference began, Britain
had negotiated treaties with chiefs in the Niger delta, and thus was able to achieve recognition as the dominant power on the Lower and Middle Niger; in return she agreed to freedom of navigation on the river. To look ahead by a few months, the area was extended during 1885, agreement was reached with Germany, and a protectorate was proclaimed.

It was the third basis of the Conference which encouraged the Powers to act. This agreement regulated 'new occupations' on the coast of Africa and laid down the doctrine of 'effective occupation'. It was probably intended to eliminate permanently Portugal's ancient and shadowy claims to half the coastline of Africa. But it also alarmed Great Britain. She had traditionally shied away from establishing political control, which was expensive in money and men; rather, the government - all British governments - had preferred to leave trade matters, which was what was at stake, as far as possible in the hands of the merchants. All Britain had wanted was to have enough influence to ensure that her interests were not discriminated against in favour of those of any other power. But this light touch was now no longer enough: thanks to the doctrine of effective occupation, Britain and the other Powers would now have to assert their presence on the ground. There followed six years of scrambling.

**PICTURE 27: MAP OF AFRICA** - As I mentioned a moment ago, the agreement about the British sphere of influence on the Lower Niger had been reached with Germany, not with France. This was a mark of the rapidly changing situation, because Germany was now a major factor in Africa. You might just glance at this modern map: the two areas of contention with Germany before 1914 were the area which became German Southwest Africa, and Cameroon. **PICTURE 28: MAP OF AFRICA IN 1886** - The first clash centred on the region between Cape Colony and the Portuguese colony of Angola. In 1878 Britain had annexed a small station, Walvisch Bay, but few had paid much attention to the barren stretch of coastline. The only resident Europeans were some German missionaries. When the German Government enquired in February 1883 whether Britain claimed to exercise any jurisdiction there, the British government thought that they were seeking protection for the missionaries. It dawned on them only very slowly that the Germans, who had always insisted that they had no wish for colonies in Africa, now wanted to take control of the region. A German trader had set up a trading station at Angra Pequeña in April 1883, to which the British government had no strong objection, since she had never had any colonial quarrels with Germany. It was the Cape Colony which protested, and the British felt obliged to consult them, which entailed long delays. The Germans thought it was a time-wasting device, whilst the British were annoyed at the colony's assumption that it had a right to control the surrounding region, which the Royal Navy and the British taxpayer would have to maintain. Thus, when the Germans announced in 1884 that they would protect Angra Pequeña by establishing a territorial protectorate, the British acquiesced without much difficulty, although irritated by Germany's discourteous manner.

The Germans challenged the British much more directly over the Cameroons. They lay between the Oil Rivers and Gabon, and were desirable because they were healthier than other regions. Britain had old-established trading interests there, but had always refused the requests of local chiefs for protection, since they were trying to limit their responsibility and expense. Two German firms were established there in 1880. The British still feared the French more than the Germans, and thus were happy to assist a German explorer who wanted to go to the Cameroons for scientific and commercial purposes. Only in July 1884 did they learn that he had used the opportunity to sign treaties with the local chiefs, establishing a German protectorate. It underlined the fact that the old tradition of informal influence was no longer enough, since the situation had been altered by the burst of French and German activities and by the new rules of the game. What finally moved a reluctant British Government to act was the recognition that British trade was in danger and that, in the last analysis, the government had a duty to protect that trade, even if it meant an unpleasant extension of political responsibility. Britain had gained a great deal of territory in West Africa, including the whole of modern Nigeria. The climate of opinion at home and abroad had changed.

What about East Africa? In 1877-78, British influence, based on the influence it exercised over the Sultan of Zanzibar, was dominant, but suggestions in Britain that the British establish a colony in the region of Mount Kilimanjaro were rejected by Prime Minister Gladstone. It was German activities which changed the situation. **PICTURE 29: CARL PETERS** - In 1884, the German explorer Carl Peters went to East Africa. He had been told that he was on his own and could expect no help from his government, but he went ahead and concluded a number of treaties with chiefs in the general area of Tanganyika. **PICTURE 30: TANGANYIKA** - Peters returned to Berlin in February 1885, and on 3 March, the day after the end of the Berlin West Africa Conference, the German government proclaimed that it would take the territory under its protection.

