1911
PRELIMINARY MOVES

THE 2011 CHIEF OF ARMY
HISTORY CONFERENCE

Edited by
Peter Dennis & Jeffrey Grey
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Back cover: detail from AWM P00717.001
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Preface

The papers in this collection centre loosely around the events of 1911, both before and after. As the centenary of the First World War grows inexorably closer the age-old question of inevitability invariably arises. While it is tempting to see the war as an unavoidable consequence of international developments in the preceding decade, it did not seem so at the time. True, many of the belligerents had anticipated a war, and made plans accordingly, but the circumstances and timing caught most by surprise. The gradual disintegration of the European system and the outbreak of war in 1914 needs to be balanced against the successful management of that system in the forty years preceding the summer of 1914. Localised conflicts there were, but the Great Powers successfully managed to preserve the peace between themselves, even while jockeying for position and influence at the expense of others.

Italy’s invasion of Libyan abruptly ended the period of managed decline of the Ottoman Empire upon which the Great Powers had reached informal, if uneasy, agreement in the preceding decades. In a variety of ways, and often connected only by the most tenuous of links, the year 1911 became a pivotal year in the international system. It did not necessarily appear that way to the participants: as C.V. Wedgwood, author of many studies of the seventeenth century, noted decades ago, history is lived forward but recollected, analysed and understood in retrospect. I.B. Holley, an American historian of air power, puts it in a different, and sobering, way for contemporary participants: ‘Experience [or history] is a wonderful thing; it helps us recognise our mistakes when we repeat them.’

A conference such as this could not succeed without the help and cooperation of many organisations and individuals. We are, as always, indebted to our speakers for their participation and cooperation, both in the conference itself and in the publishing process. The Army History Unit, especially Roger Lee and Andrew Richardson, undertook the essential administration with enthusiasm. We thank them, as we also thank the conference sponsors for their generous support. We especially thank the Department of Veterans’ Affairs, the major conference sponsor and underwriter of the costs of this publication. Once again we are grateful to our ever-reliable and patient typesetter, Margaret McNally, and to our indexer, Terry McCullagh.

Peter Dennis & Jeffrey Grey
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John Crawford is historian of the New Zealand Defence Force, located in Wellington and a well-known figure in military history circles in New Zealand. He has written or edited a number of books in the field, most recently including (with Ian McGibbon), *New Zealand’s Great War: New Zealand, the Allies and the First World War* (2007).

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Edward J. Erickson is currently a professor of history at Marine Corps University, Quantico, Virginia. A retired US Army officer who served in the Gulf War and Bosnia and in UN assignments in Turkey and Italy, he has written a number of books on the Ottoman military in the early twentieth century, including *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign* (2010) and, with Mesut Uyar, *A Military History of the Ottomans: From Osman to Atatürk* (2009).

John Gooch is emeritus professor of history at the University of Leeds. Founding editor of the *Journal of Strategic Studies*, he has published variously and widely on British military history 1870-1945, Italian military history 1870-1943, and the Boer War. He is currently writing a book on Italy and the Great War following from his study *Musolini and his Generals* (2008). In 2011 he was appointed *Cavaliere dell’Ordine della Stella della Solidarieta Italiana* by the Italian Government in recognition of his significant contribution to the writing and understanding of modern Italian history.
Jeffrey Grey is professor of history at the University of New South Wales, Canberra campus.

Paul Harris has been teaching in the Department of War Studies at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, for more than 20 years. A noted member of the generation of historians of the Great War sometimes dubbed 'revisionist', his publications include *Men, Ideas and Tanks: British Military Thought and Armoured Forces 1903-1939* (1995) and (with Niall Barr) *Amiens to the Armistice: The British Expeditionary Force and the Hundred Days' Campaign, 8 August-11 November 1918* (1998). His *Douglas Haig and the First World War* (2009) is a major scholarly and critical analysis of a subject who frequently generates much heat and correspondingly less light.

Keith Jeffery is professor of British history at Queen's University Belfast. Among the fourteen books he has authored or edited are an award-winning biography of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson (2006) and the ground-breaking official history, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service 1909-1949* (2010).


Neville Meaney is honorary associate professor in history at the University of Sydney, where he spent many years as an academic before retirement. He has a longstanding research interest in international history, especially concerning the way in which ideology, culture and geopolitics have interacted to shape the changing character of Australia’s relations with the world. He has published widely in the field, his most recent work being *Australia and World Crisis 1914-1923* (2009).

William Mulligan is a lecturer in modern history at University College Dublin, where he is also one of the founding members of the UCD Centre for War Studies. He previously worked at the University of Glasgow, where he was also a member of the Scottish Centre for War Studies. He is the author, most recently, of *The Origins of the First World War* (2010).

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Introduction

Major General John Caligari

The Chief of Army’s History Conferences has been held annually since 1994 and since that time has produced an impressive reference source for researchers delving into the complex and at times turbulent history of the Australian Army and other military forces, a history that must be studied within a broad context if it is to have value. However, the mere existence of this body of work and the continuing commitment to these history conferences are not, of themselves, evidence that the Army understands or values its history.

On 1 July this year, as the Head of Modernisation and Strategic Planning for Army, I assumed command of the Australian Army History Unit. I asked for it and it was readily given to me. I didn’t need to explain my rationale to get it, but since 1 July I have had to explain how I saw the connection between modernisation and history many times.

One of the more contested, if arcane, debates we have in Army is about the utility of history to a modern Army. Those who follow the Henry Ford school of history (namely that history is more or less bunk), dismiss it as irrelevant. On the other side are those with a strong personal interest in the subject, who believe that history has much to offer the modern Army, especially in relation to preparing it for the future. The latter often have a difficult time convincing the former of the utility of history and so the value with which it is held is patchy at best, often resulting in poor resourcing. Unfortunately for Army, much of the debate about history’s usefulness is characterised by assertion and personal prejudice and too infrequently subjected to objective analysis. I intend to change that. As the head architect of Army’s future, I need all the tools available to me to help succeed in what is a complex assignment.

The Chief of Army’s goal is to build an Army that is as adaptable as possible to deal with the uncertainties of the future. Being prepared to deal with the possibilities the future may present is different from fighting the last war. A solid understanding of the application of history in modernisation will help with the former; a poor appreciation will ensure we do the latter.
Let me describe what I see as being the utility of military history for the complex task of modernising an army. Narrative history tells the chronological story of past events: who, where and when. If done properly, it also exposes the ‘why’ in the outcomes achieved. Narrative history is the type of history that can help junior leaders plan tactical engagements and assist strategic commanders plan campaigns. It offers a level of understanding deeper than a superficial grasp of current events. It is the narrative form of military history that is most frequently encountered and quite often the one that attracts disciples early. Army uses narrative history all the time – frequently unconsciously. It is often the basis for lesson plans; it plays an important role in recruiting, it features strongly at regimental functions and in esprit-de-corps building exercises and it is often recounted in doctrine and concept papers as the start point for future development. Military history can also be used by the military to help understand and educate the non-military mind, especially the political mind, about military affairs. Narrative history does all this and, when done intelligently, does it very well. In the modernisation game, helping others (especially non-military personnel) gain an appreciation of what it is to be a soldier and give them a taste of military affairs has a significant reward in resource prioritisation.

Analytical history is the other type, with its focus on statistics, quantification, timetables, loading data, consumption rates, transit times and the like. It lacks the adrenaline rush of the cavalry charge or the morale-lifting tale of the heroic defence of a critical position but in terms of modernisation, it provides some basic building blocks. For example, the Army is currently in the middle of acquiring an amphibious capability. The complexities of this are enormous: how should it be done, what equipment and training is needed, what doctrine is required, where are the likely failure points? The list goes on: as Head of Modernisation, I look to the military historians for answers: not only as to how we did it previously but projected forward to the future, in concert with my smart young experienced planners. Through thorough analysis the variables that are likely to be different can be employed to derive useful guides to the issues likely to be encountered. Simple questions need answers: what command and control complexities influence the shape of the organisation needed to provide this capability, how many assets are needed to support what sized force ashore at what distance from the beachhead?

This is why I believe history, and especially military history broadly defined, has great utility for Army. But to reach this idealistic place of having the right information and the detail necessary for the careful analysis of the records and to write the history we must do two things. First, we need to energise the soldiers and officers of the Army to appreciate
the value of military history; and secondly, we need to add rigour and completeness to
the discovery, collection, organisation, analysis and presentation of history. It is for this
reason I brought the Australian Army History Unit into the Modernisation Division
and why I expect the historians to be actively involved in the development of future
modernisation concepts, training, experimentation, and the definition of what it is we
think we need to be the most adaptable Army we can be, to meet the broadest range of
circumstances in which we might find ourselves involved. I am convinced that the clever
involvement of the Australian Army History Unit and the intelligent utilisation of the
historians’ work will materially improve the quality of future planning. Conferences
such as this provide the basic building blocks for this essential endeavour.
One of the most notable speeches of 1911, delivered at the Guildhall in London, was Lloyd George’s warning to Germany that Britain would not stand aside while her interests were under threat during the second Moroccan crisis. ‘When Mr Lloyd George rose to speak’, recorded The Times, ‘a young man in evening dress who sat at a table near to the door, asked to be informed of the intentions of the Government in regard to Women’s Suffrage. He was at once removed and taken in charge by the police. He admitted that he had come to the banquet uninvited, but pleaded, as if in mitigation of his conduct, that he had not tasted any of the things provided.’ The Times lingered no longer on the disruption, but the intrusion of the young man reminds us that 1911 was a year which foreshadowed many of the issues that would dominate the next decade and a half of international politics. In 1911 Clara Zetkin, a leading member of the German Socialist Party, had organised the first International Women’s Day, the Universal Race Congress met in London, the coronation of King George provided an opportunity to tighten the bonds of empire, the Parliament Act and the imminent Home Rule crisis threatened those same bonds, revolution in China overthrew the Qing dynasty and inaugurated civil conflict that would last almost four decades, and the Mexican revolution, begun in the previous year, turned violent. In this perspective the rivalries of European powers in North Africa, which led to the second Moroccan crisis and the Italian-Ottoman War, appear provincial.

The second Moroccan crisis and the Italian-Ottoman War marked a significant change in the great power system in Europe. For over four decades, since the end of the Franco-Prussian War, the Great Powers had remained at peace with each other, the longest period of great power peace in Europe until the end of the Cold War. Any debate about the origins of the First World War acknowledges this long period of peace, but also seeks to identify when and why the international system turned from peace to war. Chronology and explanation are intertwined. The editors
of *Die Grosse Politik*, sponsored by the German Foreign Office in the 1920s, began their series of documents in 1871, implying that French revanchism was a central element of the story; the editors of the *British Documents on the Origins of the War* started in 1898, highlighting German naval expansion and colonial ambitions as the destabilising factor. 1904 (the Anglo-French entente), 1907 (the Anglo-Russian entente), and 1908 (the Austrian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) have their advocates.¹ Fritz Fischer famously identified the War Council of 8 December 1912 as the moment when German leaders decided to prepare for a general European war and then located this decision in a broader assessment of the German *Sonderweg*, or special path.² The chronology of the origins of the First World War, therefore, goes beyond a parlour game played by historians. Chronological frameworks can draw attention to some evidence and obscure other aspects of the story.

The decisions made by the Great Powers during the immediate crisis surrounding the start of the Italian-Ottoman War in late September 1911 are particularly revealing of the growing weaknesses of the European states system. Although the contours of the Italo-Ottoman War are well known, historians have accorded it much less attention in general accounts of the origins of the First World War compared to importance given to the second Moroccan crisis, the Balkan Wars, the arms race, and the developments of the alliance system. Since neither Italy nor the Ottoman Empire entered the war in August 1914, it is difficult to identify decisions made in Rome or the Porte as being an essential part of the story of the origins of the war. However if we change the questions from what or who caused the war to what or who sustained peace between the Great Powers for over four decades and when and why did this peace system collapse, the war between Italy and the Ottoman Empire achieves a more significant place in the history of international politics before the First World War. The reactions of the Great Powers to the escalating tensions between Italy and the Ottoman Empire in the summer of 1911 are instructive – they demonstrate that the powers were no longer willing to sustain the practices and norms that provided the foundations for European peace. Peace was constructed and it was an edifice that required careful attention

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and regular renewal. ‘A sentence in a despatch’, wrote Winston Churchill after the war, ‘an observation by an ambassador, a cryptic phrase in a Parliament seemed sufficient to adjust from day to day the balance of the prodigious structure. Words counted and even whispers. A nod could be made to tell.’

The war between Italy and the Ottoman Empire marked the decisive moment in the erosion of Great Power peace before 1914. First there is substantial evidence that contemporaries were aware of the likely repercussions of an Italian invasion of Ottoman territories in North Africa. Contemporaries identified the chain of events that would bring about the First World War – the spread of war across the eastern Mediterranean, the outbreak of war in the Balkans, the shrivelling of Austro-Hungarian power and prestige, and rising ethnic and nationalist tensions. In previous crises commentators had predicted instability and general war as possible outcomes, but their analysis was vague and abstract. Prophecies about the consequences of the Italian-Ottoman war were more detailed and tragically accurate. Second, there was some discussion of the kind of war that would result from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and conflict in the Balkans, which enables us to address one of the perennial debates about the so-called short war myth. Few believed that a war in the Balkans could be easily managed. Third, if these potential risks were noted by contemporaries, it raises the question of why they failed to act more decisively to limit and manage the consequences. Why did statesmen, soldiers, diplomats, and others not act to preserve the bonds of peace, as they had done over the previous four decades?

I

Before examining more closely the diplomatic and military calculations of 1911, it is worth briefly assessing why peace between the Great Powers had lasted for forty years. There were strong forces acting in favour of peace between the Great Powers in the early twentieth century. These may be divided into five categories. First, no great power had territorial claims against another another great power, at least not in the sense of claims that determined their foreign policy. By the 1890s French politicians and soldiers were more concerned about the relative increase

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in German power than the loss of two provinces, Alsace and Lorraine. Far from planning a war of revenge, they feared another invasion by Germany. Policy aimed to defend French territory in Europe, not to expand it. While Italian nationalists expressed claims to Habsburg territory in the Trentino and Trieste, these claims were never a prominent consideration in policy-making. The absence of great power territorial ambitions within Europe removed one of the classic causes of war – the search for strategically defensive borders. The Great Powers could sate their territorial ambitions beyond Europe, as they colonised almost the whole of Africa and a good proportion of Asia in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Imperial expansion, therefore, became a means of adjusting the European states system, while on the other hand a great power war over colonial claims was virtually unthinkable before 1914.

Diplomatic practices and structures also sustained the peace. The revival of the Concert of Europe, an institution established at the Congress of Vienna, helped to resolve some of the major international crises and tensions of the era, notably the Eastern question in the 1870s and the partition of Africa in the 1880s. A system of restrained competition developed, in which the Great Powers were partners and rivals at the same time. The most remarkable example of this pattern was the relationship between Austria-Hungary and Italy, partners in the Triple Alliance and rivals in the Adriatic and Balkans. The alliance system served to stabilise international politics by providing a modicum of security and incentivising restraint. Great Powers were committed to the defence of their ally, but they often refused to underwrite their more foolhardy ambitions. Moreover Great Powers could cooperate with states in the other alliance bloc on particular issues of mutual interest. Russia and Austria cooperated in the Balkans from the mid-1890s to 1908, while Russia and Germany signed an agreement over spheres of influence and railways in Persia and the Ottoman Empire in the summer of 1911, at the very moment that Russia’s ally, France, confronted Germany over Morocco.

Military force also constituted a restraint on great power war in Europe. The messy ending to the Franco-Prussian war in 1871, with its twin spectres of social revolution and popular warfare, signalled the limits of military power as an instrument of great power politics. Military power remained an, if not the, essential basis of international politics, but armies acted as deterrents. It is important to distinguish between the intention behind the increase in the size of armies and their operational doctrine. The war plans of the Great Powers centred on offensive
operations. A successful offensive required a preponderance of troops, leading to an increase in the size of armies. The war plans, however, would only be activated in defence of a vital national interest. Civilian governments remained in firm control of foreign policy and decisions about war and peace. Generals periodically issued calls for a preventive war against potential enemies, but civilian leaders were firm in rejecting such a course. Bismarck famously remarked that waging a preventive war was like committing suicide for fear of death, an analogy repeated by Bernhard von Bülow, the Chancellor, during the war scares in the Bosnian crisis in 1908.5

Public opinion played an increasingly important role in international politics. Although popular radical nationalist and militarist associations sought to influence the direction of foreign policy, the majority of Europeans might be characterised as ‘defensive patriots’, willing to wage war in defence of their country, but opposed to aggressive wars against other European powers. On the eve of the First World War the largest parties in Britain and Germany were the Liberals and SPD respectively. The 1914 elections in France had seen a swing back towards the left, which put the new Three Year Conscription law in danger. Government leaders recognised that in a major European war national cohesion would be essential. Hence public opinion limited the circumstances in which Great Powers could go to war against each other. The necessity of showing just cause and vital interest effectively ruled out wars over imperial crises. The public sphere also reinforced the diplomatic process – once negotiations began it was very difficult for a state to break them off without appearing belligerent in the court of public opinion.

The development of the international economy was a product of international stability and it also reinforced the bonds of peace. Industrialists and bankers recognised that prosperity and profit required peace. Although they had access to ministers and diplomats, their influence on specific foreign policy was extremely limited. Rather, the connection between the international economy and great power peace was structural. Governments understood that national prosperity was dependent in large part on international capital and trade flows. Trade wars and economic rivalries occurred periodically, but often they were a result of political tensions, rather than a cause of them. Economic rivalries were easily contained within the international trading system and few people argued that war would have economic benefits.

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In short, the bonds of peace had been tightly woven into the fabric of international politics. The test of the international system was its ability to resolve crises and manage social and political change. The Great Powers had balanced their own narrow national interests against broader requirements to preserve stability in the European states system. Individual Great Powers limited their gains and compensated others. Their own interests were best served by the preservation of the system. Four decades of peace did not mean four decades of political stasis. Political, economic, social, technological, military, and cultural change continued apace. The system of great power politics proved capable of managing the international dimensions of these changes. There were occasional war scares. Some contemporaries believed a general war was inevitable at some point, but their prognoses were generally vague, based on a particular reading of history. They claimed that wars had always occurred and were part of the natural, divine, or historical order. Others were more confident. War, at least a general European war, could be avoided, because it served no purpose or interest. During the second Moroccan crisis, the British ambassador to Berlin, when asked whether he feared war, replied: ‘I regarded the present situation like I regarded ghosts. I don’t believe in them, but I am frightened of them. So I don’t believe there will be war, but I am deadly anxious about it.’

