

THE MARQUESS WELLESLEY AND CEYLON 1798-1803: A PLAN FOR IMPERIAL CONSOLIDATION*

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I. Introduction

An old Trincomalee guide book declares in referring to the Wellesley house in that historic town that "in it lived Arthur, the Marquess Wellesley, Governor General of India, and, after his triumph at Waterloo, called the Duke of Wellington." An even older British publication describes Trincomalee as the "most capacious harbor in all India, from whose well-protected anchorage the British extended their imperial dominion over neighbouring lands." These two statements share several interesting characteristics. The first is that they are both, of course, incorrect. The second is that the former is widely believed to be true in Ceylon and the latter widely accepted in some other places. The third is that the misinformation reflected in each statement serves as the basis for much mixing of fact and fiction concerning the relationship of the Marquess Wellesley to Ceylon. This confusion has been in part sorted out by a generation of competent historians, but some dark corners remain. In this paper perhaps some light can be shed on a few aspects of South Asian history which have not been examined before: (1) what was the contribution of the Marquess Wellesley to Britain's decision to retain Ceylon on the occasion of the series of negotiations which culminated in the Treaty of Amiens of 1802?; (2) what was Wellesley's role in the attempt to define the relationship of Ceylon to the Indian empire, first in terms of acquisition, and subsequently in the decision to establish in Ceylon an autonomous crown colony?; (3) in relation to questions one and two, what can we state with some certainty to be Wellesley's idea of British imperial activity in South Asia, and what form did he expect institutionalization to take in terms of government and administration? Through consideration of these questions it may be suggested that the Marquess Wellesley's role in the history of Ceylon during the brief period 1798 to 1805 has been neglected, and that Wellesley's concept of empire in South Asia can be related at least in part to his views on Ceylon.

Britain's interest in Ceylon certainly preceded the advent of the protracted wars with France at the end of the eighteenth century, and prior to the war this interest had taken the form of contacts with the Kingdom of Kandy and even a mission to the capital. The idea that Dutch possessions in Ceylon should be considered fair game in any war which saw the Dutch identified with the French against the British was

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explicitly noted by Pitt in 1787 when he urged Cornwallis to occupy Trincomalee should war break out with France over Holland.¹ In 1794, revolutionary elements in Holland, not a little assisted by French agents, pressed for destruction of the ancient commercial oligarchy which, in the form of the Stadtholder William V and his friends, constituted the government of the republic. Henry Dundas, already a veteran of fifteen years' service as President of the Board of Control, suggested that Britain extract from the embattled Stadtholder permission for the British to occupy the Dutch East Asian empire as they saw fit if the French occupied Holland. On January 18, 1795, the Stadtholder sought asylum in Britain, was lodged in Kew palace, and was presented with a request for his sanction for British military operations.² The Stadtholder responded with a modified cession which allowed the British limited use of military facilities. A dozen Dutch territories were duly occupied by the British under a somewhat expansive interpretation of the letter; the operation in Ceylon, lasting from July 1795 to February 1796, proved to be the most protracted.³

Apart from the obvious interest to Ceylon, the British intervention was of interest for the role of British forces and officials in India. In the first place, the Madras Presidency was vested with immediate control over the operations in Ceylon, a control which the supreme government in Bengal disputed. In the second place, Madras' approach as fashioned by the Governor, Lord Hobart, placed a premium on the use of compulsion to effect the conversion of the Dutch, and inevitably provoked the Dutch to a protracted if half-hearted resistance. Hobart, an ambitious man, also despatched a mission to Kandy with powers to enter into a treaty whereby the British would guarantee the integrity of the Kandyan kingdom. John Shore, the quintessential Company servant and Governor General in Calcutta, sharply opposed such ambitious policies. He denied compulsion was permitted by the Stadtholder's concession, and he opposed the proposed treaty with Kandy as an effective bar to the return of the Dutch possessions in Ceylon to Holland upon conclusion of a peace.⁴ The stage was set, therefore, for a grand debate concerning the permanence of British rule in Ceylon, the relationship of the new territories to those of the East India Company to the north, and the importance of the new acquisition to impending negotiations with France.