**PICTURE 31: MAP OF EAST AFRICA** - British merchants and supporters redoubled their pressure on the Foreign Office: their fear was that a large area which could someday be important to British commerce might pass under the control of another Great Power. In November 1885, Germany, France and Britain agreed to establish a Boundary Commission to determine the legal limits of the domain of the Sultan of Zanzibar. An agreement was finally reached in October 1886 which left the coast under the jurisdiction of the Sultan but allocated what became Kenya and Uganda to Britain and Tanganyika to Germany. The land had been acquired, but it was just as well that the expectation was that the territories would not be immediately lucrative, because they were not. Bankruptcies abounded. Successive British governments had put tepid interest in the area, **PICTURE 32: LORD ROSEBERY** - and it was only with the advent of Lord Rosebery as Foreign Secretary that Uganda was finally made a protectorate in 1894. This decision was taken partly because he believed that colonies were valuable for their own sake, but it was also because Uganda had acquired strategic importance.
This was because by 1887, the British Government had decided that it was in Egypt for the foreseeable future. The administration of Egypt had been undertaken in 1882 because there seemed to be no other alternative, but by 1887 it was becoming a showpiece of British benevolent imperialism in action: the economy was fundamentally sound, and the country was prosperous. It seemed that the British were a natural 'governing race' with a mission to bring good government to those parts of the world in strong need of it. On a less exalted level, Egypt was of great strategic importance. Therefore, if Britain was going to stay in Egypt, the position had to be protected; in particular, hostile forces had to be kept away from the sources and upper reaches of the Nile. In addition, Egypt was the northern end of the Cape-to-Cairo railway project, which first began to receive serious attention in 1889.

The clash in Egypt would be with the French. Indeed, this was also the case in West Africa, which went through a semi-comic phase when the English and French were leapingfrogging each other to conclude treaties with important chiefs; in some areas the French and British claims in West Africa resembled a checkerboard. But it was also dangerous. The French advance in West Africa had always been a military one, and it began to seem that, sooner or later, the British and French would fight. **PICTURE 33: LORD SALISBURY** - Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister, was determined that this would not happen. He believed that the Nile was less important than the Nile, and in June 1898 a boundary settlement was agreed with France, allowing the British government to concentrate on the Nile.

The story of Egypt and of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan is a relatively familiar one, with famous battles and a showdown with the French. **PICTURE 34: THE MADHI** - After the British had defeated the Egyptian Army in 1882, the Sudan had risen under its own leader, the Mahdi, and was threatening the security of Egypt itself. The British put pressure on the Egyptians to cut their losses and evacuate the Sudan. **PICTURE 35: GENERAL CHARLES GORDON** - General Charles Gordon, who had been Governor of the Sudan for a time and was believed to have a fund of goodwill among the Sudanese - he had tried to suppress the slave trade - was sent to carry out the evacuation. His attraction, however, was no match for that of the Madhi, and in January 1885 he died at the siege of Khartoum. When news of his death reached Britain, it severely shook the government of Gladstone, who was blamed for not having sent aid in time. The reaction of the French was that the Sudan now had no internationally recognised government and was therefore up for grabs. The British held that it still belonged to the Egyptians, although they were temporarily unable to exercise their jurisdiction.

**PICTURE 36: MAP OF THE SUDAN** - The British did not, of course, take any steps towards the re-conquest of the Sudan until there was an imminent foreign threat. Just as some Britons planned for a British Cape-to-Cairo, the French planned for an all-French route from west to east, from Senegal to the Red Sea. Between 1896 and 1898, Major Jean-Baptiste Marchand of the French Army made an epic overland journey from the Congo to Fashoda, a small outpost on the Upper Nile above Khartoum - it is a millimetre or two on the Nile above Malakal on the map. Back in 1895, the British had warned the French that any encroachment on the Upper Nile would be regarded as an 'unfriendly act', a diplomatic way of warning that war might well ensue.

**PICTURE 37: MAJOR-GENERAL HORATIO HERBERT KITCHENER** - Salisbury decided that the Sudan would have to be re-conquered in order to make the Upper Nile permanently safe, and he entrusted the campaign to Major-General Kitchener, instructing him to act in the name of the Egyptian government; Kitchener made this clear to all by flying the British and Egyptian flags side by side. He advanced with great caution, securing his communications with each step by building a railway and matching the gauge to the one used in South Africa. **PICTURE 38: BATTLE OF OMDOUMRAN** - When he finally met the Dervishes at the battle of Omdurman in September 1898, he won a decisive victory: Gordon of Khartoum was avenged. **PICTURE 39: MAP OF SUDAN** - The French, however, were still reluctant to admit the validity of the Egyptian claim and the British decided to base their claim on the right of conquest. A few days after the battle of Omdurman, Kitchener found Marchand and his small beleaguered force at Fashoda. The two men exchanged courtesies and referred the diplomatic questions back to their governments. The excitement in both Paris and London was intense; there was talk of war, fleets were prepared, but in the end, Paris had to give in: her budget was unbalanced, her army was in disarray over the Dreyfus scandal, and she could not have moved her troops across the Mediterranean, because it was controlled by Britain. She signed an agreement with Britain in March 1899 which left Britain in complete control of the Sudan.