II

In 1911 this system began to collapse because powers no longer behaved in a way to preserve peace. Italian leaders, principally the Prime Minister, Giovanni Giolitti, and the Foreign Minister, Antonio di San Giuliano, recognised that an Italian invasion of Tripoli could lead to a general European war. Just as significantly the other Great Powers failed to intervene despite being aware of the connections between war in North Africa, instability in the Balkans, and peace in Europe. Some diplomats expressed the view that a war between Italy and the Ottoman Empire only had implications for the balance of power in North Africa. The tension between narrowly conceived geopolitical imagination and the wider interests of stability in the European states system is captured by a conversation between the Russian ambassador to the Porte, Tcharykov, and a counsellor in the Austrian embassy, Franz Kolossa, on the eve of the outbreak of the war. When the former claimed that Italy’s occupation of Tripoli merely sustained the balance of power in the Mediterranean

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and therefore was of little interest to Russian policy, Kolossa responded that Russia had a major interest in the Eastern question and the maintenance of the status quo of the Ottoman Empire for geopolitical and trade reasons.\textsuperscript{7}

Of course, the geopolitical imagination was shaped by specific national interests. Between 1900 and 1909 the Triple Entente states, France, Britain, and Russia, had recognised Italian interests in Tripoli. On the other hand the prospect of a war between Italy, a member of the Triple Alliance, and the Ottoman Empire, closely associated with German military and commercial interests, made decision-makers in Berlin and Vienna anxious. Austrian diplomats were most alert to the potential repercussions of Italian military action owing to the consequences in the Balkans. Alois von Aehrenthal, the Foreign Minister, feared the imminent collapse of the Ottoman empire, which was assailed by insurrections in Yemen and Albania and challenges from the Balkan states, looking to complete their ambitions for national unifications. In late July Aehrenthal warned the Italian ambassador to Vienna, Avarna – himself a sceptic about Italian military action in North Africa – that an invasion would entail ‘incalculable moral dangers’. Disregarding the principle of the status quo in Ottoman territories in North Africa, he claimed, would make it difficult to uphold the status quo in other regions.\textsuperscript{8} Austrian diplomats warned of specific consequences, such as the renewal of the Albanian revolt against the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{9}

Likewise their German counterparts constantly reiterated the far-reaching consequences of a war in North Africa between Italy and the Ottoman Empire. In December 1910, Gottlieb von Jagow, the German ambassador to Rome, warned the Italian Foreign Minister, San Giuliano, not to retaliate against the petty obstacles placed by Ottoman officials in the way of Italian commercial expansion as this would ‘feed the fire’ of the small Balkan states.\textsuperscript{10} The German Foreign Office reassured San Giuliano that it would not stand in the way of Italian ambitions in Tripoli, but it also predicted that the Ottoman government could not give way to foreign demands, especially in view of the emerging public sphere in the empire.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{7} Telegram from F. Kolossa, Constantinople, 26 September 1911, in Ludwig Bittner, Alfred Pribram, Heinrich Srbik, Hans Ueberberger (eds), \textit{Österreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik von der bosnischen Krise bis zum Kriegsausbruch 1914}, vol. 3 (hereafter \textit{ÖUA}), doc. 2652: 352-3.
\textsuperscript{9} Pallavicini to Vienna, 5 August 1911, \textit{ÖUA}, vol. 3, doc. 2582: 296-7.
\textsuperscript{10} Jagow to Bethmann Hollweg, 7 December 1910, in Johannes Lepsius, Albrecht Mendelsohn Bartholdy, Friedrich Thimme, \textit{Die Große Politik der europäischen Kabinette} (Berlin, 1922-7), vol. 30 (hereafter \textit{GP}), part 1, doc. 10801: 4-6.
\textsuperscript{11} Memorandum to Jagow, 30 January 1911, \textit{GP}, vol. 30, part 1, doc. 10809: 18-20.
An article in the *Kölnische Zeitung* feared the ‘incalculable results’, which would arise from an Italian invasion and the reopening of the Eastern question. Kiderlen and Aehrenthal had exchanged views on the likely Italian invasion of Tripoli, but neither seriously considered a joint representation to their Italian ally. By the first week in September, Aehrenthal believed that Italy could not be talked out of military action.

Days before the invasion Kiderlen made a half-hearted attempt to convince Jules Cambon, the French ambassador to Berlin, to make a joint Franco-German intervention in Rome. ‘The outcome is uncertain’, he told Cambon, ‘and it will be impossible the moment it breaks out to hold back Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece. The Albanians and the Arabs in Yemen will revolt, and Austria, and perhaps will be compelled to intervene in the conflict which will set fire to the whole of the Orient: it will be a general war.’ Cambon, who saw the war as a danger to ‘Europe’, was sympathetic to Kiderlen’s plea. However, for the most, diplomats in the Triple Entente were less preoccupied with Italian ambitions in north Africa. The ongoing Moroccan crisis meant that the French government was opposed to joint diplomatic interventions with Germany. Only in early September did troubling reports reach the Foreign Office and even then, they were vague on details. ‘We have had a quiet summer in Italy’, Rodd wrote, ‘particularly as the heat has washed out all one’s energy, but now things are beginning to grow more lively with Tripoli and the outcome of the Morocco question.’ British and French diplomats were slower to recognise Italy’s military ambitions in North Africa and hoped that sabres rattled remained in their scabbards.

Stories in the Italian press alerted European diplomats to the possibility of a crisis over Tripoli. Although much of the Italian press campaigned for invasion of Tripoli, there were concerns about revolts and conflicts in the Balkans. Gaetano Salvemini, a leading socialist and an historian, warned that an Italian invasion would destabilise the international system and begin a process of general plundering. However the contradiction between maintaining stability in the Balkans and

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12 Goschen to Grey, 25 September 1911, FO 421/274, 51, The National Archives (hereafter TNA).
15 Rodd to Drummond, 14 September 1911, FO 800/64, f. 169, TNA.
16 Grey to Nicolson, 23 September 1911, FO 800/350, ff. 178-9, TNA.
furthering Italian expansionist ambitions was evident, but ignored for the most part. For example editorials in *La Stampa*, amongst the most fervent advocates of Italian claims, had argued in July 1911, during the Albanian revolt, that the Great Powers had a duty to preserve peace in the Balkans. It doubted whether a war between the Balkan states and the Ottoman Empire could be localised, once it had begun. The Great Powers were more likely to be dragged into an escalating war.\(^1\) When editorials urged military action against the Ottoman Empire, on the premise that Ottoman officials had mistreated Italian citizens in Tripolitania, these wider concerns about the repercussions of war were studiously ignored.\(^2\)

The undersecretary of state at the Italian Foreign Ministry, Bollati, tried to reassure the German chargé d’affaires, Stolberg, that no complications in the Balkans would result from the Italian invasion of Tripoli.\(^3\) Yet this flew in the face of the analysis of his own ministry. Giuseppe Avarna, the Italian ambassador to Vienna, wrote a detailed analysis about the likely impact of an Italian invasion on the Balkans, ‘the truly capital and delicate point of this question’. When speaking to Aehrenthal, Avarna had breezily dismissed the risks of Italian military action, but he was more open in his analysis for San Giuliano. The current policy of the European Great Powers to maintain the status quo in the Balkans would become untenable, he predicted. Although Italy might gain territory in North Africa, it would end up damaging its own interests by undermining the Ottoman Empire and stability in the Balkans. His assumption that Austria-Hungary would look for compensation in the Balkans for Italian expansion in north Africa was mistaken, but plausible.\(^4\) On the same day, San Giuliano penned a memorandum, read only by Giolitti and the king, Victor Emmanuel. He set out two different scenarios. In the first, Italy would prepare for military action, but seek to avoid it, as a war would destabilise the Eastern Mediterranean, lead the Balkan states into conflict with an overstretched Ottoman Empire, and compel Austria-Hungary to gain compensation. Like Avarna, he concluded, in the first section, that even a successful war would damage Italy’s interests.\(^5\) This reasoning was in line with his public

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\(^1\) ‘Si accentua il pericolo di una guerra nei Balcani’, *La Stampa*, 1 July 1911, 6.
\(^2\) ‘La volontà d’agire’, *La Stampa*, 28 August 1911, 1; ‘L’ora dell’azione si avvicina’, *La Stampa*, 23 September 1911, 1.
\(^5\) Promemoria di San Giuliano, 28 July 1911, in ibid., doc. 185: 204.
statements in December 1910 and June 1911 that the integrity of the Ottoman Empire was one of the fundamental principles of Italian foreign policy. Giolitti, generally more interested in domestic than international politics, told the journalist Guglielmo Ferrari:

The integrity of what is left of the Ottoman Empire is one of the principles upon which is founded the equilibrium and peace of Europe. And what if, after we attack Turkey, the Balkans move? And what if a Balkan war provokes a clash between the two groups of Powers and a European war? Is it wise that we saddle ourselves with the responsibility for setting fire to the powder?23

At other times, and in the second scenario which San Giuliano had set out in his memorandum of 28 July, the small circle of Italian leaders, who decided on war and peace in 1911, thought that the invasion in late September was largely free of risk. The Albanian revolt had ended, which reduced the dangers of complications in the Balkans, the onset of winter would give little time for other states to start a campaign, and Italian forces could score a decisive victory over the Ottoman Empire and conclude peace quickly.24 However the wish was surely father to the thought. Colonial wars were uncertain ventures. Italy's defeat at Adowa in 1896 was the supreme example of the difficulties of fighting a war in Africa. On this occasion, however, the colonial war would intersect with the kernel of the European states system in the Ottoman Empire.

III

Why did the Great Powers do so little to stop the outbreak of war between Italy and the Ottoman Empire and why, once it began, did they fail to undertake any serious measures to bring an end to the conflict? Why did Italy persist in a policy its leaders recognised as highly risky? It is important not to underestimate the shock which greeted the Italian declaration of war in late September, even amongst those who should have been well-informed. The news of the Italian ultimatum, delivered to the Porte on 28 September, 'exploded like a bomb', according to William II, who then promptly predicted the collapse of the Ottoman government, massacres

23 Childs, *Italo-Turkish diplomacy*, 8-10, 39.
of foreigners, revolt in Albania and Crete, war in the Balkans, and the ‘unleashing of a world fire (Weltbrand) with all its horrors.’ Giolitti reprised his ‘powder keg’ analogy, telling Alfredo Frossati: ‘we are in a powder keg with a lighted match in our fingers. I have to solve the problem of not burning my fingers and not blowing up the powder keg.’ The editor of *Journals des Débats* condemned Italy’s justification for invasion as utterly inadequate. ‘On the other hand’, it continued, ‘the war started in the Balkans would have incalculable consequences. It would throw Europe into the gravest complications, perhaps into a general conflagration.’ The *Manchester Guardian* offered a different criticism of Italian policy, claiming that ‘there can surely be few parallels in history to the indifference towards the opinion and conscience of civilised states, which the aggressor has shown in entering this quarrel.’ The same paper noted that the grievances of the Balkan states against the Ottoman Empire were better founded and feared that war would spread. The Serbian government warned of likely complications in the Balkans if the war dragged on for a long time. The paralysis of the European Great Powers was neatly captured in an exchange between Grey and the Italian ambassador to London, Imperiali. Grey considered the Italian proposal to annex Tripoli by force as an ‘extreme step’ that could have ‘grave consequences’. ‘If things went on as the Italian government hoped’, Grey told Imperiali, ‘their responsibility would of course be light, but it would be heavy if very serious developments occurred which imperilled the peace of other nations.’ Yet Grey assured Imperiali that Britain would not intervene to hamper Italian ambitions in the region.

The failure of the Great Powers to intervene was partly due to poor intelligence. Uncertainty about Italian aims in north Africa made it difficult to assess the significance of the invasion. This uncertainty informed the view that it was better to stand by than to take firm measures. ‘It is also possible’, speculated Nicolson, ‘that if hostilities do break out between Turkey and Italy there will be further trouble in Albania and elsewhere … It is impossible to foresee what consequences may ensue if Turkey and Italy come to loggerheads.’ The second Moroccan crisis had helped San Giuliano and Giolitti disguise their policy. Throughout the summer European diplomats were primarily preoccupied with the resolution of the Franco-German

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27 ‘L’ultimatum italien’, *Journal des Débats politiques et littéraires*, 30 September 1911, 1.
28 ‘The attack on Turkey’, *Manchester Guardian*, 29 September 1911, 8.
29 Grey to Rodd, 29 September 1911, FO 421/274, 57-8, TNA
30 Nicolson to Goschen, 26 September 1911, FO 800/350, f. 250, TNA.
confrontation in Morocco and to a much lesser extent with the conclusion of an agreement between Russia and Germany over spheres of influence and railway projects in Persia and the Ottoman Empire.

Once war broke out, however there were further opportunities for the Great Powers to intervene as the war escalated and Italian war aims became more radical. In previous wars, rebellions, and crises in the Ottoman Empire, the Great Powers intervened in order to preserve the system. The most notable case was in 1878 following the Treaty of San Stefano, but it occurred on other occasions, such as the Ottoman-Greek War of 1897. In 1911 and 1912, the Great Powers discussed joint interventions on several occasions, but failed to translate these discussions into specific action. For example, Sazanov adopted a face-saving compromise in late December 1911, but Britain, France, and Germany refused to support his proposal. The Italian annexation decree of 5 November limited the room for an acceptable compromise and Great Powers were unwilling to risk losing influence in either Constantinople or Rome by pressing for moderation.

Concerns about the cohesion of the alliance system were the most important reason for inaction. The function of the alliance system was to provide security for the Great Powers. The prospect of luring a power out of its block was less appealing than one might assume, as this would have constituted a major upheaval and might even have provoked a preventive war by the weakened block. However Great Powers did seek to limit the commitment of members to the opposing alliance block. Bethmann Hollweg had sought an agreement with Britain, committing the latter to neutrality in a general European war, while Franco-Italian agreements in 1900 and 1902 limited the commitment of Rome to the Triple Alliance. The war in Tripoli became a test for great power influence in Italy and the question of how tightly Italy was bound to the Triple Alliance, which was due for renewal. As Rodd remarked: “The bidding for Italian friendship at the international auction may have to be rapid.”

34 Rodd to Grey, 4 September 1911, ff. 800/64, fos 166-8, TNA.
German and Austrian diplomats were not so much concerned about the defection of Italy to the Great Powers in the Mediterranean, France and Britain, as with the change in the balance within the alliance. The alliance treaty was due for renewal in 1913, but in the summer of 1911 talks began. In Vienna and Berlin there was a sense of urgency, as diplomats were concerned to complete the negotiations before Italy improved its bargaining position. Aehrenthal and Kiderlen want an extension of the current treaty, without any modifications. Aehrenthal argued that the Triple Alliance was based on the preservation of the status quo in the Balkans. He was sceptical of Avarna’s claim that the achievement of Italy’s aims in Tripoli would allow Italy to concentrate more fully on the preservation of the status quo in Balkans. This preoccupation with holding the Triple Alliance fast persisted as the war escalated. While Marschall von Bieberstein, the German ambassador to the Porte, claimed that Italy had no right to bring about a European conflagration through unjustifiable demands, Jagow warned Bethmann Hollweg against intervening, even as Italian forces got bogged down in a guerrilla war and the likelihood of naval action against the Dardanelles increased. German press criticism of Italy’s invasion added to tensions within the Triple Alliance. In a lazy, but telling, stereotype, Jagow compared Italy to a ‘prima donna’, who had expected applause for her performance, but reacted hysterically to the criticism of her friends. He was confident that Giolitti would renew the alliance, but his concern was the ebbing of German influence in Rome.

Britain and France refused to intervene. Both states had concluded agreements with Italy in 1902, recognising Tripoli as an Italian sphere of influence. Each great power, according to the exchange of letters between Prinetti and Camille Barrère, the French ambassador to Rome, ‘can freely develop its sphere of influence in the aforementioned regions [Tripoli, Cyrenaica, and Morocco] at the moment it deems opportune and without the actions of one of them being necessarily subordinated to that of the other’. The text fell short of agreeing to annexation, but it provided a formal reason for non-intervention in 1911. The language used by British ministers in private about Italy’s invasion of Tripolitania was revealing. It was ‘violent and amoral’, according to Lord Morley, one of the senior statesmen

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36 Marschall to the Auswärtiges Amt, 16 October 1911, GP, doc. 10890: 111-12; Jagow to the Auswärtiges Amt, 1 December 1911, Rome, PA-AA Italien R 7937.
37 Jagow to Kiderlen, 12 December 1911, in Ernst Jäckh, Kiderlen-Wächter der Staatsmann und Mensch: Briefwechsel und Nachlass, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1924), vol. 2: 166.
38 Childs, Italo-Turkish diplomacy, 7.
of the Liberal party. Yet the Austrian ambassador, Mensdorff, lamented that the British government would not repeat such condemnations in public. The press was not so shy, the *Manchester Guardian*, perhaps piously, noting ‘our sense of the great wrong’.

The reasoning of San Giuliano, Giolitti, and others also revealed the stresses and strains of the European system. The second Moroccan crisis was the moment when the imperial expansion of the European powers became a threat, rather than a support, of European peace. The Ottoman Empire was at the intersection of imperial and European geopolitics. Italian foreign policy was caught in the vortex of a particular choice in 1911 – either Italy could forego or postpone its claims in Tripoli, despite the French gains in Morocco, or it could assert its claims and preserve the equilibrium in the Mediterranean. The former choice would best serve European peace and stability and Italian interests in the long term, but it would have been an act of unusual self-abnegation for a European great power. One of the opponents of the invasion, Avarna, placed the Italian interests in Tripoli in a particularly broad framework, pointing not only to French and Spanish expansion in Morocco and the consequent boost to their prestige in the Mediterranean, but also to Russia’s growing presence in Persia. Italian expansion into North Africa, therefore, followed a global pattern of great power imperialism. For the most part, however, the argument focussed on Italian compensation for French gains in Morocco and the preservation of equilibrium in the Mediterranean.

The other major reason for Italian action was the growing pressure from nationalist public opinion. The press, in particular *La Stampa*, ran a concerted campaign for invasion and annexation. Nationalist opinion confirmed the geopolitical argument. Indeed it offered Giolitti and San Giuliano an alibi in their discussions with the other powers. Nationalist groups employed a range of economic and geopolitical arguments. They promoted Libya as an El Dorado. Giuseppe Bevione, who wrote for *La Stampa*, apparently cruised along the Libyan coast, viewing it through a telescope. Enrico Corradini, in *L’ora di Tripoli*, argued that territory in North Africa could be used to ease overpopulation in the south of Italy. Popular support for a colonial war as opposed to a great power war was not unusual in Europe before 1914; however on this occasion localising the colonial war presented a formidable challenge.

40 ‘War at any price’, *Manchester Guardian*, 30 September 1911, 8.
41 Avarna to San Giuliano, 28 July 1911, in Giolitti, doc. 184: 201-2.
The French newspaper, *Le Matin*, a nationalist organ, placed two photos on the front page of its issue on 25 September 1911. One showed the port of Tripoli, a shabby, crumbling site, ruined, according to the caption, by Turkish civilisation. The other showed the port of Algeria, a thriving, commercial hub, which owed its success to French civilisation. The attached article argued that an Italian conquest of Tripoli was part of a broader European civilising mission. Italy was a fellow Latin country, which would rescue Tripolitania from its Ottoman induced torpor. On this reading Italy’s war against the Ottoman Empire was justified by the standards of civilisation and progress. The optimism, misplaced as it was, of this depiction can be best understood when contrasted with a series of articles in the leading Viennese paper, *Neue Freie Presse*. On 25 September, its editorial predicted that the conflict would spread to Europe, as the Ottoman Empire would respond to military attack by boycotting Italian goods and expelling Italian citizens from the empire. The racial and religious hatred between Muslims and Christians would resonate in the Balkans, leading to conflict there. National hatred and the use of military power, unfettered by moral and legal restraints, would change the international system. The restrained international system of the nineteenth century, on this reading, was about to give way to one characterised by uncontrollable violence.