II

The Marquess Wellesley was not yet on the scene, and, strictly speaking, there was as yet no Marquess Wellesley at all, but the Earl of Mornington. The future Marquess was born in Dublin in 1760, the eldest son of an impoverished Anglo-Irish noble whose fame as musician and composer was little comfort to his creditors,

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1. Pitt to Cornwallis, August 28, 1787, Cornwallis MSS, in J. H. Rose, *Grenville's Mission to the Hague*, EHR, XXIV.
 2. Grenville to the Duke of York, January 1, 1795, Foreign Office MSS, 37/57.
 3. V. L. B. Mendis, *The Advent of the British to Ceylon 1762-1803* (*Ceylon Historical Journal*, Vol. 18) (Colombo: Tisara Prakasakayo, 1971), pp. 143-45.
 4. Hobart, December 4, 1795, "Minutes of the Meeting of the Madras Council" *Madras Military and Political Proceedings*, Vol. 50, Ser. 4694.

but whose wife, a determined and resourceful woman, did much to shape the destinies of her remarkable brood of children. Richard Colley succeeded his father as the Earl of Mornington in 1781. A second brother was the future Lord Maryborough, durable member of successive Tory governments. The third eldest brother, Arthur, was the future Duke of Wellington, and, incidentally, as Arthur Wellesley, one time British resident in Trincomalee. A fourth was Lord Cowley, the famous diplomat. The young Mornington built a political career on his close ties with Grenville and Pitt at Eton and Oxford, assumed his seat in the Irish House of Lords at 21, and sat at Westminster from 1784. His promotion to the Governor-Generalship in succession to Sir John Shore in India in 1797 involved a succession of factors both fortuitous and calculated. Mornington's familiarity with the Indian empire prior to his departure from England in 1797 was ostensibly limited to some desultory meetings of the Board of Control, in which he seems not to have played a very prominent role. Most historians have resolved the baffle of his arrival in India armed with brilliant and detailed recommendations after apparently no great acquaintance at all with India as a product of some illuminating conversations with East Indian servants on their way home at the Cape of Good Hope. If so, the month spent refitting the ship there was an extraordinary one indeed; it appears, from an examination of Mornington's vast personal correspondence, that he had already read widely, absorbed much from further study of British errors in America, and made in his own mind some fruitful comparisons with the conduct of affairs in his native Ireland.

Wellesley, as we shall refer to him from this point, arrived in India in the spring of 1798 clearly committed to what became his most famous contribution to British power in India: the concept of paramountcy and subsidiary alliances. If Wellesley's predecessor, Sir John Shore, reflected Cornwallis's idea of a bureaucratic consolidation of the East India Company's position in India, eschewing further territorial conquests and commitments, Wellesley himself was in sympathy with Hobart at Madras and his ambitious direction of British power in Ceylon. In this context, it is well to remember that under Wellesley British power in India emerged clearly unchallengeable by France, almost inevitably supreme in comparison to any combination by the native states, unabashedly infused with a sense of a political mission to India far transcending the East India Company's commercial instincts which Wellesley came to despise so heartily, and decidedly the product of Wellesley's initiatives overriding less ambitious proposals from Whitehall. To Ceylon the intervention of the British as permanent successors to the Dutch was an event of decisive importance in the shaping of modern politics; to Wellesley the same event was but part of an extension of British power on a vast scale in South Asia.

III

Whatever the dimensions of Wellesley's conquests during his seven years in India, Ceylon presented a special case. It was technically Dutch, and thus could not be annexed with the same impunity which attended the appropriation of French territories in India and the lands of native rulers so unfortunate as to cross the Mar-

