RAIDING THE RAID: A SUMMARY OF THE BRENTHURST CONFERENCE 'THE JAMESON RAID AND BEYOND', 20-22 JANUARY 1997. [1]

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My starting point in this presentation is Professor Mottie Tamarkin's keynote address and the session on the Politics of the Raid that followed it on the first day of the conference.[2] Like most of those present, I found the opening sessions both stimulating and effective in raising many of the basic issues that we needed to be concerned throughout the symposium.

The goal of this paper is to try to pull together some of the elements of the complex puzzle that is the Jameson Raid. In that regard, the paper tries to do two things. One is to come back to some of the big questions that were raised but not resolved in the opening sessions. And the second is to address the gaps, to look at least briefly at some important aspects that the symposium has so far not discussed very much.

Reading the discussion so far, it seems there was much agreement that considered in and of itself, the Jameson Raid was a trivial, almost inconsequential event. The episode of a colonial adventurer leading yet another filibustering expedition against a ramshackle mini-state in pursuit of political advantage or economic benefit on the periphery of empire would not normally warrant the attention that historians have paid to it.

Editor's note: On the occasion of the publication of T*he Jameson Raid: A Centennial retrospective* (The Brenthurst Press, 1996), the Brenthurst Library convened a symposium that brought together most of the contributors to the book with other scholars who have written on the subject for a three day examination of the issues involved. The symposium included sessions on 'The politics of the Raid', the 'Role of the media and popular literature', the 'Economic debate' and the 'Black perspective'. In a public lecture associated with the symposium, five scholars spoke briefly about some of the key personalities of the Raid: Cecil John Rhodes, Leander Starr Jameson, S. J. P. Kruger, Percy FitzPatrick and John Hays Hammond. Alan Jeeves' paper which is reproduced below was one of two given on the final day of the symposium that attempted to sum up its findings.
'The politics of the Raid' featured presentations by Professors Apollon Davidson, Bill Guest and Robert Rotberg and was chaired by Dr Iain Smith.

What then should be said about significance and consequences? In the keynote address, Mottie Tamarkin insisted that the Raid must be entirely uncoupled from the War that followed; only a heavy dose of hindsight, he argued, would allow the historian to make any connection. If this is an argument against inevitability, against the idea that somehow the Raid triggered developments bound to lead to war, then I can agree. If the point is meant to suggest that there was no influence from the Raid that actually occurred on the crisis that later led to war, then I for one take a different view.

From a somewhat different point of view, Professor Robert Rotberg argued for downgrading the significance of the Raid on the grounds that an "irreconcilable conflict" was already underway; although the phrase irreconcilable conflict carries the suggestion of inevitability, Robert noted that he, of course, wanted to make no such claim. But the Raid he said was "premature" and was a detour in the growing crisis. Suppose it had succeeded, he asked, what would have been the result? — a prolonged guerrilla war as the Transvaalers struggled to regain their independence, a context presumably like that of 1880-1881 or even 1900-1902. If the struggle for southern Africa was irreconcilable already before the Raid, what were its elements? What were the forces in play?

In response to these and related arguments, there were some highly pertinent questions and observations from the audience that bear directly on the issue of consequences and that also need further discussion and development:

During the discussion, Dr. Rodney Davenport made the important suggestion that the Raid was one of a number of events that poisoned the diplomatic well between Britain and the South African Republic and further weakened the chances of a peaceful outcome. That point was a thrust both against Professor Tamarkin's argument about no causal link between the Raid and the coming of the South African War and Professor Rotberg's suggestion that an irreconcilable conflict was already evident before the Raid.

Then there was the question about the need to separate the Raid that actually occurred from the plot that preceded it. Jameson's actual Raid was not part of anybody's plot, probably not even Jameson's until he actually made the fateful decision to ride in. This suggestion pointed to the need to separate the two analytically and ask what, if anything, was the wider significance of each.

A very helpful suggestion, I thought, but it got a weak response.