What type of risk was Italy undertaking? Was *Le Matin* or *Neue Freie Presse* more perceptive and, more importantly, which reflected the more widely held view of future wars? Did a short war myth exist in 1911? San Giuliano employed his own short war myth, arguing that Italy could launch a decisive naval and military attack on a poorly defended Ottoman province and present Europe with a fait accompli. The experience of colonial wars before 1911 suggested otherwise. Italian forces had been defeated by Abyssinia in 1896 at the battle of Adowa. Poor planning, the difficulty of conquering vast territories, logistical challenges, and vague political aims had characterised European colonial wars in the late nineteenth century. At best San Giuliano simply hoped that the Ottoman Empire would meekly accept defeat and the local population would welcome the agents of civilisation, the Italian army. However the overwhelming consensus was that the Young Turks could not relinquish Tripoli without a war and that the local population would resist.
If the Ottoman Empire did resist, there was talk of a conflict in the Balkans and even a general war. In 1910 the British liberal pacifist Norman Angell had published *The Great Illusion*, arguing that the modern integrated capitalist economies of Europe had rendered war futile. War could not deliver any more tangible material benefits than trade could. Angell forgot that wars were not always fought for material gain, but his book prompted a wider argument about war in the modern international system around Europe. Charles Malo, a prominent French writer on military affairs, drawing on Angell’s work but rejecting his thesis about the futility of war, argued that the length of the next war would depend on economic and social factors, as well as military and technological ones. Pointing to the mobilisation of millions of men and the consequent disruption to economic life, he predicted social chaos, high unemployment, and shortages of food. Owing to this vista it was ‘materially and morally impossible’ for the war to last beyond three months. He believed that exhaustion, rather than a decisive battle, would end a general European war.

Debates about the duration of the next European war were vague. In many respects this debate was secondary to the political, social, and economic consequences of a general war. On this issue more consensus existed. ‘Catastrophe’, ‘calamity’, and ‘disaster’ were frequently used to describe the possibility of a general war in 1911. Economic and social change and the commercial ties between the Great Powers acted as a restraint on warfare. One strand of liberal thought saw a pattern of progress in human affairs, which made physical violence less and less important. At a dinner hosted by the National Liberal Club for the Scottish-American philanthropist and pacifist Andrew Carnegie, Grey argued that war was destructive and futile. ‘It was quite possible’, he claimed, ‘that in the most successful war the victor might lose more than he gained.’ Grey had often expressed his concern that a general war would lead to social and political revolution. More broadly he argued that modern politics was more concerned with social reform than military glory. Voters wanted more expenditure on pensions and health care

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48 ‘De la marche et de la guerre prochaine’, *Journal des Débats politiques et littéraires*, 12 August 1911, 1. See also Bernard Serrigny, *Les conséquences économiques et sociales de la prochaine guerre* (Paris: V. Girard et E. Brière, 1909), who argued that war would last ten to twelve months.
and less on Dreadnoughts. Grey was by no means a pacifist. He resisted calls from his own Liberal party to reduce naval expenditure, as Britain needed a reasonable margin of superiority over the German navy. Grey, like most other British Liberals, articulated a position of defensive patriotism – prepared to wage war to defend a limited number of vital interests, viewing military power as a necessary deterrent, and seeking to avoid war if at all possible.

As Malo, Angell, and Grey recognised, economic interdependence within Europe made war a frightening prospect, even for those countries that might stay neutral. In September, as French and German diplomats edged closer to agreement, the *Neue Freie Presse*, closely linked to the Austrian Foreign Ministry, noted that Europe was closely connected by a ‘web of nerves’, so that the victor would suffer the misery of the defeated, and the neutral would experience the commercial losses of the belligerent. ‘Social catastrophe’ would result from defeat in battle. Austrian officers, such as Colonel Appel and Hugo Kerchnowe, shared this grim view of future war. Kerchnowe’s 1907 book, *Unser letzter Kampf*, foresaw the break up of the Habsburg empire under the duress of a war against the Balkan states, Italy, and Russia. Some officers gave a twist to this vision, by arguing that the hardships of a war would prompt a renewal of values such as honour and self-sacrifice. Few statesmen shared this view, yet they failed to sustain peace with the necessary compromises and force, despite the appalling vista of a general European war.

V

‘The war became inevitable from the moment of the march on Fez’, Stephen Pichon, the pre-war French foreign minister, told Maurice Barrès. ‘This decision released Italy, which threatened Tripolitania. Then there was war between Italy and Turkey. Then the Balkans raised their standards under the protection of Russia. Everything unfolded fatally.’ Pichon’s narrative was unusual in the context of French wartime politics, when politicians usually identified the second Moroccan crisis as the moment when Germany began to plan actively for war. Pichon downplayed

German agency, underlining instead the Great Powers’ loss of control of the international system. On this reading the significance of 1911 lies in the failure of the Great Powers to control one of the most important changes in European politics, namely the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the rise of nation states in the Balkans, and the securing of European imperial interests in North Africa.

The managed decline of the Ottoman Empire had been fundamental to the preservation of European peace since the 1870s. Managed decline meant the partition of the Ottoman Empire into spheres of influence, the distribution of its European territory to Christian Balkan states, joint great power intervention to limit the repercussions of periodic revolts, and, perhaps paradoxically, technical, financial, and military aid to strengthen core institutions in the empire. The Treaty of Paris in 1856 had confirmed that the ‘integrity and independence’ of the Ottoman Empire was central to the preservation of peace in Europe. Though the Great Powers had chipped away at its independence and integrity, they did so in unison. Italy’s claims to a sphere of influence in North Africa derived from this collaborative approach, yet the executions of those claims also showed the limits of collaboration.

The failure of the Great Powers to control events was confirmed by the two Balkan wars. First, the Balkan League ignored its Russian sponsor; rather than acting as a barrier to Austria-Hungary in the region, as Sazanov and Neratov had instructed, King Ferdinand, Pasic, and others decided to attack the Ottoman empire. Second, Russian nervousness about Bulgaria’s advance into Thrace and the possibility of a Bulgarian army in Constantinople demonstrated that St Petersburg had failed to control its client states in line with the expected practice of great power politics. Third, the Great Powers did intervene to bring about an end to the First Balkan War. Parts of the Treaty of London were enforced by naval demonstrations. However when Bulgaria refused to accept the outcome of the First Balkan War, it attacked its erstwhile allies in the summer of 1913. This Second Balkan War was ended with the Treaty of Bucharest, forged by Balkan states and the Ottoman Empire and in the absence of significant intervention by the Great Powers.

Once wars began, governments found it increasingly difficult to control the dynamics of violence. Violence was not restricted to armies. The influx of over 400,000 Muslim refugees from the Balkans to Constantinople in late 1912 and early 1913 resulted from the murder of Muslim population by paramilitary and army units from Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, and Montenegro. In Tripoli Italian forces
committed atrocities against the civilian population. It used aerial bombardments in a futile effort to control the vast spaces of the Libyan desert. Astute observers noted that these atrocities, often committed by one civilian population group against another, were not culturally specific to the Balkan nations, Ottoman Turks, or Italians, but the result of the emergence of *Volkskrieg*, or people’s war.\(^{53}\) In the limited cabinet wars of the nineteenth century political and military leaders were confident that they could direct violence towards the achievement of specific political goals, thereby limiting violence and maintaining control of war.

1911 had seen a wave of initiatives, many of which were rooted in the hope for a more peaceful world. On his return to the United States, the African-American leader, William DuBois, claimed that the Universal Race Congress was the ‘greatest event of the twentieth century so far’ because ‘the representatives of a majority of all nations of the earth met on a frankly equal footing to discuss their relations to each other, and the ways and means of breaking down the absurd and deadly differences that make men hate and despise each other’.\(^{54}\) Speaking to representatives from the Dominions, Lord Rosebery, the former Liberal Prime Minister, hoped that the gathering of leaders from around the empire would be the ‘germ of a mightier council’ and that the British Empire and the United States would have such a preponderance of power in the world that they could sustain peace.\(^{55}\) The American President, William Taft, had proposed the conclusion of treaties of arbitration with Britain and France, raising hopes that the scope of international law would could be applied to a wider range of disputes between the Great Powers.\(^{56}\) Many of these new ideas came from outside Europe; they challenged the system dominated by the Great Powers, a system that was on the verge of collapse in 1911. The years that followed were dominated by conflict over what type of international system would replace the one operated by the European Great Powers since 1871, or even 1815.


\(^{54}\) Cited in Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the global colour line: White men’s countries and the international challenge of racial equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 258.


\(^{56}\) ‘Mr Taft’s Major Feat’, *Manchester Guardian*, 23 July 1911.
The Imperial Conference, the Committee of Imperial Defence and the Continental Commitment

Keith Jeffery

The imperial conference of 1911 marked an especially significant stage in the development of empire-wide thinking about and planning for imperial defence. The involvement of the British ‘dominions’ (as they had come to be known) of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Newfoundland, and their participation in (or, at least, presence at) the discussion of foreign and defence policy, apparently at the highest level, appeared to signify a qualitative shift in the British imperial defence policy-making process. At the time, and afterwards, this was much remarked on and, indeed, celebrated.1 But the extent to which the British commitment to the Dominions participating in anything like a full share of defence policy-making is open to question.

Beginning with a review of the context of imperial defence in the decade or so following the Boer War, I will examine this matter by looking at four ‘set-pieces’ from 1911: first, the formal, plenary dimension of the imperial conference; second, the 111th, 112th and 113th meetings of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) on 26, 29 and 30 May, held during the imperial conference and attended by Dominion representatives; third, the ‘committee of the imperial conference’ convened to discuss military defence on 14 and 17 June; and, finally, the famous 114th meeting of the CID on 23 August 1911, some time after the Imperial Conference had ended. I shall focus on the British, metropolitan side of things, and also on military matters, since the Dominion contribution to imperial naval defence had substantially been settled in 1909. For the Dominions, moreover, the practical and (as it turned out) costly human consequences of the decisions made in 1911 were more military than naval.

While considering these matters, I also want to bear in mind Walter Bagehot’s useful distinction in his study of the English constitution (as he described it) between the ‘dignified’ dimension and the ‘efficient’ side; distinguishing between those parts which actually worked, as opposed to those which were more decorative, ‘theatrical’, or, perhaps, ornamental. This is not to say that one aspect is necessarily more important than the other, since Bagehot’s argument was that both were essential for the satisfactory working of the constitution.\(^2\) We might also reference here David Cannadine’s exploration of ‘ornamentalism’.\(^3\) While the main focus of his book is how the empire looked, there is also an understanding that the pomp and ceremony, the outward show – characteristic of the imperial conference and the coronation of 1911 – did matter, and signified some realities of the imperial experience and relationship. Another way of looking at these matters is also to take into account the rhetorical quality of much of the discourse. To what extent, for example, were public statements made simply to establish a position, strike an attitude, or merely oil the wheels of real discussions taking place elsewhere?

The engagements of dominion and metropolitan politicians, service chiefs and officials manifest in the meetings of 1911 have a formal rhetorical quality which embodies and emphasises the high importance of the matters being discussed but which can at the same time also occlude their potential consequences. We need perhaps to remind ourselves that discussions and decisions about defence concern issues of peace and war – these are, literally, matters of ‘life and death’ – which are the most fundamental considerations with which any state has to deal. Nothing (perhaps) is more important than national survival, though the nature of that survival and the conditions under which it might be secured – or endured – may be highly debatable. Such decisions as where, when, with whom and against whom, and how long to fight are among the most important which any political leaders take, and they are the kinds of decisions (or at least discussions) which took place in that summer of 1911.

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Background: the Boer War and its impact

The Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), arguably the last British war of imperial expansion, was a conflict which demonstrated both imperial weakness and imperial strength – a perhaps unexpected combination that was repeatedly to recur during the first half of the twentieth century. Weakness was illustrated by the time and trouble required to conquer the two small Boer republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State. It took over 400,000 troops and an estimated £200 million to defeat 50,000 Boer farmer-soldiers. The participation, however, of nearly 30,000 troops from Canada, Australia and New Zealand (of which Australia supplied the largest contingent of over 16,000 men), as well as nurses and other material assistance, suggested that the ‘Mother Country’ might not have to stand alone in any particular conflict.4

The wave of imperial enthusiasm stimulated by the Boer War fuelled hopes that even as Dominions like Canada and Australia developed autonomous identities, they might be drawn into an actively closer political relationship with the United Kingdom in some sort of ‘imperial federation’. For imperial enthusiasts, the achievement of Australian unity, for example, rather than advancing autonomy from Great Britain, seemed to offer a pattern for a wider and greater federation encompassing the whole empire and focussing a concentration of power greater than any previous global empire. Reporting on Australian developments when the Duke of Cornwall (the future King George V) visited the Dominion in 1901, the Melbourne Argus grandiloquently asserted that ‘No Emperor of the Old World, no Cæsar, no Alexander, could even imagine so wide a sovereign sway; no Czar, no American President, can hope for a realm so wide extended as that which a federated Great Britain will fuse into a whole’.5

At home the greatest proponent of imperial federation was Joseph Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary from 1895 to 1903. At the imperial conference held to coincide with the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902, Chamberlain raised the possibility of the colonies helping with imperial endeavours. Borrowing an image of Matthew Arnold’s, he famously described the United Kingdom as like some ‘weary Titan’

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5 Quoted in E. F. Knight, With the Royal Tour: A Narrative of the Recent Tour of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York through Greater Britain (London: Longmans, 1902), 115.
staggering under ‘the too vast orb of its fate’. ‘We have borne the burden for many years’, he said. ‘We think it is time that our children should assist us to support it.’ But those ‘children’ were not apparently much moved by Chamberlain’s appeal. Only New Zealand, the ‘most loyal dominion’ (and also one of the weakest), readily offered to share the burden of imperial defence. The Canadian prime minister, Wilfrid Laurier, was worried that any such arrangement might threaten what he called ‘the principle of Colonial self-government’ and he remarked that Canada did not wish to become involved in that ‘vortex of militarism’ which was ‘the curse and blight of Europe’.

In the absence of much immediate and practical support from the empire, and in the face of a growing challenge to Britain’s world-wide interests from Great Powers such as France, Germany, Russia and the USA, the early years of the twentieth century saw a reassessment of Britain’s strategic relationships, and a move away from the so-called ‘splendid isolation’ of the nineteenth century, whereby Britain had generally eschewed alliances with foreign states. The greatest challenge appeared to come from Germany, whose naval building program offered a direct threat to Britain’s vital maritime supremacy. The costs, however, of staying ahead of Germany while also matching, if not surpassing, the fleets of the other Great Powers were more than Britain, with or without imperial help, could bear. Thus British diplomats were given the task of solving a problem which the service chiefs and Treasury combined could not. The result was a strategic realignment in the first half-decade of the century which embodied agreements with Japan and France to secure British interests in East Asia and the Mediterranean, an understanding with Russia to ease the strain of competition in central Asia, and an assumption that Britain would not go to war against the USA. The practical Great Power consequence of these arrangements was to leave Germany more isolated that hitherto, and for it to be increasingly identified as Britain’s greatest single rival and potential enemy.

Despite colonial/dominion attitudes such as Laurier’s, some progress was made in the sharing of imperial defence. British General Staff papers drawn up

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for the colonial conference in 1907 anticipated the ‘probability that the colonies will take an ever-increasing part in future wars in which the welfare of the Empire is at stake’, though the only consequence was general agreement on the desirability of harmonising military practice throughout the empire. Prompted by the Dreadnought crisis, when advances in battleship design combined with an expansive German naval construction program threatened British maritime supremacy, a special conference on imperial defence was convened in the summer of 1909 which focused on naval matters. It agreed the principle of distinct Australian and Canadian navies, along with an assumption that they would contribute to imperial defence. Naturally, from the Dominion perspective, this primarily meant local defence, though the extent to which the Dominions might have to contribute more widely to imperial defence was left undefined. There was also agreement on the establishment of an ‘Imperial General Staff’, though, again, not much of a practical nature ensued from this.

Meanwhile British war planning increasingly focused on the possibility of conflict with Germany, and the potential necessity of Britain having to stand by its ally France in the event of German aggression. Anglo-French staff talks had begun not long after the 1904 Entente Cordiale and by 1911 the prevailing assumption in British military circles was that Britain already had a ‘Continental commitment’. As we shall see, it was an assumption also held well beyond the War Office.

The formal, plenary dimension of the 1911 conference

It was clear from the start of proceedings that imperial defence was going to be the major concern. Reporting the opening day of the conference on 23 May, The Times headlined its report ‘Imperial Conference/Mr Asquith’s Welcome to the Delegates/The Question of Defence’. After some conventional bromides about loyalty to the Crown, the rule of law (important matters, to be sure), and remarking that the empire was ‘a political organisation which, by its mere existence, rules out the possibility of war between populations numbering something like a third of the human race’, Asquith noted the proposal before the conference for a closer form of political union, in, say, the form of an Advisory Council, or some such body. Offering no opinion on this matter, save to note the importance of maintaining

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8 ‘The possibility of assimilating war organisation throughout the Empire’, 15 April 1907 (in Papers laid before the Colonial Conference 1907, Cd 3524), quoted in Gooch, Plans of War, 134.

9 The Times, 24 May 1911.
both ‘elasticity and flexibility in our Imperial organisation’ and also the ‘principle of Ministerial responsibility to Parliament’, he smartly moved on to ‘a topic of even greater moment – that of Imperial Defence’. It was, he told the assembled Dominion statesmen, ‘in the highest degree desirable that we should take advantage of your presence here to take stock together of the possible risks and dangers to which we are or may be in common exposed; and to weigh carefully the adequacy, and the reciprocal adaptiveness, of the contributions we are respectively making to provide against them’. He proposed that these matters should be discussed in confidential meetings of the Committee of Imperial Defence.10

What can we make of these remarks? On the matter of any closer imperial political union (embodied in a proposal from the New Zealand premier, Sir Joseph Ward), Asquith was, in fact, quite explicit in his opposition. The maintenance of ‘elasticity and flexibility’ in imperial organisation ruled out any fixed and permanent structure, and the ‘principle of Ministerial responsibility to Parliament’ meant that for the United Kingdom, no less than any of the Dominions, no ‘imperial council’ or such thing could supersede the authority of the legislatures of the empire. Here the United Kingdom was at one with the predominance of Dominion opinion, including Canada and Australia. As to the question of imperial defence, two important considerations were evident in his remarks. First, Asquith’s observation about ‘the possible risks and dangers to which we are or may be in common exposed’ meant not only that some realistic assessment of the imperial strategic position would be essayed, but that such risks and dangers might be held in common. Although there is some ambiguity here, my reading of ‘are or may be in common exposed’ is, not that some risks and dangers might not be held in common – it does not appear to be a conditional statement – but that the risks and dangers, which are held in common, already exist or ‘may exist’. The second consideration is embodied in the phrase ‘to weigh carefully the adequacy, and the reciprocal adaptiveness, of the contributions we are respectively making’. Here, the key assumption is not whether or not ‘we’ (i.e. the governments represented at the conference) should make contributions to imperial defence, but that such contributions were, in fact, obligatory. In part, this merely confirmed the principle regarding naval defence which had been formally established in 1909, but it also touched on Asquith’s typically vague concept of ‘reciprocal adaptiveness’, which could mean much or little depending on circumstances.