quest's path. It was also far from clear that Ceylon would become part of the East India's Company's possessions, and inasmuch as Dutch resistance had been overcome prior to Wellesley's arrival in Calcutta, Wellesley's claims to control were weaker. There were, in any case, the putative negotiations in Europe, the first series of which was underway even before Wellesley departed England. V. L. B. Mendis in his *Advent of the British to Ceylon* has traced Ceylon as a negotiable quantity through the various twisting and turnings of these meetings. We know from him that the negotiations in Paris of 1796 floundered on France's unwillingness to accommodate Britain's demand that the Austrian Netherlands be restored to Austria, with Britain compensating France by restoring Dutch and French colonies as needed. In these negotiations it appeared that Pitt was already convinced of the strategic importance of both the Cape of Good Hope and Trincomalee, but might have surrendered them to secure peace.⁵ In the negotiations of Lille in 1797, in which, by the way, Wellesley's youngest brother Henry, the future Lord Cowley, got his first taste of diplomacy, Britain dropped her demands for the restoration of the Austrian Netherlands but still failed to secure the peace.⁶ In this round negotiations eventually hinged on getting Holland to agree to cession of the Cape and Ceylon in return for funds sufficient to pay off an indemnity to France. The Dutch refused, and French power in Holland was not yet sufficiently strong to force the issue in its favor. Pitt, allegedly under the influence of Dundas, proceeded to sharpen his appreciation of Trincomalee to the extent that he now thought it more valuable than the Cape⁷. He would, it was thought, have been willing, however, to sacrifice both the Cape and Ceylon if peace could be secured. He was stoutly opposed in this by his friend Lord Grenville, the foreign secretary, who was so fearful that Pitt would give in to the temptation that he opposed negotiations altogether, and declared he was particularly adamant on the question of keeping Ceylon.⁸

By the autumn of 1801, moreover, when negotiations began in earnest leading up to the Peace of Amiens of March 27, 1802, Ceylon had become a cornerstone of British acquisitions. The treaty, which was a sacrifice of Britain's position on the continent and in the Mediterranean (with Malta being relinquished), gave Britain relatively little except Ceylon (even the Cape was returned). In the parliamentary debates which followed, moreover, Pitt praised the treaty, and in doing so was forced to argue, as Mendis notes, that acquisition of Ceylon was worth acquiescing to French domination in Europe. Pitt declared that Ceylon gave India the ultimate security she had long sought.⁹

5. J. H. Rose, *William Pitt and the Great War* (London, 1911), p. 323.

6. E. D. Adams, *The Influence of Grenville on Pitt's Foreign Policy 1787-1795* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institute, 1904), p. 56.

7. Rose, *Pitt and the Great War*, p. 323.

8. James Harris, First Earl of Malmesbury, *Diaries and Correspondence*, 4 Vols.; (London, 1845), III. 385.

9. Mendis, *Advent of the British*, pp. 201-2.

On the face of it British strategic thinking underwent considerable transformation between 1796 and 1802, especially in terms of Ceylon. What was appropriated substantially on the initiative of the Governor of Madras in 1796 and in the face of opposition from the Governor General, and what was administered on an *ad hoc* basis with an eye to its restoration to the Dutch upon the conclusion of hostilities, became the major advantage Britain gained in an otherwise unsatisfactory peace. It has generally been thought sufficient to ascribe the change of heart to the promptings of Dundas alone. Indeed, the evidence is so scanty that trusting to Dundas's illumination has seemed to be the safest course. His biographer assures us that Ceylon was "seldom absent from Dundas's mind" because it was the base from which the French could support Tipu, who until destroyed by Wellesley, harbored pro-French sympathies.¹⁰ The appointment of Frederick North to be governor of Ceylon has been seen by De Silva as proof positive of Dundas's success in convincing Pitt of the need to retain Ceylon.¹¹

One need not discount Dundas's contribution to the decision to retain Ceylon to point out that other factors and personalities may have intruded. The decision to despatch North to Ceylon was certainly influenced by more factors than Dundas's desire to annex the island. Dundas was anxious to deny patronage to Hobart, both because Hobart chafed under Dundas's directions and because Dundas was an assiduous pursuer of new patronage sources for his Scottish friends. There was also the act that Shore was leaving and either Hobart or Wellesley was going to Madras; for either the simultaneous addition of the burden of Ceylon would have been difficult. The installation of a governor in Ceylon fit in quite well with British administrative practice in India, where Bombay and Madras were at once subordinate to Bengal for larger imperial policy and quite independent (at least prior to Wellesley) in the conduct of local affairs. Finally, Wellesley's success in destroying Tipu, ironically, undercut his argument for retaining Ceylon. It is interesting to note that Dundas confided to Wellesley in October 1799 that he did not believe Mauritius or Ceylon in French hands would threaten India any longer unless joined to naval superiority; were naval superiority denied France, she might be able to land in Bengal or elsewhere but could not long remain. It was, by extension, not so necessary to retain Ceylon as it was to maintain naval superiority.¹² Mendis notes that Dundas's early fears of a French invasion of India through assistance to Tipu Sultan, once countered by Wellesley's vigorous and complete victory over the unfortunate ruler, turned Dundas to much less ambitious schemes which the previously cited letter of October 1799 suggests. Mendis notes that thereafter the initiative for permanent occupation of Ceylon