Third, there were questions about the Transvaal and Afrikaner side of the equation: about how the Raid may have strengthened Kruger's possibly insecure political position before the Raid and ensured his easy re-election in 1898; about the new Transvaal-Free State alliance that followed directly from the Raid; without that treaty would the Free State have entered the war when it came?; absent assurance of support from the Free State might Transvaal diplomacy have been different? I could add another point noted at the time by Sir Hercules Robinson, Governor and High Commissioner at the time of the Raid. Robinson did not doubt that the Raid enormously strengthened Kruger's position among Afrikaners not only in the Transvaal but throughout southern Africa. To the extent that Kruger and his advisers themselves understood that, how might it have effected their diplomacy and their response to the reform demands of the Uitlanders?

To take these points in turn:
The first is the suggestion that only a heavy dose of hindsight can make a connection with the Raid and the War. There are two comments I want to make. One is to talk about the immediate response of the Imperial government to the Raid and the second is to comment on Professor Davenport's point about the poisoning of the diplomatic well in Anglo-Transvaal relations that resulted from Jameson's invasion.

For the Imperial government, the response of the Secretary of State at the Colonial Office, Joseph Chamberlain, to the news of the Raid was immediate. He cabled Robinson on 4 January 1896 with a forceful message that associated the Imperial government directly with the cause of the Uitlanders in Johannesburg and their demands for the vote and the redress of other grievances. He described their unresolved situation in the Transvaal as a major factor making for instability throughout the region, outlined needed reforms, and called for the granting of municipal self-government to the mining areas.

Historians from J. S. Marais to Andrew Porter have recognised the importance of this despatch because it associated Imperial prestige and power directly with Uitlander rights.[3] Sir Henry Loch had seen in 1894 that the Uitlanders were the key to the Transvaal's bolted door and proposed to use a rising in Johannesburg sup-

ported by an outside force of Imperial troops to kick it down; Rhodes scavenged Loch's scheme but his crony Jameson made a hash of it; in immediate response, the Secretary of State took up the cause of Uitlander rights, suggesting that in his view their situation held the key to the British position in the subcontinent; the implications were very dangerous and they followed directly from the Raid; London had not acted directly in this fashion before.

However, the immediate effect was small at first. Why? The reason is simply that several ingredients necessary before the Imperial government could act in the way that Chamberlain proposed were missing. First, Robinson refused to cooperate with the proposal to take up the matter of Uitlander political rights with President Kruger. When the despatch arrived, the High Commissioner was attempting to mediate the crisis that followed Jameson's surrender and to secure a peaceful resolution. The leaders of the Johannesburg reform movement were facing jail for treason. There were already rumours in circulation that they were very probably guilty. In this situation, the timing could not have been worse to raise the question of Uitlander "rights" with the Transvaal government. Second, for the Imperial government to take up the cause of the Uitlanders, there had to be some credible evidence that the Uitlanders themselves were concerned. When Loch developed his plan in 1894, it was in the context of the agitation in Johannesburg during the so-called Commandeering Crisis that erupted during 1894 when the government tried to press some Uitlanders into military service for the northern war.[4] Thereafter, however, the Uitlander reform movement subsided again. In December, 1995, those in the know in the Transvaal recognised that the Reform Committee did not have enough popular support in Johannesburg to make the threat of a rising credible. In any case, Sir Hercules Robinson replied to Chamberlain's January 4th despatch that the timing was completely wrong for the Imperial government to intervene on behalf of Uitlander rights and that any attempt to do so would only increase sympathy for Kruger among the Transvaalers and in southern Africa generally.

J. S. Marais, *The fall of Kruger's Republic*, (1961); G. H. L. le May, *British Supremacy in South Africa, 1899-1907*, (1965); A. N. Porter, *The origins of the South African War, 1895-1899*, (1980), pp. 79-85.
T. J. Makhura, "Another road to the Raid: The neglected role of the Boer-Baganawa War as a factor in the coming of the Jameson Raid, 1894-1895," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21, (1995), pp. 257-267.