10 Imperial Conference 1911: Minutes of Proceedings, 22–3, CO 886/5B, The National Archives, Kew (TNA).
Underneath the apparent conditionality of Asquith’s words, and their rhetorical spin, nevertheless, was a fixed assumption that there were potential imperial-wide ‘risks and dangers’, and also that there were reciprocal imperial obligations regarding defence. Having set down these markers, Asquith left the matters to be discussed in the CID.

The 111th–113th meetings of the CID, 26, 29 and 30 May 1911

In his memoirs, Maurice Hankey recalled that, drawing on their experience during the 1909 conference, Sir Charles Ottley (secretary of the CID) and Hankey (assistant secretary) had concluded that progress in making plans for ‘the co-ordination and direction of the Empire’s Forces’ was only possible through ‘direct and continuous contact between the Dominions and the Mother Country at the Committee of Imperial Defence’. This, wrote Hankey, was ‘given effect’ in 1911 by the invitation to Dominion representatives to attend meetings of the CID.11 The 111th meeting on 26 May 1911 was a full-dress affair. Chaired by Herbert Asquith, the Foreign Secretary, the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Colonial Secretary, and the Secretaries of State for India and War all attended, along with some senior officials and officers (among whom was the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), Sir William Nicholson, and the upwardly-mobile Brigadier-General Henry Wilson, who had been Director of Military Operations since August the previous year). Attending, too, was that grey eminence of pre-war British defence planning, Lord Esher. All the Dominion premiers, and some ministers, attended. Wilfrid Laurier brought his Minister of Defence, Sir F. W. Borden, while Andrew Fisher of Australia was accompanied by Egerton Lee Bachelor, Minister of External Affairs, and George F. Pearce, the Minister of Defence. The same personnel also attended the subsequent two meetings.

Asquith opened the proceedings by reviewing the ‘progress in imperial defence matters’ since 1909. By and large this was very satisfactory, including the creation of Dominion naval units (apart from South Africa) and active measures being taken to ensure a ‘uniformity of military organisation’ throughout the empire. Referring to a paper which had been prepared by the CID on the ‘general principles’ of imperial defence, Asquith affirmed the primary maritime basis of imperial security. ‘The maintenance of our naval supremacy over the naval forces of any combination of

powers likely to be arranged against us’, he said, ‘is the basis of the system of Imperial Defence for by no other means can the security of British territory and maritime trade in war be insured.’ He added that Australia and New Zealand in particular gained ‘a large measure of security’ from the existence of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, repeated this during a long and frank tour d’horizon of British foreign policy. Echoing Asquith, Grey asserted that ‘what really determines the Foreign Policy of this country is the question of sea power’. He described how since about the turn of the century, Britain’s relations with France and Russia had appreciably improved, to such an extent that it had become ‘apparent that our relations with Russia and France were better than our relations with Germany’. While it was British policy to maintain cordial relations with Germany, ‘if we come to any understanding with Germany of a public kind which puts us on good relations with Germany it must be an understanding which must not put us back into the old bad relations with France and Russia’.

As Grey described it, thus, France and Russia had a veto power over any possible future Anglo-German rapprochement. Moving on to the military dangers of the current diplomatic situation, without mentioning it by name, Grey outlined the threat posed by Germany (and it is worth quoting him here at some length):

There is no danger, no appreciable danger, of our being involved in any considerable trouble in Europe, unless there is some Power, or group of Powers, in Europe which has the ambition of achieving what I would call the Napoleonic policy. That would be a policy on the part of the strongest Power in Europe, or of the strongest group of Powers in Europe, of first of all separating the other Powers outside their own group from each other, taking them in detail, crushing them singly if need be, and forcing each into the orbit of the policy of the strongest Power, or of the strongest group of Powers in Europe at the moment. The moment it was pursued, the moment the weakest Powers in Europe were assailed, either by diplomacy or by force, one by one they would appeal to us to help them. I may say at once we are not committed by entanglements which tie our hands. Our hands are free, and I have nothing to disclose to our being bound by any alliances, which is not known to all the world at the present time. But I do feel this very strongly, that if such a situation should arise, and there was a risk of all the Powers, or a group of Powers, acquiring such a dominating position in Europe that on the Continent of Europe it would be the arbiter not only [of] peace and war, but of the diplomacy of all the other Powers of Europe and if while that process was going on we were appealed to for help and sat by and looked on and did nothing, then people ought to realise that the result would be one great combination in Europe, outside which we should be left without a friend.
The result of this, argued Grey, would be a sharp deterioration in the naval situation, so that a ‘probable combination’ of fleets against Britain would not be those of two Powers, but of five. ‘Now, that is the situation’, he asserted, ‘and that is why I say, though I do not think there is any prospect that one can reasonably see at the present moment of our being involved in serious trouble in Europe, it is possible that under such extreme conditions as I have named the question might arise as to whether we ought to take part by force in European affairs, and if we did it would be solely because Sea Power, and the necessity of keeping the command of the sea, was the underlying cause and motive of our action’. That being so, it was ‘obvious’ how it was ‘a common interest between us here at home and all the Dominions’, since ‘if the control of the seas was lost, it would not only be the end of the British Empire as far as we are concerned, but all the Dominions would be separated from us, never to be rejoined’.12

This was the core of Grey’s analysis: Britain’s strategic security, as always, depended on maritime strength which could only be threatened by ‘the strongest Power in Europe’ (which he made clear was Germany), or ‘the strongest group of Powers in Europe’, which, without British intervention, would be able to dominate the European continent, assemble a five-power strong fleet and thus threaten ‘the maintenance and control of sea communications’ which was so vital for Britain and the empire. Although expressed in guarded language, and although Grey emphasised the unlikelihood of such an extremity occurring (‘I do not think there is any prospect that one can reasonably see at the present moment of our being involved in serious trouble in Europe’), embedded in his speech was the clear prospect of Britain intervening on the European continent against Germany. As Michael Howard has observed, the frankness of Grey’s review ‘might have astounded the House of Commons’,13 as it made explicit the extent to which Britain was already committed to intervening on the Continent should it appear to be necessary to curb the threat of Germany dominating Europe, and thus being in a position to challenge Britain’s cherished maritime power.

According to David Lloyd George, Grey’s review of foreign and defence policy at the 1911 CID meeting was fuller than anything that was delivered to the United Kingdom Cabinet during the eight years which preceded the war.14 It is perhaps

12 Minutes of CID 111th meeting, 26 May 1911, CAB 38/18, No. 40, TNA.
14 David Lloyd George, War Memoirs (London; Odhams edn, n.d. [1938]), vol. 1: 27–8. Lloyd George was, in fact, not at the meeting, and we may detect the hand of Hankey (who helped with Lloyd George’s memoirs) in this passage. See Andrew Suttie, Rewriting the First World War: Lloyd George, Politics and Strategy 1914–18 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 20–1.
significant that Asquith and Grey were prepared to take the Dominion leaders into their confidence in a way they were not prepared to do with their own domestic colleagues. Indeed, had Grey spoken similarly to the Cabinet, he would have run the risk of stirring up serious opposition from navalist and isolationist colleagues for whom any hint of a military Continental commitment was absolutely anathema. But in these imperial meetings of the CID there was no critical response from any of those present to Grey’s remarks.

On the first day of the CID meetings, the liveliest responses from Canada, Australia and New Zealand concerned the implications of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. While everyone generally welcomed it for the contribution it made to imperial security in the Pacific, there were concerns lest its existence might jeopardise established ‘whites only’ immigration policies. The Australian Minister of Defence, George F. Pearce, said that public opinion in Australia was ‘undoubtedly nervous as regards the Japanese’ and feared unrestricted Japanese immigration into the north of the country. Pearce asserted in addition that ‘to a certain extent it degraded the position of the Empire to go into a Treaty with an Asiatic country’.15

At the second CID meeting, held on Monday 29 May after a weekend break, the First Lord of the Admiralty, Reginald McKenna, began by putting the case for a unified Imperial Fleet. Although the principle of separate Dominion navies had already been conceded, no doubt the Admiralty did not want to miss an opportunity of reaffirming their ideal. McKenna argued the key principle of command of the sea, which would underscore security both at home and overseas. ‘Closing the sea to the enemy’, he said, ‘means that not only the shores of these islands, but, with the exception of Canada, all the Dominions would be free from fear of invasion, and the trade of the Empire would be secure.’ On the subject of potential enemies, McKenna was much more explicit than Grey had been the previous Friday: ‘There is only one great navy at this moment than could be considered as having to be taken into account when regarding the possibilities of warfare, and that is obviously the German Navy’. He asserted that ‘on the outbreak of war our problem, which will be one and the same the whole world over [emphasis added], would be to seek out, to bring to battle, or to mask the German Fleet and German ships of war wherever they might be found’. Several times McKenna stressed that the distribution of the British fleet had to be ‘determined by the distribution of the enemy’s fleets’, and since the ‘great mass’ of the German fleet was in the North Sea and Baltic, it

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15 Minutes of CID 111th meeting, CAB 38/18, No. 40, TNA.
followed that the preponderance of the British fleet should be stationed in home waters, ‘where security is most vital because the loss would be heaviest’. And with the British fleet concentrated in home waters, the Dominions would have to help protect British commerce in their own spheres, thus ‘the Empire would look to Australia to protect the trade which comes round Cape Leeuwin’ (Western Australia) and Canada that ‘which comes out of the St Lawrence’.

Laurier took the opportunity of re-emphasising Canada’s independent-mindedness in the matter of imperial defence, asserting that his Dominion was not obliged ‘to take part in the wars of the United Kingdom’ and Canada would ‘have to determine herself whether she will go to war or not’. In fact, however, he trod a virtuoso line of asserting autonomy in principle but co-operation in practice, and he observed a difference between major and smaller wars. ‘If war were declared with Germany’, he said, ‘probably our duty would be to go to war at once’, but he could ‘conceive there are many smaller nations who might be at war with Great Britain and which war we should take no part whatsoever’. Canada, he asserted, would come to the aid of the Mother Country, but this was a very different thing from simply handing over the Canadian navy for the Admiralty to use at will.

The Australians, Fisher and Pearce, were keen to confirm that there would be a specific ‘Australia Station’ with defined ‘Australian waters’. While they were also worried about the possibility of the Australian fleet being ‘placed at the disposal of the Admiralty’ in time of war, Fisher assured the meeting that ‘if Great Britain is in difficulties we shall, I think, in every circumstance feel that we are in difficulties too, and there need hardly be any argument on that point’. Pearce, echoing Laurier’s position, declared the need to maintain the ‘complete local autonomy of the Dominions’ and, bearing in mind the need for Dominions to raise military forces for local defence, he significantly noted that they had not been asked ‘to give any obligation in regard to land forces’.

The third Imperial Conference meeting of the CID was held on Tuesday 30 May. It began with Asquith trying to get agreement on a resolution concerning co-operation between the naval forces of the United Kingdom and Dominions. Allowing that the ‘ideal situation’ for the Admiralty would be ‘a single navy, with a single centre, a single head’, but, bearing in mind the political realities of the situation, provision had to be made for the Dominions’ desire for autonomy. Asquith assumed, nevertheless, that if the Empire were involved ‘in a naval war

16 Ibid., 112th meeting, 29 May 1911, CAB 38/18, No. 41, TNA.
with a great naval Power [unspecified], Canada, both from sentiments of loyalty and from sentiments of self-interest, would in all probability [emphasis added] place her fleet at the disposal of the British Admiralty. The same is true of Australia.\[emphasis added\] I am practically [ditto] certain.’ (‘Practically’, in this case, appears to mean ‘in practice’, rather than ‘almost’.) In the end there was a fudge, in which the British and Dominion representatives colluded, by which the desirable arrangement of a unified imperial fleet was asserted, while Dominion autonomy was guaranteed.

Easier progress was made on the proposal that the Dominions should be represented at the CID ‘when questions of Naval and Military Defence affecting the Overseas Dominions are under consideration’, though there was some debate as to who the most suitable Dominion representatives should be, whether, for example, they should be the High Commissioners, officers seconded for the purpose, or Dominion ministers of defence, who would have to travel to London specially for meetings. There was general agreement, too, that local Dominion Defence Committees should be set up to co-ordinate local planning.

The last formal presentation at these CID meetings came from the Secretary of State for War, Viscount Haldane. Beyond encouraging the development of Dominion forces along uniform imperial lines, and complaining that what he called the ‘territorial army’ which had been created in Britain was not developing as quickly as hoped due to the loss of potential recruits through emigration (presumably to the Dominions, among other places), Haldane focused on the availability of Dominion local forces ‘for the assistance of some neighbouring Dominion which was taken unawares, or which was in circumstances of difficulty’. Haldane also spoke about the development in Britain of ‘an expeditionary army’, which was ‘ready for mobilisation and which we can send to any part of the Dominions of the Crown to your assistance as you may need’. He assured the assembled company that ‘the two purposes for which the entire army exists, the Dominions and the British, are local defence … and mutual assistance’.\[17\]

This principle of reciprocity (Asquith’s ‘reciprocal adaptiveness’) was a key part of the British defence planners’ assumptions about imperial defence. As Haldane articulated it at the CID, moreover, it seemed that the balance of obligation lay on Britain’s side. There was an expeditionary force and it was available to be sent to the Dominions if required. This reflected the line agreed in the War Office during their preparations for the conference. In the spring of 1911 the War Office had been

\[17\] Ibid., 113th meeting, 30 May 1911, CAB 38/18, No. 42, TNA.
warned that Australia might enquire what military obligations might arise for the Dominion and a paper was prepared which emphasised the help the Dominions might give to the United Kingdom rather than vice versa. On Haldane’s and the CIGS, Sir William Nicholson’s insistence, the paper was redrafted to give precisely the opposite impression. For example, the statement ‘The four great Dominions to which the Mother Country will naturally turn in time of emergency’ was altered in the final draft to ‘The four great Dominions which will turn to the Mother Country or to which the Mother Country may turn for help in time of emergency’.18

A final observation might be made about the Dominions’ engagement with the substantive issues raised at these meetings. In fact, despite the Dominion effusions about their readiness to come to the aid of the Mother Country in its time of need, what the minutes of the CID meetings reveal most abundantly is some dissipation of Dominion attention on peripheral matters. Rather than offer any sustained critique of the presentations made by Grey and McKenna and the policy implications contained therein, the Dominion representatives expended much energy on such matters as Japanese immigration and what variant of the White Ensign Dominion fleets might fly.

Henry Wilson was not greatly impressed by what he witnessed at the three CID meetings:

We spent most of to-day continuing our discussions on the Imperial Conference. Haldane talked d— rubbish for an hour, & my general feeling at the end of three days is this. The task of welding this Empire into one is the most difficult that any man was ever called upon to perform. Obvious, therefore, that we must get a great man such as Pitt, Bismarck, etc. I confess I see no signs of such a man in this country.19

The ‘committee of the imperial conference’ convened to discuss military defence, 14 and 17 June 1911

This was much more of a business meeting than those which had gone before. Chaired by Sir William Nicholson (‘Old Nick’), Chief of the Imperial General Staff since 1908, the War Office was represented by Henry Wilson (DMO), Launcelot Kiggell (DSD) and ‘Archie’ Murray (Director of Military Training). The

18 Gooch, Plans of War, 144.
19 Diary of Sir Henry Wilson, 30 May 1911, Wilson papers, Imperial War Museum (IWM).
Dominions were represented by subsidiary ministers and officials. Sir Frederick Borden (Minister of Militia and Defence) was there with his CGS and Colonel Sam Hughes MP, described as a ‘Railway Intelligence Officer’. There was one representative each from New Zealand and South Africa, but, at the start, there was no sign of George Pearce, the Australian representative. He arrived after an hour, having mistaken the starting-time of the meeting. In the meantime, the others began to discuss a War Office paper on ‘The co-operation of the military forces of the Empire’, which still embodied some of the metropolitan assumptions about ‘mutual assistance’ that had exercised Haldane and Nicholson earlier in the year. Among other things, the paper noted that while the first duty of the military forces of the dominions was ‘local defence’, they also existed to provide ‘mutual assistance in emergency’. That being so, at least part of the Dominion forces should be organised so as ‘to permit of their employment in war outside as well as within their respective Dominions, thus enabling them whenever necessary to fulfil an Imperial as well as a local purpose’. Alert to the implications of this, Sir Frederick Borden observed that a phrase which spoke of ‘the various contingencies in which help from the Dominions will be forthcoming’ might be amended to read ‘the various contingencies in which help from or to [emphasis added] the Dominions will be forthcoming’. Later on in the meeting (and demonstrating the extent to which the Dominion representatives had to think about public opinion back home) he dryly observed that ‘this paper would rather indicate that it has been looked at solely from the point of view of the Mother Country, which would not go down quite so well with the Dominions if it got out’.

Various other matters, such as the role of the Inspector-General of Overseas Forces and nominations to the Staff College, were discussed before Pearce arrived, but the focus soon returned to the ‘co-operation’ question. Pearce noted that, while the local Australian force was ‘raised entirely for local defence’, it was recognised ‘that in any considerable war a large number of our troops would volunteer for service overseas if necessary’. What he wanted was some idea of where the War Office thought those troops might be deployed. Since this was such a sensitive issue, and since Borden wanted time for his prime minister to read the paper, further discussion was postponed for a resumed meeting in three days’ time. This time Pearce led from the start. Although the Australian Defence Act did not authorise the sending of troops overseas, he repeated his assumption that in

20 Proceedings of a Committee of the Imperial Conference convened to discuss Questions of Defence (Military), 14 & 17 June 1911, WO 106/43, TNA.
the event of a serious war a considerable number of Australians would volunteer for such service. ‘It seemed to us’, he said, ‘that our local General Staff ought to know what is in the minds of the Imperial General Staff as regards what use such forces should be put to’, so that they could be better prepared for such service. Even this was rather too specific for Borden who argued that a somewhat airy general assurance agreed in 1909 that the Dominions would ‘assist in the defence of the Empire in a real emergency’ was quite sufficient.

In fact, Nicholson was not prepared to give anything specific away concerning British war plans. ‘We have a scheme’, he admitted (without saying where they are going to), ‘of mobilising an Expeditionary Force to be used, we do not specify where or for what purpose.’ If the Dominions so wished, they could earmark forces for ‘expeditionary action’, but this would have to be ‘without going into the details of where it is to be used or when it is to be used … and we cannot tell in the British Empire in what particular direction, though we have some idea where, it might be used. It is much better’, he said, ‘to hold our tongues about it and not say anything, according to the old Persian proverb, “What two ears only hear, God himself does not know”. Therefore in these matters we do not say anything and nobody else knows about it.’ 21 Although there was a strong implication here that the proposed expeditionary force might be used in some imperial theatre of operations, it was clear that there was going to be no agreement in any explicit commitment to Dominion assistance being lent to the Mother Country in the event of a serious war, especially since the British side were not going to take their Dominion colleagues into their confidence about War Office thinking on how the expeditionary force might actually be deployed.

And so the matter was left and the War Office paper on military co-operation was withdrawn.

The 114th meeting of the CID on 23 August 1911

In July 1911 the Agadir, or ‘second Moroccan’, crisis raised the spectre of war between France and Germany. 22 In Britain it precipitated an intense examination of both grand strategy and actual war plans, which by the end of the summer had been thoroughly considered.