10. Holden Furber, *Henry Dundas*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 96.
11. Colvin R. de Silva, *Ceylon Under the British Occupation 1795-1833* (2 vols.; Colombo: Colombo Apothecaries' Company, 1953), I. 224.
12. Dundas to Mornington, October 9, 1799, printed in Edward Ingram, ed., *Two Views of British India: The Private Correspondence of Mr. Dundas and Lord Wellesley 1798-1801* (Bath: Adams and Dart, 1970), p. 185.
Note: This convenient compilation of the Dundas-Wellesley correspondence is referred to in lieu of the appropriate manuscript citations in this paper.

may have come from Bengal (that is, Wellesley) and not from Britain at all.¹³ When North adopted his own version of subsidiary states by despatching MacDowell on his mission in Kandy in March 1800 he had Wellesley's express approval, and no real authorization at all from London.¹⁴ If anything, by 1801, when the decision to retain Ceylon at almost all costs was cast in concrete, Dundas was in a near panic about the overextension of British resources in India and deeply depressed by Wellesley's disregarded for economy. One might hazard a belief that if Dundas's influence had been decisive in 1801 Ceylon's acquisition might not have been assured. Dundas opposed the treaty, and resigned office.

There is, moreover, some evidence that others were impressed with the importance of Ceylon and were eager to push this point at home. It is striking that all of them had firm connections with Wellesley, and certainly that none was more forward than Wellesley in preaching the new doctrine. Grenville and Pitt were still among Wellesley's principal correspondents, and Grenville appears to have been one of the few people, if Wellesley's complaints may be believed, who maintained a steady correspondence with the Governor General in Bengal. We also have the long memorandum of General Stuart, one of Lord Bute's ambitious progeny and a participant in Wellesley's Mysore campaigns, to Dundas in January 1800. A copy of the memorandum, a rather rambling and disconnected affair, appears in Wellesley's papers, and sentiments and even phrases in it closely parallel those in Wellesley's own dispatches to Dundas at the same time.¹⁵ Wellesley indeed may have used Stuart, who returned to Britain in ill health in June 1800, to read the memorandum to Dundas directly. The message which Stuart delivered was that the security of British power in India was directly dependent upon control of the sea. In this he went beyond Dundas, who saw no danger unless an enemy gained maritime ascendancy, in holding that India would be vulnerable unless the British mastered the Indian Ocean. But control of the sea, declared the memorandum, was impossible without British control of the entire Indian sub-continent littoral, and Ceylon's position here was crucial. In contradistinction to Dundas, who suggested in the wake of Wellesley's destruction of Tipu Sultan that British power in South India be concentrated at Seringapatam and equipped to move in any direction as required, Stuart declared that only situations on the sea could provide the necessary flexibility. British power, Stuart suggested, might better be concentrated at Trincomalee; at any rate, were Ceylon in the hands of the French British power in Mysore would quickly be reduced.¹⁶

Wellesley himself delivered a series of powerful messages to Dundas supporting permanent British acquisition of Ceylon. The sentiments expressed in his first letter

13. G. J. Alder, "Britain and the Defence of India: The Origins of the Problem 1798-1815", *Journal of Asian History*, No. 1 (1972).

14. Mendis, *Advent of the British*, pp. 199-200.

15. Stuart to Dundas, January 1800, printed in S. J. Owen, ed., *A Selection from the Despatches, Treaties and Other Papers of the Marquess Wellesley, K. G., during his Government of India* (Oxford University Press, 1877), pp. 567-77.