Reluctantly, Chamberlain accepted the advice that Sir Hercules gave. Briefly during March 1896, Chamberlain and the Parliamentary Undersecretary at the Colonial Office, Lord Selborne, considered an ultimatum to force concessions on Uitlander rights from the Transvaal Republic. Neither the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, nor the cabinet was prepared to authorise such action at that time, although they may have agreed that an ultimatum was unlikely actually to lead to war. Given the international situation, they did not want to become embroiled in another crisis. More important in restraining policy was the state of opinion within South Africa, as Robinson had described it. Robinson had explained that in the event of conflict on any of the areas of dispute arising out of the Raid, Kruger could count on the support of the Free State and, at the least, the sympathy of many Afrikaners in the Cape and Natal. The result of any war would be ongoing ethnic conflict and endemic hatreds among the whites that would persist for decades and require the maintenance of large Imperial forces at great expense for many years. Drawing back from thoughts of forcing the pace, Chamberlain shifted temporarily away from the issue of Uitlander grievances but continued to hammer at enlarging the claims to British suzerainty over the Transvaal under the London Convention.[5]

Nevertheless, the January 4 despatch was a fateful indicator of crises to come. Put in a different governor in the person of Milner; create a rabid agitation over Uitlander rights through the South African League which began to organise later in 1896; back them up with a virulent press campaign and you have the ingredients of renewed trouble with very dangerously Imperial prestige directly on the line. The point is that within days of Jameson's surrender, Chamberlain saw in effect that Rhodes was finished politically, at least for the time being, and he stepped in to fill the vacuum. That intervention was an immediate, direct and potentially calamitous consequence of the Raid, not the plot that preceded it but the Raid itself, that supposedly trivial, inconsequential event that we have been talking about for the last two days.

P. Lewsen, (ed.), *Selections from the correspondence of J. X. Merriman*, vol. II, *1890-1898*, (1963), pp. 181 - 183; Marais, *Kruger's Republic*, pp. 99-100; R. Robinson and J. Gallagher with A. Denny, *Africa and the Victorians; The climax of Imperialism in the Dark Continent*, (1961), pp. 430-433; D. E. Torrance, *The strange death of the Liberal Empire: Lord Selborne in South Africa*, (1995), pp. 35-36; R. H. Wilde, "Joseph Chamberlain and the South African Republic, 1895-1899", *Archives Yearbook for South African History*, (1956), Part I.

The potential for disaster was the greater because of the complete absence of trust in Anglo-Transvaal diplomacy which was, I agree with Professor Davenport, an important consequence of the Raid, not the Raid alone but the Raid very substantially. Distrust arose because of the well founded suspicion that Kruger, his advisors and some of their sympathisers at the Cape most certainly had that Chamberlain and his officials were deeply implicated in a plot to destroy their independence. When Kruger told the intransigent Milner in 1899, "it is my country that you want;" he was thinking not only of Milner himself but also of a whole series of, in his view, treacherous dealings at the hands of Britain, perhaps going back, as Davenport also suggested, to Shepstone and the first annexation in 1877. In the litany of events that Kruger probably had in mind, the Raid must have been near the top of that list.

The effect of the Raid in undermining the possibility of serious discussions between the Imperial and Transvaal government is shown by the latter's efforts during 1896 to evade an invitation from Chamberlain to Kruger to come to London for talks on outstanding issues. Convinced that he would be facing British officials who were deeply implicated in plots against Transvaal independence, Kruger showed how reluctant he was to do any such thing. The proposed meeting foundered in the atmosphere of suspicion and distrust that the Raid had done much to intensify. That was another, direct, immediate and important consequence of the Raid that had an important bearing in preparing the ground for the final crisis that led eventually to War.

Should we conclude then that the Raid was "the first shot" in the South African War? No, but it was one event in a long series that led to that result. It had serious consequences for the future of southern Africa which when combined with other developments helped to bring on the conflict. The Raid was important for what it did to make a peaceful resolution of outstanding issues between Britain and the ZAR more difficult.

Second, what about Professor Rotberg's suggestion that an "irreconcilable conflict" already existed before the Raid occurred. My question is where are the signs of it? The irreconcilable conflict up to that point was between Rhodes, Kruger and their advisers and had been fought out all around the periphery of southern Africa over the previous decade. With the pre-Raid conspiracy, Rhodes's plot brought the contest into the citadel of Transvaal power. But

once the Raid knocked Rhodes out of the game, for all anyone knew in January 1996 probably forever, where is the "irreconcilable conflict"? All the other elements are missing before the Raid. To repeat those ingredients are: an actively interventionist Imperial government taking up the cause of the Uitlanders and doing so publicly and directly; an Uitlander agitation to make such intervention credible; the poisoned diplomatic well; an Afrikanerdom increasingly alarmed and increasingly united to resist the forces gathering against the Transvaal; and a rabid press bent on throwing petrol on the flames. None of those elements was visibly present before the Raid; it was the Raid itself that helped to unleash them. It seems to me that if you want to speak about the sin of hindsight, it is not those who find serious consequences flowing from the Raid who are guilty of it but those, like Professor Rotberg, who find an "irreconcilable conflict" already in progress before the Raid.