21 Ibid.
irrevocably, it seems, confirmed the ‘Continental commitment’ on the side of France. The immediate cause of the crisis was the arrival of the German gunboat Panther at Agadir on Saturday 1 July. The following Monday The Times promised that Britain would ‘not be disloyal or unfaithful’ to the Entente and the Cabinet resolved to back up France, though there was no suggestion that any more than diplomatic support would be given. But tension rose over the following month and by early August it was clear that the government was increasingly contemplating the military options.

At Nicholson’s request, Henry Wilson prepared an extremely important paper ‘on the pros & cons of our joining with France in a war with Germany’. It articulated Wilson’s own belief that ‘we must join France’, but it was adopted by Nicholson as embodying the views of the general staff as a whole. Wilson’s paper began with the ‘axiom’ (which Sir Edward Grey had stated in the CID meeting of 26 May) that ‘the policy of England is to prevent any Continental Power from attaining a position of superiority that would allow it to dominate, and dictate to, the rest of Europe’. If Germany attacked France ‘in pursuance of a policy of domination’, it would be impossible, he argued, ‘for England to remain neutral’. Wilson argued that the immediate deployment the six-division expeditionary force, small though it was, could make a crucial difference to the balance of forces between France and Germany, so much so that it was ‘scarcely too much to say that the difference may be that of victory and defeat’.

Evidently concurring with Wilson’s general gist, Haldane had him argue his case in person to a meeting of the CID on 23 August, which turned out to be of extraordinary importance in the evolution of British strategic planning before 1914. As Zara Steiner has observed, it was the only time the CID ‘actually reviewed the over-all pattern of British strategy before 1914’. Wilson’s paper was circulated in advance, as was one by Sir Arthur Wilson (the First Sea Lord), which Henry Wilson dismissed as ‘one of the most childish papers I ever read about the use of our Exped. force in a Continental war. Absolutely hopeless. It appears that 5 Div.

23 Wilson diary, 11 August 1911, IWM.
24 Wilson’s draft, dated 12 August 1911, is in the Wilson papers, HHW 3/5/13, IWM; copies of the General Staff Memorandum, ‘Military aspect of the Continental problem’, dated 15 August, are in CAB 4/3/2 and 38/19/47, TNA.
are to guard the east coast & one Div. is to land in Germany! I never heard such a thing.'27

Chaired by the Prime Minister, the meeting was attended by Haldane, Churchill, Grey, McKenna (First Lord of the Admiralty), and Lloyd George. Nicholson, Sir John French and Wilson represented the War Office; Sir Arthur Wilson and Alexander Bethell (Director of Naval Intelligence) the Admiralty. There were no representatives from any of the Dominions, though the business of the meeting was clear enough: ‘Action to be taken in the event of intervention in a European war’.28 Beginning at 11.30 in the morning, the War Office batted first. Nicholson left Wilson to put their case. ‘I had all my big maps on the wall’, he wrote, ‘& I lectured for 1 3/4 hours. Everyone very nice. Much questioning by Winston and Lloyd George, especially.’ After a break for a late lunch, Arthur Wilson led for the Admiralty. ‘It soon became apparent’, recalled Churchill, ‘that a profound difference existed between the War Office and the Admiralty view.’ Insofar as any coherent navy plans existed at all, they depended on the traditional enforcement of a maritime blockade on the enemy, coupled with the limited use of the army for raids on the German North Sea coast. Asquith called the navy’s half-baked plans ‘puerile’ and ‘wholly impracticable’. But Churchill’s ‘profound difference’ was one of style as well as substance. In the ‘battle of the Wilsons’ the admiral was no match for the general, and Henry Wilson carried the day as much through the ‘remarkable brilliance’ (Hankey’s description) of his exposition as the depth and completeness of his plans. After the meeting, indeed, he ‘got a nice note from Haldane. It ran: “My dear General. You did admirably to-day. Lucid & of real grip, your exposition made a real impression.”’29

There were imperfections in the army’s case as put by Henry Wilson, not least because his planning depended so heavily on the French. But the navy’s view was put so badly and incompetently by Arthur Wilson that it obscured the weaknesses in the army plans. Asquith was indeed no great supporter of the ‘Continental commitment’, but he had to agree that ‘in principle the General Staff scheme is the only alternative’, though he wanted it in the first instance to be limited to the despatch of only four divisions.30 The 23 August meeting was important, not so

27 Wilson diary, 21 August 1911, IWM.
28 Minutes of CID 114th meeting, 23 August 1911, CAB 2/2/2, TNA.
30 Asquith to Haldane, 31 August 1911 (ibid).
much (as some have argued) because this was the moment when the commitment to France was made. This had been agreed by 1906, and military planning had proceeded accordingly. Yet the CID meeting was a moment when the military proponents of a French alliance, and direct military intervention on the Continent, could have lost the case (as Admiral Wilson did).

The consequence of the CID meeting of August 1911 was to make the deployment of the BEF to France three years later more certain than it had ever been. Based on the CID’s acceptance of the military strategy, Henry Wilson and his colleagues in the War Office worked assiduously on perfecting the practicalities of deployment, to the extent that in early August 1914 it was effectively the only viable option for the British government to take, if they were to decide to go to war at all. The decisions of that CID meeting confirmed the reality of Britain’s twentieth-century defence posture, which increasingly reflected the fact that Britain’s essential interests lay in Europe and not in the empire. ‘Imperial defence’ at its most basic was in fact European defence; the defence of the United Kingdom in Europe, and the first call on the resources of the empire would always be for the protection of the Mother Country. This being the case (and although this perception is certainly illuminated with the benefit of hindsight) it seems crystal clear that the matters discussed at the CID meeting of 23 August 1914 were *prima facie* ‘questions of Naval and Military Defence affecting the Overseas Dominions’, for the discussion of which it had been agreed just two months previously at the imperial conference that Dominion representatives should be present. Indeed, there is little sign here of the ‘direct and continuous contact between the Dominions and the Mother Country’ which, many years afterwards, Maurice Hankey asserted had been ‘given effect’ by decisions made at the 1911 Imperial Conference.31

**Conclusion**

It is worth reflecting on what was said; what was unsaid; what was understood (that is to say in the sense of accepted as a ‘fact’); and, finally, what was assumed. It is clear (and this is natural enough) that the more involved were the technicians, the sailors and soldiers, the more definite they wished to be. Both Asquith and Sir Edward Grey imagined Germany would be the enemy, but did not explicitly say so. Reginald McKenna, influenced, no doubt, by naval hawks in the Admiralty, was quite open about it and wanted to establish the crucial principle of a unified

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31 Quoted above at n. 11.
wartime imperial navy. Henry Wilson and his colleagues in the War Office had long decided that Germany would be the enemy, that Britain would fight at France's side, and they secured approval for that at the 23 August meeting. But this was an occasion to which Dominion representatives were not invited, and at the military committee meetings on 14 and 17 June, the CIGS had deliberately avoided being specific about the assumed destination of the expeditionary force.

So it was that in 1911, so far as the Dominions were concerned (and despite the explicit mention of Germany by some individuals, and the clear implication by Grey in his statement on 26 May of Britain's potential involvement in a European continental conflict), the United Kingdom position was massaged to make it look as if the arrangements for imperial military assistance were truly reciprocal which (perhaps) they might have been in the wildly unlikely contingency of the USA invading Canada, or Germany (based in, say, Samoa) launching a ‘bolt from the blue’ on Australia.

But, did the British believe that their Dominion colleagues were taken in by this conference and committee-room sleight of hand? Were the Dominion representatives, for their part, actually deceived? Or did each side (as I suspect was the case) for the most part simply say (and hear) what they thought each other wanted to say and hear, in effect a kind of theatrical, decorative performance, staged to satisfy perceived imperial needs without really articulating the full consequences of the agreements apparently reached. What we have is a kind of fudge, which is, after all, one of the most valuable mechanisms for securing international agreements.

There was an echo of these discussions some fifteen years later when, in the late 1920s, the possibility of South Africa remaining neutral while the United Kingdom was at war briefly excited the Chief of the Naval Staff, Sir Charles Madden. Madden consulted the longtime Cabinet Secretary, Sir Maurice Hankey, on the matter. Hankey, sensibly appreciating the gulf between theory and practice, replied that the question of Dominion neutrality had been discussed before 1914. Although Canada and Australia had then stood out for the right to remain neutral, Hankey’s recollection was that ‘Mr Asquith privately held the view that it would be all right on the day, and that it was better not to force an issue on what he regarded as an academic question’.32

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32 Madden to Hankey and reply, 21 and 23 November 1928, CAB 21/311, TNA.
While this tended to be Asquith’s view on most issues, in this case he was absolutely correct, and the pattern of imperial assistance to the Mother Country established in the Boer War was repeated on an altogether greater scale in the world wars of 1914–18 and 1939–45. On both occasions the Dominions (and India) rallied to the imperial war effort, though the timing, nature and impact of their contributions, and that of the colonial territories, differed on each occasion and reflected changing political and social relationships within the empire. In August 1914 Sir Joseph Cook, prime minister of Australia, affirmed that ‘when the Empire is at war, so is Australia’, and in effect a declaration of war by the British government included all the imperial territories. Similar protestations of loyalty were made elsewhere. Despite his categorical assertion at the 113th meeting of the CID, ‘For my part I have a very strong objection that Canada should have to take part in the military operations of Great Britain’, by 1914 now leader of the opposition in Canada, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, proclaimed that ‘all Canadians stand behind the mother country’. In India, one of the appointed Indian members of the Viceroy’s Legislative Council declared that Indians were ‘ready to meet any danger and render any sacrifices for the sake of the great and glorious Empire of which we are proud to call ourselves citizens’.

The tension between the expense of protecting Britain’s imperial interests, and the potentially even greater costs of ‘home defence’ against a European challenge, was a theme which emerged strongly in the twentieth century. For the United Kingdom, the inescapable geopolitical reality was that, however pressing the threat to some distant part of the empire, the security of the ‘Mother Country’ must come first. It followed that the defence of the far-flung empire must come second. The compelling (for British policymakers) strategic logic underscoring this truth could not but dismay imperial decision-makers in Ottawa, Canberra, Wellington or wherever, eroding their belief in the empire as a useful and protective world-system and potentially also undermining their willingness to assist Britain when required. In a sense the decisions of 1911 led not only to the costly trench warfare of the Western Front, but also to the fall of Singapore in 1942.

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33 Minutes of CID, 113th meeting, 30 May 1911, CAB 38/18, No. 42, TNA.
35 And, on a more trivial level, the doleful fact that when entering the United Kingdom Australian (and other former Dominion) citizens have to queue up at an immigration desk for foreigners, while British citizens queue up at one for European passports.
One of the great difficulties of making sense of the crucial imperial defence decisions of 1911 is that we view them through the prism of the First World War. We know what happened and, with that bright illumination of hindsight, are only too well aware of the terrible consequences following on from the assumptions, decisions and dispositions of 1911. To what extent (if at all) did the actors of 1911 have any idea of what might happen, and of the consequences (specifically in terms of human cost) which might flow from their decisions? Returning to the observation made at the start of this paper, that decisions about defence concern matters of life and death, was the imperial and Dominion confidence which stemmed from the apparently satisfying fact that 16,000 or so Australians rallied to the empire’s side during the Boer War in any way diminished or modulated by the fact that some 560 of those men had not returned?36

But not all the participants in these various discussions evidently thought the matters were purely theoretical, and even had they been aware of the consequences of their actions it might not have made any difference. At least one individual present at the meetings of May, June and August 1911—Brigadier-General Henry Wilson, the British Director of Military Operations—appears to have had some inkling of the human consequences of the ‘Continental Commitment’ confirmed by Britain’s defence policymakers during that summer, though his premonition does not appear to have shaken in the slightest his belief in its necessity. In October 1910 Major-General George Barker, the commander of the East Coast Defences at Chatham in Kent, wrote to Henry Wilson at the War Office asking if he could send down an officer to lecture about ‘Belgium as a field of operations. It would’, wrote Barker, ‘stimulate interest’. Wilson replied that he would send a list of potential lecturers and their topics, as ‘there are many other problems that are probably of more interest to regimental officers than the topography of a funny little country like Belgium, although’, he added, ‘most of them may be buried there before they are much older’.37 How right he was.

37 Barker to Wilson, n.d., and reply, 24 October 1910, WO 106/59, TNA. I am very grateful to John Gooch for drawing my attention to this important file of correspondence.
Coronation Conversations: The Dominions and Military Planning Talks at the 1911 Imperial Conference

John Connor

The coronation of King George V on 22 June 1911 was the sole reason an Imperial Conference was held in that year. Despite this, the military planning talks that took place as part of this conference between British ministers and officials and the Dominions representatives – the coronation conversations – became a significant event that made possible the creation and deployment of Dominion expeditionary forces at the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Prior to the 1911 conference, the British Government had made several attempts to persuade the Dominions to standardise their militaries along current British lines and to start planning the type of force they might be able to contribute in time of war, but these had met with little success. The shift in the Dominion ministers’ opinions at this conference occurred when the British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey informed them that relations with Germany had deteriorated to the extent that conflict between the British and German Empires was becoming increasingly likely.

This essay will outline the conversations held in 1911 in the Council of Imperial Defence, the Admiralty and the War Office and consider the Dominions’ subsequent naval and military planning to fight alongside the United Kingdom in the event of war with Germany. In the Australian historiography, the 1911 Imperial Conference is best known for the argument put forward, initially by John Mordike and subsequently by Greg Lockhart and Brian Toohey, that the Australian Defence Minister, Senator George Pearce, entered into a ‘conspiracy’ with the British Government when he agreed to commence planning for an expeditionary force. This argument will be examined and refuted. In October and November 1912, when it appeared the Balkan War might escalate into a major European war, the New Zealand and Australian governments jointly planned to send an expeditionary force. It is likely the Canadian Government did the same, and the absence in the archival record for this period probably reflects not the absence of discussion, but
rather the documents’ subsequent removal by the erratic and egotistical Militia Minister, Colonel Sam Hughes. The Dominions’ expeditionary force planning after 1911 was not accompanied by a similar emphasis in developing Dominion naval forces. The Canadian Government agreed at the 1911 conference to expand the newly-established Royal Canadian Navy, but political changes in both Canada and the United Kingdom, accompanied by continuing opposition to acquiring warships in New Zealand, meant that only Australia would be in possession of a ‘fleet unit’ in 1914.

The representatives of the five Dominions – Australia, Canada, Newfoundland, New Zealand and South Africa – arrived in London in the northern Spring of 1911 to witness the Coronation and attend the Imperial Conference. ‘Dominion’ was the term applied at this time to the self-government components of the British Empire in which white settlers and their descendants predominated over the indigenous population either numerically or, in the case of South Africa, politically. This essay will focus on the roles played during and after the Imperial Conference by the Commonwealth of Australia (formed 1901, 1911 population not including indigenous 4,455,005), the Dominion of Canada (formed 1867, 1911 population including indigenous 7,206,643) and the Dominion of New Zealand (granted Dominion status 1907, 1911 population including indigenous 1,058,312).1 Newfoundland (self-governing since 1855, 1911 population including indigenous 242,649) will not be discussed in this chapter because it had not established a local defence force when the British Army garrison was withdrawn in 1871 and only had a unit of Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve formed in 1902. This Dominion would not have a locally organised military formation until the creation of the Newfoundland Regiment in 1914.2 (Newfoundland would became a province of Canada in 1949.) The Union of South Africa (1911 population 5,973,394 of whom around 20 per cent were white), bringing together the previously separate colonies of the Cape, Natal, Orange Free State and Transvaal, will also not be included because the Union had only been formed the previous year.3 At the 1911 Imperial Conference South African Prime Minister Louis Botha would express concerns

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about the German threat to the ports of Lourenço Marques (now Maputo) and Beira in Portuguese Mozambique that were vital to South African trade, but the Union Defence Forces had little opportunity to consider expeditionary forces as they were still being created out of the several military forces with disparate organisations and traditions. As well, some of the Afrikaner leadership strongly opposed South African involvement in British wars.

It must be remembered that although the Dominions were self-governing, they not independent as we would understand it today. They had no foreign policy separate from that of the British government. This meant that if the United Kingdom was at war, they were automatically at war, though they could determine the scale of their contribution to the war. The second point to remember is that the Dominions attending the 1911 conference did not have the separate national identities exhibited by the current independent nations of New Zealand, Canada and Australia. It is true is that people living in the Dominions in 1911 did have ideas of local identities, but these existed within the broader British identity and were compatible with it, in the same way one could be a Yorkshireman and British at the same time.