16. *Ibid.*

on the subject, written while he was at the Cape of Good Hope in transit to Bengal, are remarkable indeed when it is noted that there appear to be no sentiments respecting Ceylon in any of his previous correspondence. On the basis of his conversations with several British military and administrative officials returning to Britain after India service Wellesley confided to Dundas that he was persuaded that "the possession of Ceylon, either in the hands of France or of her bondslave Holland, would enable the French interests in India to rise within a very short period to a degree of formidable strength, never before possessed by them. On this subject I find no difference of opinion in the minds of any persons acquainted with India. The possession of Ceylon is universally held to be indispensable to the preservation both of our power on the continent and of our commerce on the seas of India"¹⁷. In the same series of letters he again noted that "the necessity of retaining Ceylon is now admitted universally" and on the basis of this sentiment declared that the Cape must be retained in order to guarantee the security of Ceylon. In October, shortly after his arrival in Bengal, Wellesley informed Dundas that he had ordered a reduction in British forces in Madras so that the Ceylon establishment could be strengthened.¹⁸ During 1799 no fewer than ten references to the indispensability of Ceylon to Britain's position in Asia were incorporated in Wellesley's correspondence to Dundas, and the same sentiments were addressed directly to Grenville, to Pitt, and even to Addington, who was destined to preside over the Treaty of Amiens. By 1800 Wellesley was content to believe that Ceylon's permanent acquisition was secured, and turned his attention completely, as will be seen later, to Ceylon's future relationship to India.

What the effect of all this was on Dundas's thinking is difficult to measure inasmuch as he increasingly viewed all projects in terms of Wellesley's penchants for deficit spending. That he wavered concerning permanent annexation when he realized in full measure Wellesley's expansionist tendencies is suggested in his letter of October 9, 1799.¹⁹ The fact that at the same time Grenville, Pitt and his friends were moving quickly to make acquisition not only a *sine qua non* of any future treaty, but indeed sufficient excuse for signing one, suggests that voices other than Dundas's were being heard. Wellesley was in a position to intercede powerfully; his instincts moved along lines of strategic thinking, and the same friends who translated him from the frustrations of Irish politics to heady power in India were also his principal correspondents. If acquisition was inevitable, then Wellesley's arguments justified it; if acquisition was not inevitable, Wellesley's observations may have helped to make it so. In any case, Wellesley was motivated in Ceylon by motives similar to those which induced him to double the size of British possessions in India. He craved power, even if his instincts in the exercise of it were often excellent. In retrospect, it is clear that Wellesley understood the thought processes of the opposition, even though his evidence was weak. We know now for instance, what Wellesley could only have guessed,

17. Mornington to Dundas, February 28, 1798, printed in Ingram, *Two Views*, p. 41.

18. Mornington to Dundas, October 11, 1798, printed in Ingram, *Two Views*, p. 99.

19. Dundas to Mornington, October 9, 1798, printed in Ingram, *Two Views*, p. 185.

that Napoleon gave serious consideration to the possibility of a sea invasion of India on at least three occasions between 1803 and 1805, and that Wellesley was quite correct when he told Castlereagh that the overland threat was not a great one for the moment.²⁰ For all these reasons he wanted Ceylon to be at his disposal, as we shall now see.

IV

Wellesley's succession to Bengal immediately preceded Frederick North's appointment to Ceylon; Wellesley, indeed, was at the Cape of Good Hope urging Ceylon be detained when in the wake of the collapse of the Lille negotiations Dundas decided that steps were needed to put the government of Ceylon on a more regular basis. Wellesley forever regretted that a separate government had been decided upon, though North's commission was sufficiently complicated to leave open the possibility of different arrangements in the future. North's commission, dated March 26, 1798, made him Governor and Commander-in-Chief, but, as he hastened to inform the arriving Wellesley, he was instructed "as far as circumstances will permit" to respond to directives of the Company, especially concerning commerce, to correspond with the Secretary of State through the Court of Directors, to obey orders from the Governor General at Fort William in the same way as Bombay and Madras were subject to Bengal, and to heed advice given by the Secret Committee on India. This confusing situation prompted North to hope that the anomalous nature of his situation would not impair relations with Wellesley.²¹

Wellesley's immediate reaction was to cultivate North's friendship. North was invited to Madras during the summer of 1799 and Wellesley journeyed south from Fort William to take the measure of the governor first-hand. He informed Dundas immediately after meeting North that North was a man of impressive abilities, and that should Lord Clive, the Governor of Madras and in Wellesley's mind an amiable but panicky soul, return to England for reasons of health, North should be moved to Madras.²² Wellesley repeated the suggestion twice more while North was in Madras.²³ He pressed his support for North even further by helping him defuse a spate of agitation against his authority in Ceylon masterminded by Cleghorn and others, who wrote to Dundas dilating their complaints against North. North resumed control upon returning to Colombo, referring as needed to Wellesley's support, which, as North told Wellesley, "dumbfounded" his opponents.²⁴ Wellesley thereafter kept a close eye on events in Ceylon and continued to declare his support for North's