In discussion, Professor Rotberg explained that he had in mind the structural conflict between the traditional agrarian society of the Transvaal and the modern industrial order that was emerging in its midst around the mining industry. In a basic way that conflict was irresolvable without profound change in the Transvaal's rural order. However, such conflicts only become "irreconcilable" when they cannot be managed politically. There was little to suggest during 1895 that social and economic change in the Transvaal was producing an unmanageable political crisis of sufficient magnitude that was likely to lead to war.

In general, the symposium was less successful in addressing issues concerning the Transvaal side of the crisis and the response of the Kruger government to it.

First, how important was the Raid in strengthening Kruger's position in Transvaal politics? Sir Hercules Robinson thought it was very important. There seems to be much evidence of opposition to Kruger among the burghers up to 1895, even over his policies of dealing with the Uitlanders.[6] On the face of it, the invasion itself and even more the suspicion of the Imperial government's involvement must have helped to make opposition to Kruger, as increas-

C. T. Gordon, *The growth of Boer opposition to Kruger 1890-1895*, (1980)

ingly after the Raid, the very embodiment of Transvaal independence seem almost treasonous.

Second, there is the matter of the new Transvaal-Free State alliance. The prelude to the Treaty of 1897 was the election of Martinus Steyn as State President of the Free State who had an easy electoral victory shortly after the Raid. That victory was a signal of the political shift of the Free State away from the Cape and toward the Transvaal. The treaty that followed reaffirmed that the two republics would support each other in the event of an external threat to the independence of either of them. How important was the assurance of that support in shaping the Transvaal's response to the diplomatic crisis? Did it make Kruger less inclined to make concessions on the reform issues that surfaced so strongly in 1898-1899?

There are a number of other issues that did not get much discussion in the symposium. One is the question of internal economic reforms in the Transvaal after the Raid. The most interesting recent work on this aspect is Patrick Harries recent *Work, culture and identity.*[7] Harries emphasised the seriousness with which the Kruger government tried to deal with the outstanding grievances of the mining industry in the two years following the Raid. In that regard, he pointed to the government's successful efforts to support the industry black wage reductions in 1896-1897 that reduced those wages by thirty per cent and the negotiation of an agreement with the Portuguese during 1897 that was very important in entrenching the mining industry's monopoly on the flow of migrant labour from Mozambique. Fifteen years ago, Charles van Onselen also stressed the importance of the government's economic reform efforts at this time. He said that the Raid gave the government a "severe political jolt," and that in response it made "serious, consistent and determined efforts to improve the quality of its administration and to accommodate the mine owners' steadily escalating demands for a new order which could more effectively nurture the growth of industrial capitalism."

Van Onselen thought that the Raid marked "an important turning point" because it led to "hesitant, grudging" but nevertheless marked

P. Harries, *Work, culture and identity: Migrant labourers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910,* (1994).

effort to recognize the gold industry's centrality in the economic future of the republic.[8]

The government's reform intentions were also indicated by its appointment of an Industrial Commission of Inquiry to advise on economic policy and the grievances of the gold industry. The Commission held hearings during 1897 and produced a comprehensive report at the end of the year. As was noted in one of the sessions, the State's response was quite limited and the reforms actually implemented fell well short of the industry's minimum demands. There was a contradiction between the decision to appoint the Commission an to name people to it who were serious advocates of economic reform on the one hand, followed by the failure to implement significant changes to economic policies. The failure to follow through suggests serious internal divisions within the Transvaal state on how to deal with the mining industry. Nevertheless both Harries and Van Onselen emphasise the importance of its reformist intentions and attempts to modernise itself in order better to cope with an emerging industrial order.