During the South African War (1899-1902), Canada, New Zealand and Australia had all sent volunteer forces, mostly in units specially raised for this conflict. Once the war had concluded, individuals in various parts of the British Empire attempted to find ways to regularise this voluntary effort so it could be more easily replicated in future wars. These attempts, however, had little success. For example, at the 1902 Colonial Conference (they would not be renamed Imperial Conferences until 1909), New Zealand Prime Minister Richard Seddon proposed each self-governing colony should establish a component of an ‘Imperial Reserve’ that could be deployed overseas in the service of the empire. Both the

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4 Harcourt to Gladstone, 3 August 1911, Harcourt Papers, dep 484, f. 178, Bodleian Library, Oxford (BL).
7 Canada provided 8,400 troops, New Zealand 6,000, Australia 16,000. The British colonies in southern Africa provided 52,000 troops: Arthur Berriedale Keith, Responsible Government in the Dominions, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), II: 979.
Australian and Canadian delegations opposed Seddon’s idea so it was not pursued.\(^8\) At the 1909 Imperial Conference, the War Office produced a paper proposing the establishment of an Imperial General Staff and for the Dominions to reorganise their military forces along British lines. This did not gain full acceptance, but did lead the Canadian and New Zealand governments to start considering the formation of expeditionary forces.\(^9\)

In the lead-up to the 1911 Imperial Conference, British officials hoped this meeting would result in the Dominions taking increased responsibility for Imperial defence. Lord Esher, a member of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID), wrote on 10 January 1911 that the upcoming conference would ‘define the general conditions and the precise circumstances under which mutual defence would automatically come into operation’, but a CID paper produced for the meeting acknowledged that the Dominions were ‘divided on many important aspects of defence policy’ and expected consensus would be difficult to obtain.\(^10\)

Despite this pessimistic prediction, the Dominions did reach a remarkable level of agreement on defence issues at the Imperial Conference. This was in response to the briefing by Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, gave to the Dominion ministers on British foreign policy during a closed CID meeting on 26 May 1911. During this briefing he described the decline in British-German relations.\(^11\) The Dominion politicians left the meeting convinced that war with Germany would be likely in the near future. The Australian Defence Minister, Senator George Pearce, recalled in his memoirs that he and the other Australian delegates ‘came unanimously to the opinion that a European war was inevitable and that it would probably come in 1915’.\(^12\) Sir John Findlay, the New Zealand Attorney-General, thought the same,\(^13\) and in his published account of the conference, which came out in 1912, implied that the Foreign Secretary had said something significant during this briefing:

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\(^8\) Keith, *Responsible Government*, II: 971.
\(^9\) ‘Proposals for so organizing the Military Forces of the Empire as to ensure their effective co-operation in the event of war’, 17 July 1909, WO 106/43, TNA.
\(^10\) Memorandum, Esher, 10 January 1911, CAB 17/79, TNA; CID Paper 67-C, 11 March 1911, CAB 5/2, ff. 145-6, TNA.
\(^11\) CID Meeting, 26 May 1911, CAB 2/2, f. 79, TNA.
\(^12\) George Foster Pearce, *Carpenter to Cabinet: Thirty-Seven Years of Parliament* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1951), 81-2.
\(^13\) Godley to Wilson, 6 September 1911, WO 106/59, f. 328, TNA.
No man who heard him in that Conference will ever forget Sir Edward Grey’s address to us on the history and present nature of the Foreign policy of Great Britain. It was delivered to us sitting as a Secret Committee of Defence ... The speech – with its power, sincerity and truthfulness – did more to stir and leave a sense of Imperial unity in our blood than all the rest that happened or was said throughout the Conference.14

Following Grey’s speech, the Dominion ministers discussed naval matters with the Admiralty and military matters in the War Office. At the 1909 Imperial Conference, Australia had agreed to an Admiralty proposal that the Dominions should form their own navies on a ‘fleet unit’ organisation based around a battlecruiser;15 Canada had agreed to form a navy, but not on the ‘fleet unit’ model.16 At the 1911 Imperial Conference, Louis Brodeur, the Canadian Minister of Marine and Fisheries, sorted out with the Admiralty his outstanding issues on the formation of the Royal Canadian Navy,17 while Pearce attempted to interest the New Zealand Prime Minister, Joseph Ward, in creating a joint Australian-New Zealand navy which would become the ‘dominating factor in the South Pacific’. Ward, a staunch Imperialist, viewed Pearce’s scheme as seceding from the Royal Navy and rejected it.18 On 29 May, the First Lord of the Admiralty, Reginald McKenna, asked Pearce under what circumstances Australian ships would come under Admiralty control. Pearce had already carefully considered this issue, and replied, ‘in case of war unquestionably’. He then went on to warn McKenna that the issue of wartime control of Australian warships would provide ammunition to his political opponents in Australia and concluded with the words: ‘I think it is far wiser to leave it unwritten.’19

16 Johnston et al., The Seabound Coast, 176-7.
17 Ibid., 179-82.
18 Minutes CID meeting, 29 May 1911, CAB 2/2, ff. 102, 103, 106, TNA.
19 Minutes CID meeting, 29 May 1911, CAB 2/2, f. 105, TNA; ‘Memorandum of Conferences Between the British Admiralty and Representatives of the Dominions of Canada and Australia’ [June 1911], ADM 178/8, TNA; Pearce, Carpenter to Cabinet, 85.
The Australian Defence Minister’s willingness to discuss defence cooperation but unwillingness to make formal commitments was repeated in the Imperial Conference discussions on military issues. These talks took place on 14 and 17 June 1911 in the War Office and were based on the paper written by Brigadier-General Henry Wilson, the Director of Military Operations, entitled ‘The Desirability of such a General Uniformity of Organisation throughout the Military Forces of the Empire as may Facilitate their rendering Mutual Support and Assistance’. Wilson’s paper argued that future wars would be ‘short, sharp and decisive’: this meant that the detailed planning of any forces the Dominions might offer in time of war would have to be completed before the war had even begun.20

The New Zealand, Canadian and Australian ministers present at this meeting all agreed to this idea, but they stressed to the generals that this planning would not automatically commit a future government to implement it. As Pearce said in the meeting: peacetime planning ‘would not commit us to take that action, while if we decided to take that action we would not have to commence at the last moment or improvise our schemes, but would have our schemes for mobilisation and so on ready’. The second meeting on 17 June agreed that expeditionary force planning should commence, but the Canadian Minister of Militia and Defence, Sir Frederick Borden, also gained agreement for Wilson’s paper to be withdrawn. Pearce supported suppressing the document, telling the meeting that he, like Borden, would have domestic political difficulties if the issue became public.21

In Australia, the War Office meetings at the 1911 Imperial Conference are best known through the writings of John Mordike. He argued in his 1992 book *An Army for a Nation* that in these War Office meetings the Australian Defence Minister joined a ‘conspiracy’ in which ‘Pearce committed Australia to future imperial undertakings without question’22 and ‘Pearce never spoke openly of his

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20 CID Paper 80-C, 12 May 1911, WO 106/43, TNA.
21 ‘Proceedings of a Committee of the Imperial Conference convened to discuss Questions of Defence (Military) at the War Office’ [June 1911], 12-13, 22, WO 106/43, TNA.
22 John Mordike, *An Army for a Nation: A History of Australian Military Developments 1880-1914* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 240. Mordike wrote that he ‘discovered’ Wilson’s paper and that: ‘There was no public knowledge of the War Office meetings and Pearce’s undertaking until publication of my book *Army for a Nation* in 1992.’ While it is true Mordike was the first to provide a detailed account of the War Office discussions, John Gooch was the first historian to refer to this document and to the conversation between Pearce, Borden and the CIGS, General Sir William Nicholson. John Mordike, *We should do this thing quietly*: *Japan and the great deception in Australian defence policy 1911-1914* (Canberra: RAAF Aerospace Centre, 2002), 79; John Gooch, *The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy c. 1900-1916* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 145.
undertaking to provide an expeditionary force for Britain’.

Mordike reprised his argument in a shorter work in 2002, and it has been repeated in 2011 by Greg Lockhart, who argues that the Anzac myth ‘protects a great deception – one that centres on a secret undertaking by Australian ministers to prepare an expeditionary force for military service outside the country’, and Brian Toohey. Lockhart and Toohey have provided the additional argument that the Australian Defence Act of 1903 made it illegal for the Australian Government to deploy troops outside Australia.

Mordike’s assertion that Pearce promised at the 1911 Imperial Conference to provide an expeditionary force ‘without question’ is incorrect because the Senator made it clear that the decision to commence planning in peacetime ‘would not commit us to take that action’ in wartime, but would rather provide an option for the government of the day, who would decide whether or not to create and deploy an expeditionary force.

Mordike is also incorrect that Pearce and other Australian politicians never talked openly about forming an expeditionary force in case of a major war. Before the 1911 Imperial Conference, Pearce had advocated the use of expeditionary forces in wartime. He had told the Senate on 13 October 1910 that ‘if war has to take place, it is far better that it should be conducted on some other land than ours’. Even in the lead-up to the 1911 Imperial Conference, he told a journalist from the Sydney Morning Herald: ‘Our Imperial responsibilities may require expeditionary forces, and we must be ready at any moment to get well forward into a fighting line well beyond the territorial limit of Australia.’ As will be outlined below,

23 Mordike, An Army for a Nation, 241. Mordike later claimed: ‘Pearce never publicly disclosed the undertaking to make preparations for an expeditionary force, not only before the outbreak of World War I but throughout his long life.’ This is incorrect. In September 1933, following Lord Grey’s death, Pearce issued a statement recalling Grey’s speech at the 1911 Imperial Conference that stated: ‘This meeting made so great an impression upon the minds of myself and Mr Andrew Fisher that we determined, on our return to Australia to re-organise Australian defence with the utmost dispatch … It was this that placed Australia in a sound position of preparedness when the war came a year earlier than the then Sir Edward Grey had forecast.’


26 ‘Proceedings of a Committee of the Imperial Conference convened to discuss Questions of Defence (Military) at the War Office’ [June 1911], 12-13, WO 106/43, TNA.

27 Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (hereafter CPD), LVIII: 4995.

28 Pearce’s comments made his comments before the conference but they were not published until after it had concluded: Sydney Morning Herald [SMH], 5 July 1911.
there were at least four occasions between 1911 and 1914 when a person who read the newspapers would have been aware that the Australian and New Zealand Governments were planning expeditionary forces.

In his article, Brian Toohey quotes a conversation with Lockhart in which the latter states that Pearce should not have permitted expeditionary force planning because ‘it contradicted the clear intention of the Defence Act (1903) to deny the government to order forces outside Australia’.\(^{30}\) It is true that Section 49 of the Defence Act stated that members of the military forces could not be compelled to serve overseas, but this statement was found in the defence legislation of all Dominions. As Berriedale Keith noted in 1912, ‘in no case are the Dominion forces bound to serve beyond the limits of the Dominions without their consent’. However, Lockhart’s statement neglects the fact that the Defence Act and its equivalent legislation in the other Dominions did allow for volunteers to serve overseas as had happened during the South African War and would occur during the First World War.\(^{31}\) Pearce showed his understanding of this when, in early 1914, he told the Governor-General, Lord Denman, that the ‘question of aid in other parts of the Empire by Australia must always be left to voluntary action’.\(^{32}\)

European crises would force the Dominions to consider creating expeditionary forces twice before the First World War. The first came in 1911 only a few months after the Imperial Conference when Germany and France confronted each other over colonial interests in Morocco. The British Cabinet decided – without consulting the Dominions – that if war eventuated, the United Kingdom would come to the aid of France.\(^{33}\) In Australia, Prime Minister Andrew Fisher on 18 September attached the two Australian destroyers then in service, HMAS *Parramatta* and HMAS *Yarra*, to the Royal Navy Squadron based in Sydney. As the Australian mobilisation procedures were still incomplete, Pearce considered a plan, probably suggested by Major-General George Kirkpatrick, a Canadian-born British Regular officer who was the Australian Inspector-General, of creating an expeditionary force from veterans of the South African War.\(^{34}\) War would be

\(^{30}\) Toohey, ‘Making War’.
\(^{32}\) Pearce to Denman [1914], MS769, 90, National Library of Australia (hereafter NLA).
\(^{34}\) [Hobart] *Mercury*, 19 September 1911, 5; Denman to Harcourt, 17 October 1911, Harcourt Papers, dep 478, f. 14, BL.
averted in early November when the German and French Governments signed an agreement whereby Germany gained territory in central Africa in exchange for accepting French predominance in Morocco, but on 22 October 1911, when the outcome was still uncertain, Pearce gave a speech in Melbourne in which he stated, ‘though the aim of the Labor Party was peace, preparations had to made for war’.35

The second consideration of forming expeditionary forces occurred in October-November 1912 during the First Balkan War. This conflict began on 8 October when Montenegro invaded Ottoman territory. The war widened on 17 October when Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia joined the war against the Turks. On 22 October, the Bulgarians broke the Ottoman lines in Thrace. This led to fears that Austria-Hungary and Russia might intervene and escalate the local conflict to a European-wide war.36

On 24 October, at Pearce’s request, Andrew Fisher sent a telegram to his New Zealand counterpart, William Massey, requesting the New Zealand General Officer Commanding, Major General Alexander Godley – who had arrived in Sydney the day of the Bulgarian breakthrough – meet with Australian Chief of the General Staff, Brigadier Joseph Maria Gordon, and discuss the possibility of creating an Australian-New Zealand force in case of war.37

Godley met Gordon at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne on 18 November. Pearce issued a press release published widely in Australian newspapers announcing the Gordon-Godley meeting. This stated: ‘Plans were suggested for mutual help in time of war and general co-operation in case of national emergency … The results of the conference will be confidential.’38 With newspapers and periodicals at this time filled with reports of the Balkan wars and speculations on the likelihood of Great Power intervention,39 any informed person would have understood the implications of Pearce’s statement.

35 SMH, 23 October 1911, 9.
37 SMH, 23 October 1912, 14; ‘Defence. Proposed Organisation for an Expeditionary Force’ attached to Allen to Godley, 5 June 1913, AD10 7 16/6, Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga, Wellington (hereafter ANZ).
38 [Melbourne] Argus, 19 November 1912, 9,
Godley and Gordon agreed in the meeting that, in the event of Britain declaring war, Australia and New Zealand would create a combined expeditionary force, and provided their respective governments with two options: an ‘Australasian’ infantry division, which Godley and Gordon recommended, or a mounted force consisting of three Australian light horse brigades and one New Zealand mounted rifle brigade. This would probably have been commanded by Major-General Kirkpatrick. In the end, no expeditionary force was created or deployed. On this occasion, unlike in 1914, a Balkan crisis remained confined to the Balkans.

The next public discussion of Antipodean expeditionary forces was made soon afterwards on 11 December 1912 by James Allen, the New Zealand Defence Minister. In a farewell speech in Wellington before he sailed to Australia and the United Kingdom, Allen announced that New Zealanders needed to start thinking about an expeditionary force. He stated:

They could not tell when the moment might come when the Home Country might say that it wanted 8000 or 10,000 men, armed and equipped in such a way that they might be instantly grafted on to the greater organisation.

Allen, who was ‘practically the only Minister in favour of Australian cooperation’, met with Pearce in Melbourne on 22 December to discuss the details of the Australasian Division proposed during the Godley-Gordon meeting. The *Sydney Morning Herald* noted the more cooperative relationship between New Zealand and Australia, and believed it was due to ‘the darkening clouds of the international situation’. Before he left Australia, Allen gave an interview in which he made another explicit reference to ‘the expeditionary force’. While in Britain, Allen would take advice from the War Office on the organisation of a New Zealand force. He even

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41 Fisher to Pearce, 25 October 1912, MS2919, 66/52, NLA.
considered the possibility, never enacted, of asking men to volunteer in peacetime for the expeditionary force for a period of one year. This was aimed at enabling volunteers to undergo training ahead of any possible deployment.\textsuperscript{45}

The Australian Senate even discussed the possibility of an expeditionary force on 17 December 1913 and again on 29 May 1914. This made public an ongoing disagreement between Kirkpatrick and his ministers, firstly Pearce, and then Pearce’s successor Liberal Senator Edward Millen.

Following the Moroccan crisis in 1911, Kirkpatrick proposed to Pearce that the four so-called ‘national regiments’ in the Australian Army – Saint George’s English Rifle Regiment, New South Wales Irish Regiment, New South Wales Scottish Regiment and Victorian Scottish Regiment – should not be disbanded, as was intended with the introduction of compulsory military training and the Kitchener plan territorial reorganisation, but should be allowed to retain their distinctive uniforms and recruit men who would ‘voluntarily agree to serve outside the limits of the Commonwealth’, thereby forming a brigade-strength expeditionary force. Kirkpatrick anticipated this force would be used in the event of war to capture the port of Rabaul in German New Guinea.\textsuperscript{46}

Pearce opposed Kirkpatrick’s proposal on several grounds. Most importantly, he refused to accept volunteers for overseas service in peacetime.\textsuperscript{47} As well, he wanted to disband the ‘national regiments’ due to the expense of their extra uniform items such as kilts,\textsuperscript{48} and because he wanted the Commonwealth Military Forces to embody a uniquely Australian identity. As he told the Senate in 1913:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{45} ‘Defence. Proposed Organisation for an Expeditionary Force’ attached to Allen to Godley, 5 June 1913, AD10 7 16/6, ANZ.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Kirkpatrick to Pearce, 30 November 1911, MP84/1, 1856/1/33, NAA. Godley initially envisaged a similar task for a New Zealand expeditionary force, but, when he asked Sir Henry Wilson ‘Shall we come straight to Belgium as quick as possible or go to Samoa & the other German possessions in the Pacific and mop them up?!’, Wilson replied that the loss of Samoa or New Guinea ‘would not be seriously felt by Germany’, and the New Zealanders would be more useful fighting in Europe or, if they joined the war, the Ottoman Empire. Following Wilson’s assassination, Lady Wilson asked Godley for any letters from her late husband that could assist in the writing of a biography. Godley remembered this letter from Wilson as being ‘not only interesting but most amusing’ and asked the New Zealand Army HQ to find it: Godley to Wilson, 6 September 1911; Wilson to Godley, 1 January 1912, WO 106/59, ff. 320, 322, 328, TNA; Godley to Burgess, 18 January 1926, AD12/21, Unnumbered files – Semi-official correspondence of Sir AJ Godley, July 1912-April 1926, ANZ.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Pearce to Pethebridge, 21 January 1913 [on Gordon to Pethebridge, 27 September 1912], MP84/1, 1849/1/2, NAA; \textit{CPD}, LXXIV: 1669.
\item \textsuperscript{48} \textit{CPD}, LIV: 2271, LXXII: 4585, LXXIV: 1663, 2669. Another reason for Pearce’s desire to disband the Scottish regiments may have been his dislike of bagpipes: \textit{CPD}, LIII: 5764.
\end{itemize}
If our men are going to fight for this country, we want them to fight for it because it is a country which they love and are proud of. We want them to be proud because they are Australians, not because their fathers and mothers were Scotch, Irish, English, or Welsh. I am the son of an Englishman, but I am proud to be an Australian, and I never want to be called anything else.49

When Labor lost the 1913 election, Kirkpatrick submitted his proposal to the new defence minister, Senator Edward Millen. Unlike Pearce, the Senator from New South Wales was willing to continue the ‘national regiments’, three of which came from his own state. But, like Pearce, he would not allow them to be the basis for an expeditionary force. As the Melbourne Argus paraphrased Millen’s comments in the Senate in December 1913:

Regarding the formation of national regiments, the scheme that had been adopted was, with one exception, the same as submitted to Senator Pearce. Those volunteering for national regiments had originally to agree to foreign service if required by the Commonwealth authorities. He was not countenancing that scheme … 50

When Millen and Pearce discussed Kirkpatrick’s ‘national regiments’ proposal again in the Senate in May 1914, most newspapers concentrated on the issue of uniforms and called it the ‘Battle of the Kilt’.51 However, the Sydney Daily Telegraph summarised Millen and Pearce’s comments on volunteering for wartime overseas service with the words: ‘soldiers who were true to Australia would be equally true to the Empire’.52 This phrase neatly describes how Dominion and British loyalties at this time could be compatible and not in conflict.

As mentioned earlier, Canada had begun considering an expeditionary force following the 1909 Imperial Conference. A Mobilization Committee had been formed in Ottawa in January 1910. Much of its attention was devoted to the impossible task of reducing the time in which the part-time soldiers of the Canadian Militia could be called-out and concentrated in order to thwart an American invasion, but the first matter it discussed in its first meeting was: ‘To consider the adoption of the Imperial War Establishments for the Canadian Militia when co-operating in an Imperial War beyond the seas’.53

49 CPD, LXXII: 4586.
50 Argus, 18 December 1913, 11.
51 Ibid., 30 May 1914, 25.
52 [Sydney] Daily Telegraph, 30 May 1914.
Following the 1911 Imperial Conference, the Canadian Militia Minister Sir Frederick Borden in Sir Wilfrid Laurier’s Liberal Government authorised planning for an expeditionary force. A plan for a contingent consisting of an infantry division and a mounted brigade equipped for ‘active service in a civilized country and in a temperate climate’ – by which the staff officers meant fighting Germany in Europe – was completed on 1 October 1911. By the time, this mobilisation plan was devised, the Liberals had lost an election to the Conservatives with Robert Borden with prime minister and Sam Hughes as Militia Minister. Hughes was a colonel in the militia, and in this capacity had attended the Imperial Conference as ‘Railway Intelligence Officer’ and been present at the War Office discussions regarding expeditionary forces. A guide to Sam Hughes’ quixotic personality can be conveyed by the titles historians have given to biographies of him: Ronald Haycock dubbed him the ‘controversial Canadian’; for Tim Cook he was the ‘madman’.