20. Wellesley to Castlereagh, July 25, 1803, Owen, *Wellesley* pp. 583-92.

21. North to Mornington, June 5, 1798, Wellesley MSS, 13866.

22. Mornington to Dundas, April 21, 1799, printed in Ingram, *Two Views*, p. 144.

23. Mornington to Dundas, May 16, 1799, July 31, 1799, printed in Ingram, *Two Views*, pp. 151-171.

24. North to Wellesley, September 15, 1799, Wellesley MSS, 13866; De Silva, *Ceylon under the British Occupation*, pp. 231-32.

policies and to praise North's abilities;²⁵ Dundas for his part was momentarily convinced that North was the man for Madras.²⁶

Wellesley's solicitous attentions to North, as Dundas quickly discovered and as North to his advantage never quite realized, obscured quite different motives. In a letter to Dundas which followed inconveniently fast on his praise for North, Wellesley advanced the proposition that North's translation to Madras would be the ideal time to unite Ceylon to Madras and to reinforce the dependence of both on Bengal. The burden on Madras, Wellesley explain, was "not more than one good-governor with an efficient council might well manage".²⁷ The proposal reached Dundas at a time when he was still undecided as to which course to follow. Dundas had from the beginning seemed to lean towards direct control by the Crown, giving the East India Company, whose limits for exclusive control of trade already comprehended Ceylon, jurisdiction until a peace settlement confirmed permanent control. Following the collapse of the Lille negotiations Dundas moved gradually towards the idea of separate control even as his reactions to Wellesley's expansionist policies may have prompted doubts whether Ceylon need be retained at all.

In January 1798, Dundas was far from sure which way to turn; North's commission shows this. But in 1799 two developments pushed Dundas into decisive support for crown colony status. The first was North's difficulties in Ceylon itself. Complaints reaching Dundas from North that this dependence on Company servants in Madras was giving him only the dregs of the lot, and from North's opponents that the governor was insensitive to the interests of British inhabitants, made their impression upon Dundas. Dundas later reported to Wellesley that the connection with the East India Company had done "no good, and a good deal of mischief" and must be terminated.²⁸ He noted that administrative union was "premature"; mischief followed blending Madras' and Ceylon's civil service when no one would serve in the latter.²⁹ Another inducement for Dundas to separate Ceylon from India entirely can be drawn from an examination of Dundas's correspondence with Wellesley. Dundas was manifestly alarmed at the pace at which Wellesley was extending British power in India, ignoring strictures for financial economy, and proclaiming his resolve to deny places in India to unqualified patronage-seekers from home. In his letter announcing the intention to proceed with full separation Dundas referred directly to the first item. India's revenues, depleted as they had been by recent wars (wars which Wellesley did little to avoid) and burdened with the prospect of future campaigns, were inadequate to support the defense of Ceylon.³⁰ The question of financial economy, which North's ambitious

25. Wellesley to Dundas, June 8, 1800, printed in Ingram, *Two Views*, p. 267.

26. Dundas to Mornington, November 1, 1799, printed in Ingram, *Two Views*, p. 205.

27. Mornington to Dundas, May 19, 1799, printed in Ingram, *Two Views*, p. 162.

28. Dundas to Wellesley, September 11, 1800, printed in Ingram, *Two Views*, pp. 297-98.

29. *Ibid.*, December 30, 1800, printed in Ingram, *Two Views*, pp. 320-21.

30. *Ibid.*

efforts to discipline Kandy had already undermined, suggested to Dundas that this extension of Wellesley's power would only excite the Governor General to even more ambitious policies in Ceylon's interior. Dundas was already distressed at Wellesley's penchant for action first, justification later; their correspondence was becoming increasingly acrimonious; and their plans for India moving in sharply different directions. Dundas was anxious to curb Wellesley's designs in Ceylon as he had already curbed them in Persia, at the Cape of Good Hope, and as he had failed to curb them in relations with Arcot, Tanjore, Oudh and increasingly with the Mahrattas. The third element, patronage, pitted Dundas, whose power in Scotland was based squarely on his success in satisfying patronage demands and who populated India with unemployed Scotsmen, against Wellesley. The Governor General adhered to his vow not to place incompetent administrators in positions in India, and wished to relieve those already in place. That Dundas was relying on Ceylon to supply what Wellesley was denying him in India in the way of patronage opportunities is underscored by North's complaints to Wellesley.³¹ A separate Ceylon, immune from Wellesley's passion for appointing men young, brilliant, and loyal to him, may not have been the least important consideration in Dundas's decision.