It can be argued that Kruger's ministers after the Raid and in response to it began seriously to work toward a political and administrative system that was capable of meeting the needs of the modern city and industrial system which had grown up in their midst over the previous decade. The young Jan Smuts, who had moved north from the Cape immediately after the Raid and later joined the South African Republic as attorney-general, promoted reforms in the administration of justice that made possible better enforcement of the laws against gold theft and against the sale of liquor to black miners. Shortly before the War, the Wernher, Beit firm acknowledged the success that Smuts and his chief detective had in disrupting the illicit liquor trade, that was one of the mines major grievances. The decision (in 1897) to grant municipal status and broader powers of local self- government to Johannesburg was a product of the same modernizing impulse.

So successful were these reform policies, according to Harries, that the economic issues no longer provided any valid basis for the mining industry or the Imperial government to bring on a crisis to

C. van Onselen, *Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914,* vol. 1: *New Babylon*, (1982), p. 13.

secure further changes.[9] Harries makes a strong case but tends perhaps to overstate it. For instance, the minimal reforms that the government enacted in response to the Industrial Commission Report was a serious tactical error. That response was denounced by the mining industry which made effective propaganda in demanding much more reform. The Imperial government eventually took up these grievances and added them to the political ones. The state's grudging response to the highly visible Industrial Commission Report was a symptom of a more general failure to get public-relations credit for its otherwise serious and successful efforts to modernise itself. In the resulting vacuum mining companies were able to turn the hearings before the Industrial Commission into an intemperate attack on Transvaal policies and to minimise its reform efforts.

The Kruger government's failure to follow through, its tendency to dribble out reforms rather than granting them generously and at once, was partly the result of the suspicions generated and aggravated by the Raid. Everything had to be looked at from the standpoint of its possible effect on Transvaal independence. Kruger in 1897-1898 was responding to opposition much as P. W. Botha did during the crisis of 1984-1988. Both leaders had reformist intentions and had acted on them in significant and important ways. Yet both of them in the end were afflicted either by a failure of nerve or by a failure of imagination in their inability to follow through or to accept the full logic and implications of their policies. As a result, they gave their enemies opportunities that they were not slow to exploit.

In my conclusion to the chapter on the Consequences of the Raid for the Brenthurst Jameson Raid Book, I made the point that was often stated during the symposium, that at one level the Raid was merely an absurd and predictable fiasco, a grotesque monument to overconfidence, bad planning and serious political misjudgment.[10] Yet, that is only one dimension of the Raid's place in South African history. Put the Raid in context, as historians are trained and expected to do, and one can see that it both grew out of and in its effects served to reinforce important trends in South African devel-

P. Harries, "Capital, state and labour on the 19th Century Witwatersrand: A reassessment," *South African Historical Journal*, 18 (1986), pp. 25-45.

The Jameson Raid: A Centennial retrospective, (Brenthurtst Press:Houghton, 1997)

opment. In that regard, I wrote that the Raid brought into much sharper relief than ever before the interconnectedness of Transvaal power, the wealth and needs of the mining industry, Uitlander rights, British supremacy, and the prospects of a united South Africa. Rhodes saw that, as did Sir Henry Loch before him. Chamberlain understood it immediately the Raid had occurred as is shown by his famous cable of January 4, 1896. Kruger's government now seemed the one remaining obstacle to resolving these matters in ways favourable to British, Cape and Rhodesian interests. Rhodes and Loch both thought that a single blow aimed at Kruger where he seemed most vulnerable might speed things up.

Rhodes failed, partly because of serious deficiencies in his so-called 'plan', partly because of divisions among the Uitlander Reform Committee, but mainly because of the failure of the individuals on whom he relied and his own inability to take the measure of Kruger, to see that in the Transvaal State President he faced a much more shrewd, able and determined leader than he had usually faced in the past. This failure was the more inexcusable since Rhodes was no stranger to negotiations with Kruger and had had every opportunity properly to understand him. When Chamberlain, attempting to rescue something from Jameson's folly, proposed to put the focus squarely on Uitlander grievances in his despatch of 4 January 1896, it had no effect at first because the high commissioner refused to respond as the Secretary of State thought was necessary. Jameson's foolhardiness, however, did have serious consequences; it helped to intensify a dangerous dynamic in South African affairs. Consequently, questions of private profit and political change, and the demand of white British subjects to have these things on terms that they would dictate, continued to dominate southern Africa affairs, not only up to the South African War but also right through another decade of economic reconstruction, political turbulence and, finally, Union.