Sam Hughes had an obsessive belief in the superiority of the part-time militia soldier over his full-time regular counterpart. In 1914, when the First World War began, the minister’s hatred of regular staff officers would lead him to throw out the existing mobilisation plans that they had devised, and instead sent telegrams to every militia unit in the Dominion asking them to send any men willing to go overseas to Valcartier in Quebec, even though a camp did not exist there at the time. Sam Hughes described his actions as ‘a call to arms, like the fiery cross passing through the highlands of Scotland, or the mountains of Ireland in former days’.

In October 1912, when the Australians and New Zealanders became concerned that the Balkan conflict might become a major European war, Sam Hughes had returned to Canada after visiting the United Kingdom, where he had viewed

54 ‘Memorandum relating to a Scheme for the Mobilization of a Canadian Contingent for General Service Overseas’, 1 October 1911, RG24, 2498, HQC-1050, pt 1, LAC.
55 Frederick and Robert Borden were cousins.
57 On the outbreak of the First World War, there were two Canadian mobilisation plans: the 1911 Gwtkin/Mackenzie plan in which new battalions would be formed from regions according to population, and the 1914 Gordon-Hall plan in which existing militia units would form the basis of battalions. See Stephen J. Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 93.
58 Quoted in Haycock, *Sam Hughes*, 181.
the annual British Army manoeuvres and ‘discuss[ed] general questions with
the Imperial authorities’.

One would have expected Hughes and his military
advisers to have discussed the possibility of creating an expeditionary force, but
in the records of the Mobilization Committee and the accompanying files on
mobilisation plans there is a gap in the files from mid-September to the end of
November. It is possible that no correspondence was created for this entire period
of high international tension and the possibility of a major European War. This
is unlikely. The most likely explanation is that Sam Hughes agreed in 1912 to
implementing the mobilisation plan that he later rejected in 1914, and removed
the files to conceal the fact that he had at that time approved the putting into effect
a plan produced by regular officers. There is no evidence for this, but it would
be consistent with his personality, and might explain Sam Hughes’ comment in
May 1913 that he had never heard of the mobilisation scheme, even though he
had been told of it.

At the same time as Canada, New Zealand and Australia were developing plans
to organise expeditionary forces, Australia would the only one of these Dominions
to develop a functioning navy before 1914. Under the Liberal Government of Sir
Wilfrid Laurier, the Royal Canadian Navy had been established in 1911 and gained
its first two warships, the elderly Niobe and Rainbow. After the 1911 Imperial
Conference, Laurier intended to expand the navy, which was opposed by some in
French-speaking Quebec, and extend the existing reciprocal trade agreement with
the United States, which was opposed by many protectionists in English-speaking
Ontario. When the Conservatives began a filibuster to prevent the reciprocal
trade agreement being passed into law, Laurier called an early election with the
expectation that he would defeat his political opponents. Instead the Liberals
were roundly defeated on 21 September 1911 by an unlikely coalition of English-
speaking Conservatives supported by French-speaking Quebec nationalists. The
new prime minister Robert Borden halted development of the Royal Canadian
Navy.

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60 The gaps are from 16 September to 27 November 1912 in the minutes of the Mobilization
Committee, and October-November 1912 in the mobilisation plans, RG24, 2498, HQC-
1050, pt 3 RG24, 4263, C-2-4, LAC.
62 Johnston et al., The Seabound Coast, 183-9.
This was soon followed in October by the appointment of Winston Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty. Churchill overturned the Admiralty’s policy of encouraging and assisting the development of Dominion fleet units. Instead he concentrated British sea power in the North Sea against what he saw as a growing German naval threat. When Borden visited the United Kingdom in 1912, he was advised that the best Canadian naval policy was to purchase battleships for the Royal Navy. Borden introduced a bill to Parliament that would present the British Admiralty with thirty million Canadian dollars to construct three battleships. This proposal came to nothing as it was blocked by the Liberals in the Senate.63

In December 1913, New Zealand passed its first Naval Defence Act. This mirrored the cautious Canadian naval policy. While it empowered to Government to commission its own warship, HMS Philomel, it ensured it would be automatically placed under Admiralty control in time of war.64 Churchill publicly put pressure on the Australian Government to place the Royal Australian Navy under his control, even in peacetime.65 Pearce complained to Denman that the atmosphere of naval cooperation between Britain and Australia at the 1911 Imperial Conference had been followed by ‘a complete change of personnel at the Admiralty followed by unsympathetic treatment’.66

The 1911 Imperial Conference was a moment where there was a consensus in ideas of military and naval policy between the United Kingdom and the Dominions that had not been seen before in peacetime, and was not repeated subsequently. The Governments of New Zealand, Canada and Australia made their own decisions in 1911, in which Empire loyalty and ideas of Britishness played their part as much as hard strategic thinking, to begin planning expeditionary forces. In the same way, they would make their own decisions on their own terms to create expeditionary forces and send them to war in 1914.

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63 Harcourt to Connaught, 30 August 1912, Harcourt Papers, dep. 476, f. 70, BL; Keith, Responsible Government, II: 1010.
66 Pearce to Denman [1914], MS769, f. 88, NLA.
The idea of ‘Greater Britain’ was a central problem for Australian leaders as successive governments in the decade preceding the outbreak of the First World War struggled to manage what they had defined as their country’s strategic crisis in the Pacific. As Duncan Bell has explained in his study of English intellectuals and ‘Greater Britain’, though this idea was given a variety of meanings, the dominant one referred to some form of union between the ‘Mother Country’ and the British settled colonies, most commonly in an ill-defined ‘Imperial Federation’. In Australia as in Britain this movement was driven primarily by the rise of national sentiment which swept the Western world at the end of the nineteenth century, and for Australians the question of how this idea could be given an acceptable political expression and allow the British peoples to face the world as one was central to the debates over defence and foreign policy.¹

¹ Duncan Bell, The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 16, 265 and 271. Duncan Bell in his thickly-textured and original work deals with this idea in English intellectual discourse in the latter part of the nineteenth century, pointing out the diverse forces at work giving rise to this concept and exploring the complex meanings which gathered around it. He also shows that ‘Greater Britain’ gained its most concrete expression in proposals for an Imperial Federation, whether through adding colonial representatives to the British Parliament, creating a new super Imperial Parliament or establishing an Imperial Council. He has little to say about the colonial side of the question but nevertheless attributes the failure of Imperial Federation, at least in part, to the British settlers’ ‘indifference’. This description of the self-governing colonies’ attitude to the question of ‘Greater Britain’, however, is misleading. Certainly the Australian leaders were not indifferent to the ‘Greater Britain’ question and from the colonial era until the Second World War were constantly involved in trying to find ways to give it a practical expression, as this chapter illustrates. For two other works which also demonstrate this Australian preoccupation with this question, see Neville Meaney, Australia and World Crisis 1914-1923 (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2009), esp. chs 5, 12 and 16, and James Curran, Curtin’s Empire (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
Before dealing with the Australian response to its strategic crisis it is necessary to have some understanding of nationalism and how nationalism worked itself out in Australia. Nationalism was a product of modernisation. It was a response to all those forces which by the end of the nineteenth century were reaching a critical mass and transforming the Western world and also Japan. The application of science and technology to agriculture and manufacture, transport and communications, business and administration was creating mass societies. It was destroying traditional face-to-face self-sufficient communities and making anachronistic local ideas of identity and loyalty. For those rudely uprooted from the old ways this process was traumatic. The mobile anonymous masses who streamed into the mega metropolises which were the hub of the modernising dynamic needed new ways to make sense of their alien condition. A number of ideas appeared in the market place to fill this void. Liberal globalism was too bland and unrelated to the common experience to have wide appeal. Karl Marx, who understood modernisation as exploitative capitalism, called on its greatest victims, ‘the workers of the world’, to unite; he was, so to speak, saying that through this comradeship the down-trodden everywhere could once again find a sense of community. While communism had some influence in socialist parties and trade unions it could never, however, overcome the attraction of nationalism. In this struggle for the modern mind the idea of culture nearly always trumped that of class and the idea of the people nearly always trumped that of the proletariat.

Nationalism’s virtue was that its myths linked the past that had been lost to the disturbing present and offered its adherents the promise of a redemptive future based on the supposed ideals and values of their ancestors. The major nineteenth century Western historians in their multi-volume works gave a scholarly authority and romantic aura to this new vision of belonging. These historians traced out a teleological narrative of their people who each from their origins in the forests or on the frontiers shared common ‘blood’, language and customs and had over time been engaged in a noble struggle against hereditary overlords and foreign masters. Through state-sponsored mass education these ideas were rapidly spread and readily embraced. Nationalism offered the displaced and disoriented an intense social identity as a salve for the trauma of modernisation, an identity which justified the modernising world as the fulfilment of their past. It was a quasi-religion with its anthems and rituals, saints and martyrs, sacred sites and holy days. Its prophets and poets spoke of a ‘national soul’. Thus when at the beginning of the nationalist era Peter McCormick was moved to write ‘Advance Australia Fair’ he exulted that
This brings us to the problem of Australian nationalism or perhaps – to put the issue more precisely – the problem of nationalism in Australia. When I first began to interest myself in the defence and foreign policy of this period, I was puzzled by the way in which Australians responded to nationalism. In Europe where the idea first took root each people believed that their historical destiny could never be realised until they were united with all who shared their distinctive myth in one state and under one government. And yet in Australia where the colonists in this nationalist era defined themselves as British and where they cherished a ‘white’ British race myth, there was a consensus across the political spectrum that it should not surrender any jot or tittle of its right to self-government to Britain or the British Empire. Indeed it could well be argued, if one looks at Australia’s attitude to Britain’s wars, that Australians identified more enthusiastically and uncritically than their compatriots in the ‘Mother Country’ with the cause of empire. At the outset of the Boer War Edmund Barton, the leader of the movement for Federation, affirmed that ‘when our Empire is at war with any power whatever it becomes our turn to declare the motto, “The Empire right or wrong”’. Only on the fringes of politics was there any call for independence or ‘cutting the painter’ as the metaphor of the time put it. Certainly there was no rival national myth to challenge Australia’s Britishness. The Bush legend, even if it could be conceded that it had widespread appeal, was not a national myth but a folk tradition not unlike, for example, those found in Cornwall or Yorkshire. It had ballads not anthems. When the Empire was in danger its heroes such as Henry Lawson and A.B. (Banjo) Paterson also rallied to the British cause.

Why then in 1901 were Australians embracing enthusiastically a local federation while at the same time opposing an Imperial federation? The short answer is that nationalism offered not only socio-psychological but also physical and material security and whereas in Europe each people was consolidated in their own land and so there was a natural congruence between the cultural idea of society and the political interests of the state, Australia’s position was very different. Australia’s

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experience of nationalism was – perhaps with the exception of New Zealand – sui generis. The great distances separating Australia from the Mother Country led to conflicts over basic interests such as immigration, trade, defence, external affairs and Pacific policy. For this reason it would not accept any form of Imperial federation in which Britain because of its greater population could use its numbers to dispose of Australia’s economic and military resources to serve its own interests or geo-political priorities. By contrast the British Australians had no such reservations in setting up their own federation. All the colonies accepted that, as a result of their geo-politics, they shared fundamental common interests and so readily agreed to join together in a federal union giving to the Commonwealth all the key powers of a state, including powers over taxation, defence, external affairs and Pacific policy.

Out of Australia’s exceptional experience there emerged a tension between these two sides of nationalism, between what might be called the community of culture and the community of interest.3

The Australians were not happy to find themselves in this awkward position. On the one hand they were ready to separate themselves from the Empire if Britain should attempt to block their racially discriminating immigration laws, and this even though, as Henry Parkes said, they were aimed at protecting ‘the British type in the population of their country’.4 On the other, Alfred Deakin, one of the strongest opponents of British plans for Imperial federation at the time of the making of the Commonwealth constitution, saw no contradiction in being a founding member of and subsequently president of the Victorian Imperial Federation League. In his presidential address he declared that ‘The same ties of blood, sympathy and tradition which make us one Commonwealth here make the British of today one people everywhere’,5 and he delivered this speech just a month before becoming

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prime minister and announcing his intention, in defiance of British authorities, to bring in an Australian defence policy of compulsory military training and a local flotilla. Deakin, like all other Australian leaders of his time – with perhaps the exception of George Reid – held a very different view of the British Empire and Imperial federation from that prevailing in the Mother Country. Whereas the British political class, despite the advocates of Imperial federation, saw the empire as a London-centred hierarchical structure made up of different kinds and levels of colonies, their Australian counterparts imagined it as a poly-centred Greater Britain in which all the British peoples had an equal right with the ‘Mother Country’ to play a part in the making of imperial defence and foreign policy and an equal right with the Mother Country for the protection of their peculiar interests. And as the ways and means of healing the breach between the community of culture and the community of interest were being debated, the Australians, finding that they held starkly divergent views from Britain about security in the Pacific, pursued their own defence and foreign policies to meet what they perceived to be their distinctive dangers.

**Pacific Perils**

In the early years of the Federation the only invasion that Australians feared was an influx of Asian migrants, and the Commonwealth parliament as its first major piece of legislation passed an Immigration Restriction Act to close off the entry of ‘coloured’ peoples into the country. The first Australian government in so far as it had any clear view about international politics agreed with Britain that Russia represented the greatest threat to the Empire and that the Anglo-Japanese alliance would act as a useful counter to any Russian expansionist tendencies in the region. The British naval squadrons in the Pacific would be adequate for the defence of coasts and ports, the only possible hostile action that the Australians could envisage, and for this purpose the Commonwealth provided a £200,000 subsidy for expanding the British squadron on the Australian Station. Thus the Commonwealth’s first defence policy was primarily concerned with the conversion of the six colonies’ militias into an Australian military force and in the process with cutting back on expenditure for the permanent forces. It also rejected a War Office proposal, inspired by the colonists’ enthusiasm for the Empire’s cause in the Boer War, to establish a permanent field force which would be available to go to the support of any part of the Empire in times of trouble. In its founding Defence Act of 1904 it made its position even clearer on this latter question by laying it
down that Australians could only be conscripted for the defence of their own country and its territories and that the government could only send volunteers to take part in any imperial conflict outside the country. The government accepted that should Britain become engaged in another conflict it would, as in the case of the Boer War, almost certainly raise a volunteer force to support the empire but it was adamant that it would not commit itself before the event to any agreement which detracted from its decision-making authority.

In May 1905 the Japanese triumph over Russia at the battle of Tsushima Straits jolted Australians out of their complacency about Pacific security. Japan had defeated a great European nation and emerged from the conflict as the dominant power in the region. Its stunning victory accompanied, as it was, by Britain withdrawing its capital warships from around the world to meet a German naval challenge in the North Sea, exposed Australia to a threat from the North Pacific. Alfred Deakin almost immediately grasped the full significance of this strategic revolution. In an inspired interview with the *Melbourne Herald*, just a few weeks before becoming prime minister, he spelled out its meaning. As a result of the Russo-Japanese war, he said,

> What we have to estimate for the future is that instead of two fleets in the China seas belonging to separate – even opposing – powers, we shall now have one fleet, only it will probably be as strong as the two former, and will cooperate under one flag …

> Under all the developments of the modern men-of-war Australia, which used to depend largely on its isolations for security, is now within what is termed striking distance of no less than sixteen foreign naval stations …

> The most efficiently equipped, supported and protected are those to the north of China – those in Japan and now at Port Arthur. As a fact, Japan is the nearest of all the great foreign naval stations to Australia. Japan at her head quarters is, so to speak, next door, while the Mother country is many streets away, and connected by long lines of communication. What happened to the ships in Port Arthur so soon after the declaration of war shows what is possible immediately strife commences.6

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He concluded by suggesting that the first step for a defence policy to meet this new danger from the north should be the acquisition of a naval force to guard coasts and harbours, and he hinted more vaguely at the desirability of universal military training.

From all sides political leaders took up Deakin’s warnings and amplified them. Allan Mclean, deputy prime minister in the then Reid government, declared that

> The stupendous struggle in the East must awaken the people of Australia to the fact that we have been living in a fool’s paradise, when we have assumed that our great distance from the military nations gave us immunity from foreign invasion … Japan has astonished the world … We now find one of the great naval and military powers within a very short distance of our shores.

He conceded that while it was fortunate that ‘the great Power, which has recently arisen in the East, was allied to Great Britain’, nevertheless ‘that condition of things might not always continue and we must be prepared for what might happen’. Likewise George Pearce, who subsequently became the defence minister in all three of Andrew Fisher’s Labor governments, publicly discounted the value of the Anglo-Japanese pact and stressed that Japan was very likely to continue on its imperialist path, with Australia as its greatest prize. Speaking in parliament he said that Australians had little or no reason to fear European aggression and that they would be foolish if they took that treaty ‘to be a guarantee for all time’. And he added that

> Japan has shown that she is an aggressive nation. She had shown that she is desirous of pushing out all round. What has always been the effect of victory and of conquest upon nations? Do we not know that it stimulates them to further conflict? To obtain fresh territory? Has not that been the history of our own race? … Is there any other country that offers such a temptation to Japan as Australia does?

The Australians had now come to believe that they were faced with not only a migratory but also a military invasion. Over the next few years fear of Japan spread through the populace and as with attitudes to immigration it was often,

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7 Ibid., 13 June 1905.
8 CPD (1905 Session), XXIX: 5346, 22 November 1905.
but by no means always, expressed in racial terms. A National Defence League
was formed to keep the message before the public and an Immigration League to
encourage British settlers. The looming racial danger from the north permeated
popular culture. It was to be found in cartoons, poetry, short stories, invasion scare
novels, plays, and even an early film, ‘Australia Calls’, by Raymond Longford.
C.J. Dennis’s jingle *Austral—Aise*, published in 1908, was his contribution to the
general hysteria.

Assuming office as prime minister in August Deakin for the next three years
set about trying to build up Australia’s defences to meet the perceived threat.
His government’s policy was firstly to meet the possibility of invasion, secondly
to guard against raids on coastal shipping and harbours, and thirdly to provide
some protection against attacks by enemy cruisers on ocean-going commerce.\(^9\)
He needed British co-operation but when he submitted his proposals to London,
found little sympathy. The Colonial Defence Committee and the Committee of
Imperial Defence believed that the maximum possible attack against Australia
would be a raid on ports by no more than three or four cruisers and that this
could be met by fortified harbours, garrisoned forts and a militia force. They
could find no justification for a local flotilla. In their view the Japanese alliance,
which had been renewed in 1905, would safeguard all British Territories in East
Asia and the Pacific.\(^10\) Deakin was unmoved by this negative response. The growth
of the German navy represented a challenge to Britain’s naval supremacy and if
its control of the seas were ‘in any respect shaken’ it was not foolish ‘to consider
our own conditions, and the possibility of an attack of a more serious nature than
had hitherto been contemplated’.\(^11\) Deakin and other members of parliament had
noticed that British was taking steps to protect itself against Germany not only by
entering into an ‘entente cordiale’ with France but also by withdrawing its capital
ships from its scattered overseas squadrons.