On December 30, 1800, Dundas advised the Court of Directors that Ceylon should be made a royal colony and communicated this to Wellesley the same day.³² The decision, which Dundas told Wellesley would not be implemented until a peace treaty confirmed Ceylon as a permanent acquisition, apparently surprised and definitely angered Wellesley, who took advantage of whatever time might remain before negotiations with France resumed and a treaty fashioned to develop his arguments for integrating Ceylon into the Indian empire. Wellesley's arguments did not convince London, but they deserve detailed analysis as a reflection of his conception of empire, a conception which he was largely successful in impressing upon the remaining British dominions of South Asia, and as testimony to his formidable intellect and dedication to empire at a time when others' thoughts were directed to questions of Britain's survival.

With characteristic decisiveness, Wellesley despatched Dundas's economic worries as unworthy of further consideration in matters of such importance as the constitution and extension of the empire. It made no difference, he reminded Dundas in a letter written at Barrackpore on May 10, 1801, whether the Crown defrayed the deficiency on Ceylon's account directly or through the East India Company; Ceylon was not now, and might never be, able to defray the military expenses which attended annexation of it and its role in defending India. No empire could be sustained if each constituent was expected to pay its own way; one justified retention of Ceylon because it secured British power in India, and one could justify India even when expenses exceeded income because India's resources sustained Britain in its titannic struggle.

31. North to Wellesley, September 7, 1801, Wellesley MSS, 13866.

32. De Silva, *Ceylon Under British Occupation*, pp. 248-49. Dundas to Wellesley, December 30, 1800, printed in Ingram, *Two Views*, pp. 320-21.

Assuming no one contested the premise that Ceylon was crucial in a military sense, the essential question was political and administrative, not economic and financial. Wellesley advanced two principles which he thought basic to the viability of the Indian empire. Every part of the empire, continental as well as insular, "must be subject to the general control of one undivided authority". Secondly, "the constitution of every branch of the empire should be similar and uniform, and no subordinate part should be so constituted as in any respect to hold a rivalry of dignity even in form with the Supreme Power". Unity of power in India was the best security one could provide against the danger posed by the vast extent of British possessions, by the variety of interests embraced, by the remote position of various provinces, and by "the natural principles of division and discord". This unity must be not only substantive, but symbolic. The inhabitants of India respected royal power in India because it was supreme and undivided, and they deprecated the power of the East India Company because it was restricted, distracted, and inconsistent. They appreciated the royal power because of its visible embodiment in the Governor General, whose civil and military powers were fused. British pre-ponderance in India was a function of power centralized, power made visible, and, of course, power used wisely. There was an "absolute necessity of preserving the control of the Governor General in Council over the Government of Ceylon entire, and in the fullest efficiency". The suggestion of division would destroy control, and "without this control the possession of Ceylon, instead of being the great bulwark of this Empire, may become nearly as useless to the common cause as if it were in the hands of a neutral power". An independent governor might prove "the source of the most dangerous confusion and distraction in the bosom of our dominions". Should autonomy be sustained, it would weaken the authority of the Governor General perhaps irreparably, for his civil authority, coming from the Company and not the Crown, would not compare in the popular mind with the mandate granted to the governor of Ceylon. There was no alternative to integration of Ceylon in the Indian system.³³

Wellesley rested his case, and without effect, until November 1803, when he resurrected his letter to Dundas and attached a long letter to Hobart, Dundas's successor at the Board of Control, declaring intervening events had proved him right. The consequences of separation had, Wellesley believed, confirmed all his apprehensions. In Ceylon war had been undertaken without the previous knowledge of the Governor General, but whose expenses were in the first instance supplied by Bengal and the calamities of which have necessitated a call for troops. Wellesley refrained from putting forward elaborate criticism of the war itself, but thought it evident "that every arrangement connected with these questions might have been formed with greater advantage under the direct authority of the power which must ultimately furnish the supplies for war, and provide the securities for peace". Had Ceylon been subordinate to Bengal, war if necessary would have been undertaken only after deliberate preparation and planning. There was danger for the future as well. If war resu-