**PICTURE 40: MAP OF SOUTH AFRICA** - Meanwhile, in South Africa by this time, events were going rather worse for the British. Here, the enemy was primarily the Boers. In 1795, Britain had taken over Cape Colony from the Dutch, and almost from the beginning the Dutch settlers and their descendants were unhappy with British rule. They objected to the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, which made it difficult for them to secure labour; the abolition of slavery in the Empire in 1833 brought freedom to some 39,000 slaves in South Africa, but compensation could only be collected in London, and thousands of Boer farmers received nothing. Two years later Parliament passed the Cape of Good Hope Punishment Act, which was designed to protect African natives from white aggression and to check European seizure of their lands. These British measures provoked large numbers of Boers to undertake what came to be known as the Great Trek, a migration between 1836 and 1840 of some 10,000 Boers and their families from Cape Colony to the lands beyond the Orange and Vaal Rivers. Many settled in Natal, on the eastern coast north of Cape Colony, but in 1842 the British, motivated in part by the desire to protect the natives from exploitation by the Boers, attacked Natal and the following year made it a colony. The Boers then upped stakes again and trekked to join those who had settled in the territory north of the Vaal River. Conflict repeatedly raged between the Boers and the British, and in 1854 the Boers established the
In 1880 the Boers rose up in revolt against the British. After a few minor reverses, the Gladstone government recognised the South African Republic's independence. British imperialists in South Africa were dismayed, and they were even more dismayed, indeed alarmed, by the government's recognition of Southwest Africa as a German protectorate. **PICTURE 41: CECIL JOHN RHODES** - Foremost amongst British imperialists in Cape Colony was Cecil John Rhodes, who had come to South Africa for his health and made a fortune in the diamond mines and other business ventures. His goal was to open up Africa to British imperial and commercial enterprise, and the greatest threat was the Germans. **[TOGGLE BACK TO MAP]** He and others feared that the Germans and the Boer Republics would move into the unclaimed land between them, ending Rhodes' dream of building a railway from the Cape to Cairo. A lesser threat was that the Portuguese would push eastwards from Portuguese Angola or westwards from Portuguese Mozambique into the interior. To counter the German and Portuguese threats, Rhodes considered it vital that the British establish clear claims to the territory northwards of Cape Colony. One way was to bring them into Cape Colony - not an unthinkable goal, given that his treatment of the Boers in Cape Colony had gained the support of many of them.

**PICTURE 42: PAUL KRUGER** - Rhodes might have been successful in bringing the Boers into a southern African federation had it not been for the opposition of Paul Kruger, a leader in the Boer rebellion in 1880 who became president of the South African Republic in 1883. A devout Calvinist, he was suspicious of foreigners, called Uitlanders, and fearful of modern economic and social developments, which he regarded as threats to the traditional values, religion and political independence of his people. He might have been able to preserve his Republic's relative isolation and independence had it not been for the discovery in 1886 of huge gold deposits in the Transvaal. The lure of gold attracted fortune hunters from around the globe, and soon the city of Johannesburg had a population of 100,000, half of them black workers and the rest largely foreigners, a large proportion of whom were British. Kruger and his colleagues realised the threat: Rhodes and others would be even more keen to extend their influence and control over the South African Republic. To deal with the threat, the Kruger government severely restricted their political and civil rights. The British blocked his attempt to gain a seaport, and instead the Boers began to build railways to connect them with other parts of the region. The fear grew in Cape Colony of the apparent German influence over the Kruger government and Transvaal affairs in general.

The situation deteriorated badly. Rhodes decided to exploit the disaffection of the Uitlanders in the Transvaal to overthrow the Kruger government. **PICTURE 43: JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN** - He hoped to gain the support from the new British government, whose Colonial Secretary was Joseph Chamberlain, a strong imperialist. Throughout the summer and autumn Rhodes and his associates paid for large stores of arms and ammunition to be smuggled into Johannesburg for the use of the Transvaal rebels, and his assumption was that Chamberlain would support, or at least condone, the plan. For his part, Chamberlain had strong reservations about Rhodes, whom he thought had become too powerful and independent and might well pursue policies which diverged from Britain's overall interests. Nevertheless, when informed by one of Rhodes' agents of the planned Uitlander revolution, he felt that he had no alternative to allowing the plans to go forward. However, the revolution did not come off as planned because of differences amongst the conspirators, including arguments over whose flag was to be raised in Johannesburg following their victory. The leader of the invasion force, Dr Leander Jameson, was instructed to delay action, but he ignored these instructions, cut the telegraph line to prevent any further instructions, and on 29 December 1895 crossed the Transvaal frontier with 500 horsemen. The Boers, fully informed of Jameson's movements by their own agents, allowed him to get within ten miles of Johannesburg, caught his troops in ambush, and forced his surrender.