33. Wellesley to Dundas, May 10, 1801, Owen, *Wellesley*, pp. 613-16.

med, the Indian government was expected to secure the remaining possessions of the French and the Dutch in Asia, support Mediterranean operations from the Red Sea, and insure maritime supremacy in the Indian ocean. The first two objectives required assurance that Ceylon would not demand troops for domestic purposes; the third required undisputed control over Trincomalee. Under present conditions it was not possible to use the ports and resources of Ceylon with the effect obtained from full command during the recent war. Indeed, "a considerable portion of the value of Ceylon in time of war is therefore actually suspended by the existing constitution of the government of that island".

The prospect of renewed war (Wellesley wisely neglected to restore the French to their Indian possessions as required by the Treaty of Amiens) set the tone for his discussions with Hobart concerning Ceylon, but he adverted to comments on Ceylon which indicate he had done some research on that island's domestic affairs. Wellesley cleverly pointed out that relations between Burma and the Indian empire were seriously affected by British treatment of the King of Kandy, who was "particularly venerated" in Burma and from whose territories the Burmese derived the source of their religious institutions. This instance suggested the truth of the observation, Wellesley added, that "the operation of any system of treaties, alliances, or political or diplomatic arrangements pursued towards the native states and subjects within the limits of the island of Ceylon, cannot be confined to the coasts of that island, even if such system should exclude the contingency of war in Ceylon".³⁴ Because of Ceylon's connections with the Northern parts of the Indian dominions and its relationship to Buddhist areas to the East, Wellesley proposed that Ceylon be placed not under Madras as he had suggested in 1801 but directly under Bengal.

Wellesley's call apparently fell on completely deaf ears. Ironically, Hobart, who had initiated efforts in 1795 to place Ceylon under Madras, had convinced himself that his failure to be moved to Fort William as Governor General in 1797 was due to Wellesley's influence with Pitt rather than Hobart's arguments with Shore. His bitterness towards Wellesley, loudly advertised, must have prepared Wellesley to anticipate his proposal would fail. Hobart, indeed, does not seem to have replied to the proposal, and Wellesley's subsequent involvement with Holkar and his first taste of defeat in India, albeit temporary, prompted a surge of criticism so great that Wellesley eventually felt obliged to resign his office and return to England. The possibility of Ceylon's integration into India was not completely stilled, but the formative period had passed and the hardened mold was not to be broken easily.

V

It was Wellesley's misfortune to have as a brother one of the dominant figures of the early nineteenth century, to enjoy his greatest success early in his public life, and to harbor an impatience towards men with weaker minds which cost him most of

34. Wellesley to Castlereagh, November 30, 1803, Owen, *Wellesley*, pp. 617-25.

his political support. He returned from India to face a hostile parliament and serious impeachment charges. He survived these, his policies were later vindicated by the East India Company itself, and his accomplishments within the context of imperialism are now being given enhanced value. His connection with Ceylon seems to have been completely severed when he left India; his bitterness at the criticism engendered by his policies was so great that he refused two subsequent invitations to return to India as Viceroy. He did not desert politics—he was Lord Lieutenant in Ireland twice, Foreign Secretary once, and nearly Prime Minister twice—but not until he retired from public life at the advanced age of 74 did his attention turn once more to the East. He undertook the study of Sanskrit, and his natural facility with languages provided him before his death with a reading competence in Sanskrit and Persian both. He edited and published his Indian despatches, which the public applauded for their evidence of statecraft, literacy, and striking narrative; the East India Company, his old antagonist, paid his debts and granted him a generous pension. His conviction that India's danger was maritime was ironically dismissed by his success in securing the Deccan (which denied the French an ally) and expanding British dominion to Delhi and beyond, which raised the question of a contest with Imperial Russia for continental supremacy.³⁵ His brother Wellington commanded the public's attention and continues to do so; Wellesley's interest in Ceylon as a constituent of his plans for imperial development still gives way before the fact that the Duke once lived in Trincomalee.

35. Alder, "Britain", *passim*.