The result deeply embarrassed both the Cape and British governments. Rhodes was obliged to resign as prime minister of Cape Colony and an inquiry was set up in London. It whitewashed Chamberlain and the government, but everyone knew that it was a cover-up. However, the government was rescued from prolonged embarrassment by the colossal blunder of Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, who sent a telegram to Kruger congratulating him on the fact that without outside help, he had defeated the armed bandits who had invaded his country. No single incident, it can be argued, did more to enflame British public opinion against Germany or to make them conscious of a German menace. It also made Kruger a hero in his own country.

Events over the following several years caused even more deterioration in relations between the British and the Boers. There were increasingly unacceptable demands and counter-demands. Finally, an ultimatum sent by Kruger in 1899 demanding the withdrawal of British troops from the Transvaal's borders, the withdrawal of British troops recently arrived in South Africa and a promise not to land the reinforcements currently on the high seas triggered the war for which the British were hoping, and which they had goaded Kruger into declaring. He really had no choice, given his belief that the British were determined to control his country. His hope was that the Boers could strike a ferocious blow at the British before they were prepared, which would bring in the other Powers in support. He looked most confidently for support to Germany, but the Germans abandoned the Boers, most likely because they were then mooting an alliance with Britain. The Boers were on their own.

**PICTURE 44: MAP OF SOUTH AFRICA** - On 11 October 1899, the South African Republic and the Orange
Free State went to war against Great Britain. Because of their initial numerical superiority and excellent equipment, the Boers won a number of early victories. The British were not used to warfare on the plains, nor could they have imagined the ability of the Boers to make so much of so little in terms of cover - ambushes were not unusual. Furthermore, the quality of the British soldier was not as high as it should have been - one outcome of these revelations was a reform of the Army in time for the First World War. It has been argued that if the Boers had made a dash for the seaports of South Africa, they might have prevented the arrival of British reinforcements. But the Boers did not have the manpower for so vast an enterprise, to capture and hold the seaports against British sea power. In the event, the British were soon heavily reinforced, and by the spring of 1900 had defeated the principal Boer armies in the field. **PICTURE 45: BOER AMBUSH** - The Boers resorted to guerrilla warfare, and the British responded with a scorched earth policy - a ruthless destruction of Boer farms and crops. **PICTURE 46: CONCENTRATION CAMP** - and the herding of the Boer civilian population into concentration camps. Of the 120,000 women and children assembled in these camps, approximately one-fifth, or 24,000, died of disease and exposure in the first year.

The war came to an end in 1902, facilitated by generous British peace terms, which were motivated by the desire to reconcile what were called the two white races of South Africa. Both former republics were given constitutions providing for representative government, although only adult white males of European descent could vote. In 1910 the Union of South Africa was established, with the Boers the eventual victors: they dominated the Union, and in 1961, declaring South Africa a republic, they severed all connection with Britain and the Commonwealth.

During the Boer War, the UK had been supported by only one country of any importance, the United States. Her isolation in Europe was manifestly clear, and she embarked on a policy of settling outstanding imperial problems. I spoke in an earlier lecture of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Agreement, and as that did not touch Africa, I will make no further reference to it. But the 1904 Anglo-French Agreement did. After two years of negotiations - note the relationship to the end of the Boer War - France agreed to British dominance of Egypt whilst Britain agreed to French dominance of Morocco, and West African boundaries were adjusted in favour of French interests in return for French concessions in other parts of the world. Thus by the First World War, British interests in Africa were settled - and were even increased after the First World War, when she fell heir to German East Africa.

**PICTURE 47: MAP OF AFRICA BY 1914** - And so: by 1914 the greater part of the African continent was partitioned. Liberia, which had been established as a country for former American slaves, remained independent under the patronage of the US and Abyssinia remained independent: the rest were the property of the European Great, and not so Great, Powers. The French controlled West and North-West Africa. The British nearly had the Cape to Cairo thoroughfare, and would do after 1918; she also had her colonies on the west coast, pre-eminently Nigeria, Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast. Germany had colonies on both east and west coasts, as did Portugal. Italy had Libya and Spain had her bit of Morocco.

The group which held almost nothing was the native Africans. However, nothing in political geography is eternal, and after 1945 the pendulum swung back.

My original intention was to finish this series of lectures with a look at the decline and fall of the British Empire, usually defined as post-1945. But I have changed my mind, and for my final Gresham lecture, I will try to say something about the various rises and falls of the British Empire over the four centuries of its existence. I will hope to see you in June for my swan song.

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