Thus Deakin went to the 1907 Colonial Conference seeking not only support
for his defence plans but also changes in the relations between the self-governing
colonies and the Mother Country. Following his Greater Britain principles he
supported the proposal for changing the name of the conference from Colonial
to Imperial but went further and urged the setting up of an advisory Imperial

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\(^9\) Ibid., XXVII: 2823, 27 September 1905.
Scheme of Defence for Australia’.
\(^11\) Ibid. (1906 Session), XXV: 5564-75, 26 September 1906.
Council on which Britain and the Dominions would be represented for the purpose of allowing the leaders of all the British peoples to confer about imperial defence and foreign policy. But he failed on both counts. The Admiralty was unshakably hostile to the establishment of local navies outside its control and the War Office’s only contribution to the discussion of military defence was to press for the creation of an Imperial General Staff with its headquarters in London and branches in the Dominions. Deakin was suspicious of this innovation and he and his Canadian counterpart only agreed to participate in order to obtain uniformity of armaments, organisation and training methods. Their representatives attached to the Imperial General Staff would only have authority to consult on military matters. The Dominion governments would keep control of their own forces until a war erupted and then they would decide how and to what extent they would aid the Mother Country. And from this time all subsequent Australian governments held to this position.

On his return home Deakin, disregarding the cool reception he had received in London, laid before parliament his government’s defence program. Looking out on the world he painted a picture of nations arming for battle, a battle which Australia could ignore only at its peril. He thus committed his government to creating a flotilla composed of nine C-Class submarines and six torpedo destroyers which were to be built in Australia, manned by Australians and under Australian control. Likewise he committed his government to begin a universal compulsory military training scheme based on the Swiss model citizen force. He predicted that within eight years Australia would have a ‘national guard’ of 200,000 men. It was his intention that the defence force would, as it developed, be ‘as thorough and complete as that of Japan’.12

Almost simultaneously Deakin learnt that the United States was sending its fleet on a world cruise in 1908 and bypassing Whitehall he sent an invitation through the American consul-general in Melbourne direct to Washington inviting President Theodore Roosevelt to allow the fleet to visit Australia. The Australian prime minister calculated that such a visit might help to arouse public support for his local defence scheme, provoke the British into sending a comparable naval force into the Pacific and act as a symbol of Anglo-Saxon solidarity in facing up to common concerns about Japan and its regional ambitions. The country was fully aware of the disputes between the United States and Japan over the former’s

12 CPD (1907-1908 Session), XLII: 7509-35, 13 December 1907.
discriminatory treatment of the latter’s nationals in America’s Pacific Coast states. It was clear that Roosevelt was sending his ‘Great White Fleet’ on this round-the-world voyage, which was to end in Yokohama, in order to warn the Japanese against challenging the United States. For the ‘lonely kangaroos’ it was a momentous event. After Roosevelt agreed to Deakin’s request and the fleet finally arrived in Sydney and Melbourne the country was gripped by ‘Fleetitis’, as one commentator put it. The visit was an overwhelming success and in summing up its significance Deakin wrote an English friend that

The visit of the United States Fleet is universally popular here, not so much because of our blood affection for the Americans though that is sincere but because of our distrust of the Yellow Race in the North Pacific and our recognition of the ‘entente cordiale’ spreading among all white men who realise the Yellow Peril to Caucasian civilisation, creeds and politics.13

When in 1909 the British Empire was rocked by reports of a new German naval building program and of tensions between Britain and Germany reaching a new level, Deakin, inspired by the visit of the United States fleet, wrote to the British government setting out a proposal for extending the American Monroe Doctrine to all the countries around the Pacific. As he envisaged it, the American guarantee would be strengthened by the adherence of the British Empire, Holland, France and China to the principle. At first Australia’s prospective enemy, Japan and Britain’s prospective enemy, Germany, would be excluded from this arrangement though he allowed, presumably thinking of countering the possibility of a Japanese-German alliance, that one of them or both of them might later on be drawn into the scheme. Deakin himself admitted that this ‘proposition of the highest international importance’ was probably ‘chimerical’. Certainly the British did not give it any encouragement. They pointed out that they had never officially acknowledged this American doctrine and its assumption that the United States had a right to intervene in the affairs of any country in the Western Hemisphere. If this proposal were accepted then any agreement between Australia and France over the New Hebrides would need America’s approval. Furthermore the British could not enter into negotiations on a pact which left out the Germans and the Japanese for they would resent their omission and in all likelihood would also believe that, as a result, ‘something almost hostile to their interests was being

contemplated'. The British in their politely formal response effectively put the kybosh on the whole idea.¹⁴

As Deakin was engaged in this quasi-diplomacy Australia’s defence policy was reaching a new stage which at last gave promise of security in the Pacific. The British, moved by the deterioration in Japanese-American relations, problems with Japanese migrants on the west coast of Canada, the loss of prestige in the Pacific following the very successful visit of the American fleet, the Dominions’ anxiety about Japanese ambitions, and Australia’s intention to build its own naval force, invited representatives of the Dominions to a defence conference in August 1909. At this conference the Admiralty, to the astonishment of the Dominions, placed before them a plan for an Imperial Pacific Fleet.¹⁵ This fleet, the brain-child of the imaginative First Sea Lord, Sir John Fisher, was to be made up of an East Indian, a China, an Australian and possibly a Canadian unit. Each unit would consist of a Dreadnought battlecruiser of the most advanced Indomitable class, three second-class cruisers, six destroyers and three submarines, all of the latest design. The Australian government responded with enthusiasm. Prime Minister Deakin appreciated well that while his plan for a small, localised flotilla would be no defence against Japan’s naval might an Imperial fleet, led by three or four of the latest class of Dreadnoughts, even though inferior to the Japanese navy, might be

¹⁴ Letter, Deakin to Lord Crewe, Colonial Secretary, 27 September 1909 enclosed with letter, Crewe to Sir Edward Grey, Foreign Secretary, 3 November 1909, FO 800/91, The National Archives, Kew (TNA). It is interesting to note that Deakin did not distinguish between putative allies and enemies in terms of race. China was welcome as an initial partner in guaranteeing the Pacific Monroe Doctrine. Germany and Japan were to be excluded. The test for the distinction was not racial colour but national interest.

¹⁵ This British initiative is surprising given that it appeared against the background of the Dreadnought affair which had stirred up jingoist demands for the British government to match the latest German capital ship program. Indeed the British government, embarrassed by the cost involved in maintaining its margin of safety over the German High Seas fleet in the North Sea, had appealed to the Dominions for financial assistance. Providing three additional British Indomitable battlecruiser units for the Pacific would either weaken the margin of safety in ‘home waters’ or, if added to the shipbuilding program, place an even heavier burden on the British Exchequer and the available shipyards. There has been little study of this topic. The latest, based primarily on Admiralty and CID papers, suggests that it was prompted by Admiralty’s reluctant acceptance that Australia was determined to have its own naval force under its own control. The Admiralty’s answer to this inescapable situation was that if an Imperial Pacific Fleet made up of British and Dominion units was created then the Admiralty would be able to exercise greater control over the Dominion flotillas. But this does not seem convincing. See Nicholas Lambert, ‘Economy or Empire? The Fleet Unit Concept and the Quest for Collective Security in the Pacific, 1909-1914’, in Greg Kennedy and Keith Neilson (eds), Far Flung Lines: Essays on Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 58-68.
able to act as an effective deterrent. The Australians promptly accepted the idea. In their arrangement with the Admiralty they insisted that their unit was to ‘form part of the Eastern Fleet of the Empire’ alongside similar Britain’s China and East Indies units. They insisted on this because unless their unit was incorporated into an Imperial Pacific Fleet it would be useless and would not justify abandoning their proposed coastal flotilla. In announcing the results of the conference in the House of Commons the British prime minister confirmed that the British East Indies and China squadrons were to be reconstructed and reinforced as part of a Pacific fleet. Against the Admiralty’s wishes, however, the Australian government made it clear that they would keep control of their squadron and decide when and under what conditions it would be handed over to the Admiralty’s command.

After three years of fruitless struggle for a defence policy that would meet Australia’s Pacific peril Deakin recognised that at last the time had arrived to achieve what he had long sought and which, given the British plan for a Pacific fleet, would be much more substantial than anything he had previously imagined. On 21 September the Defence Minister, Joseph Cook, announced the government’s intention of proceeding immediately to legislate for compulsory military training and of seeking the parliament’s approval for Australia’s Pacific fleet unit. In his speech he outlined again the Australian strategic assessment which had caused the leaders of all parties to support these defence measures. Australia could not but notice ‘the development of armed forces in the Pacific region and the unequal distribution of these forces’. He pointed out that while Japan had fifteen battleships and America had one battleship and eleven battlecruisers in the Pacific, Britain only had four outdated battlecruisers. Moreover, he added, hardly bothering to disguise this reference to Japan, that there was ‘not far from our shores … two or three million of the best trained troops in the world’, which belong to a nation ‘whose ideals are in many respects as unlike our own as it is possible to be’. Australia was ‘the most distant, richest and at the same time the most vulnerable part of the British Empire’. In this situation Australia was thus ‘absolutely dependent on the Anglo-Japanese alliance for its security, meaning it had to rely on the good faith of the Japanese. When Andrew Fisher, the leader of the Labor opposition, taking this point further, interjected that the treaty would be honoured only ‘so long as

16 Commonwealth of Australia, Parliamentary Papers (1909 Session), Vol. II, No. 64; cable, Deakin to Colonel J.F.G. Foxton, Australian representative at the defence conference, 24 September 1909, Deakin Papers, MS 1540/38/460, NLA.
17 Great Britain, 5 Parliamentary Debates (Commons), IX: 2311, 26 August 1909.
On military defence the bill Cook brought before parliament was not dissimilar to that which Deakin and Fisher had earlier proposed. It followed the Swiss citizen training scheme. All youths and young men aged 14-20 were to be required to undergo military training for sixteen days each year. The trained soldiers were to remain on an active reserve through one-day musters until they were 26. There was very little criticism and the bill was passed in both houses on a voice vote. A few Labor representatives wondered whether the Admiralty plan might not be a ruse to obtain more ships for the defence of the British Isles. Pearce, after reading Percival A. Hislam’s *The Admiralty of the Atlantic*, had come away convinced of the ‘feeble nature of the Anglo-Japanese alliance’. The book had shown that though the Royal Navy had grown considerably in the preceding years the number of British warships in the Pacific had declined. In making these points Pearce was not expressing opposition to the Pacific fleet. Rather he wanted to warn future Australian and British governments against deviating from the aim of the naval agreement, namely the protection of British Empire interests in the Pacific.

When six months later Labor came to power Fisher and his Defence Minister Pearce, both sharing Deakin’s view of Greater Britain, pursued the same defence policy. Fisher’s aim, as he had put it while briefly in office during the Dreadnought affair, was to pursue ‘a steady, persistent and determined policy to provide for the adequate defence of Australia and assist the Mother Country in time of

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19 Ibid., LIV: 7109, 7 December 1909.
22 It does not seem that the Admiralty at this time had any other intention but to carry through the defence conference agreement. Certainly this would seem to be true of Sir John Fisher, its originator, who a year later was assuring a friend that ‘the 3 “ New testament” ships [that is the three latest battlecruisers which would head the three units making up the Pacific fleet] and their attendant satellites will be in the Pacific in 1913’. See letter, Fisher to Viscount Esher, 13 September, 1910: Arthur J. Marder (ed.), *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Fisher of Kilvenstone*, 2 vols (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), II: 266.
23 *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH), 24 March 1909.
emergency’.23 The Labor government, now with a clear majority in both houses of parliament, set about consolidating and expanding the Deakin legacy.

In order to give his military scheme an imperial blessing Deakin had invited Lord Kitchener, Britain’s most distinguished soldier, to review it. Though the War Office’s official position was that Australia was the safest part of the Empire and that its Swiss system of universal and compulsory training was wasteful, Kitchener served Deakin’s purpose and in his report agreed with the Australian strategic assumptions about a threat of invasion and in approving the Swiss system made suggestions for its improvement.24 The Labor Government adopted nearly all the British field marshal’s suggestions. It accepted that the military training should be extended beyond age twenty to age twenty-five and in its defence act went further than Kitchener in requiring the adult soldiers to undertake an eight-day camp annually. Pearce estimated that by 1919-20 when the scheme was in full operation Australia would have a trained fighting force of 127,000 men.

Likewise the Cabinet adopted the principles of the 1909 naval agreement establishing the Empire’s Pacific fleet and invited the Admiralty to send a senior British Admiral, Ronald Henderson, to advise them not only on the technical matters related to the Australian unit but also more generally on ‘all the measures to be taken, both forthwith and in the future, in the formation of the Fleet’. Henderson took this commission very seriously and presented the Labor government with a blue-print for a greatly enlarged fleet which would be built over a 22-year period.25 Though impressed by the vision, Fisher saw also the huge cost that it would entail and put off making a decision until after the 1911 Imperial Conference.26

Labor ministers had to this time little direct acquaintance with imperial gatherings. As they began to prepare for what was the first Imperial Conference Deakin offered them the fruits of his long experience in dealing with the British. In a lengthy speech to the parliament he addressed the great problems that believers in Greater Britain had to face when trying to persuade London, especially Whitehall, that the Dominions had to be consulted about Imperial defence and foreign policy and their interests and dangers taken into account when decisions were made. He called upon the Australian representatives

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26 Minutes of Council of Defence Meeting, 1 March 1911, CRS A2032, National Archives of Australia (NAA).
to impress upon their colleagues at the conference that Australia, in spite
of herself, is being forced into a foreign policy of her own because foreign
interests and risks surround us on every side. A Pacific policy we must have …
We must be observant, like every other nation, providing buffers to prevent
shocks, and placing intervals between us and danger centres …

Let Ministers impress upon the Foreign Office in London that there are
Pacific problems in which the Australian interest is inexpressible; which
… should be perpetually and consistently considered, particularly by the
Naval and Military authorities, and those charged with foreign affairs of
the Empire …

The creation of this Conference was a great stride … But it is not sufficient
that this should remain a mere advisory Conference. Its powers require to
grow with the needs and the emergencies of the Empire …

… united action is only to be obtained when, instead of a conference
separated by breaks of four years, continuity and character are given to
its policy by providing a means of keeping up the work, following up its
suggestions and giving effect to its resolutions … By that means and that
means alone can we clothe this Conference with the powers that rightly
belong to it, making it a thoroughly Imperial body, representative of our
race in every part of the world, without trenching on the local Governments
of the Dominions or on the sphere of the British Government.27

By the time of the conference the Australian Labor leaders had come to share
fully Deakin’s vision of empire. They regarded the Imperial Conference as ‘the most
important step taken during this century’28 since they hoped that through it they
would at last obtain a voice in the shaping of imperial foreign policy, especially
where it touched on Australia’s interests in the Pacific. Giving advance notice of
their intentions they cabled London that they wished to put on the agenda ‘co-
operation and mutual relations of the naval and military forces’ and ‘the desirability
of Dominions being informed and consulted in negotiations with foreign powers
as to matters affecting any one of them or the Empire generally’.29 In all probability
this latter item was most immediately prompted by press rumours that Britain was
talking to the Japan about renewing the Anglo-Japanese alliance.

28 SMH, 31 March 1911.
29 Cables, Lord Dudley, Governor-General, to Lewis Harcourt, Colonial Secretary, 9 January
and 8 May 1911, FO 800/90, TNA.
In preparing for the conference, the British were greatly exercised over Australia’s claim to be consulted on defence and foreign policy matters. Though they were engaged in sensitive negotiation with the Japanese over the renewal of their alliance they finally agreed, somewhat reluctantly, that they would inform the Dominions about the negotiations at a special meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence. Thus in the first week of the conference Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, gave the Dominion representatives a very extensive overview of the foreign dangers facing the empire. He stressed that

the creation of separate Fleets has made it essential that the Foreign Policy of the Empire should be a common policy. If it is to be a common policy, it is obviously one on which the Dominions must be taken into consultation, which they must know, which they must understand and which they must approve …

After describing Germany’s ‘Napoleonic’ policy in Europe and its threat to British naval supremacy he explained that for reasons of strategy, naval expenditure and world stability it was necessary to secure a ten-year renewal of the Japanese alliance. He assured the Dominion leaders that Japan had ‘never mentioned it [Australia’s racially discriminating immigration policy] in connection with the alliance at all’ and that Japan could be relied on to honour its commitment. With this assurance Fisher was happy to give his approval, remarking in the process that it would give the Australian people ‘great satisfaction’ since ‘we are undoubtedly somewhat apprehensive of the immediate future’. He realised that though the alliance could not be relied upon it was better that Japan was linked by these formal ties to the British Empire than not. It would act as a restraint, even if only a limited one, on Japan’s behaviour in the Pacific.

Fisher was elated by the British action in bringing the Dominion representatives into the inner sanctum of Imperial policy-making. In an interview with the Morning Post he was reported as saying that

All the barriers of reserve have been broken down and mutual confidence has been established for all time. A community of interests of the highest immediate importance and vast possibilities has been created. I will go back equipped with knowledge that will qualify the federation I represent for co-operation with the mother country of a more effective kind than has ever been possible before. By the revelation of the British policy Australia has been admitted into the innermost confidence of the Imperial government.

30 Minutes of 111th meeting, CID, 26 May 1911, CAB 2/2, TNA.
31 Morning Post, 31 May 1911.
Since the British had committed themselves to the establishment of a Pacific Fleet and to consult the Dominions about the empire’s foreign policy, it seemed that the last barriers to the creation of a community of interest between Britain and the Dominions were disappearing. The communities of culture and interest were being fused and the empire would now face the world as one united people.

While in this euphoric mood Fisher, believing the principle to have been won, agreed to withdraw the Australian resolution calling for consultation. Nevertheless when the matter of ratifying the London Declaration which dealt with rules governing merchant shipping in time of war was discussed, he repeated as a question – perhaps he had residual doubts – what he had earlier seemed to think had already been conceded, asking whether

The time has not arrived for the overseas Dominions to be informed, and whenever possible consulted, as to the best means of promoting the interests of all concerned …?32

On defence very little was achieved, and this primarily because the general basis for co-operation in respect to the army and the navy had been reached at the 1909 defence conference.

The British still wanted the Dominions to accept that on the outbreak of war their naval squadrons would automatically come under the control of the Admiralty unless a Dominion government specifically refused to allow it. However Pearce, backed up by the Canadians, would not accept this limitation on Dominion authority and autonomy. The only concession that he would make was that once the ships had been handed over to the Admiralty they would remain under its control until the end of the war. In the end it was formally laid down that ‘The naval forces of the Dominions of Canada and Australia will be exclusively under the control of their respective Governments.’33

For the Army there was even less to discuss. At a meeting chaired by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir William Nicholson, the Dominions’ defence ministers revisited the agreed principles for co-operation. As Nicholson said, what

lay behind the standardising of their armaments, organisation and training with those of the British forces was that ‘while preserving the complete autonomy of the Dominions, should the Dominions desire to assist in the defence of the Empire in a real emergency, their forces could be rapidly combined into one homogeneous Imperial Army’.

Since arriving in London Pearce had become more keenly aware of the possibility of a great war breaking out in Europe and realising that many Australians would wish to volunteer to fight for the Mother Country wanted to know whether the Imperial General Staff could give the Australian General Staff any information about where such volunteers might be sent so that they could prepare plans for mobilisation and transportation. At the same time, in order that there should be no confusion on the matter, he reminded Nicholson that the government under the Australian Defence Act could not compel any soldier to serve overseas and that any decision to send volunteers would be made exclusively by the Australian government. Nicholson pointed out that it would be impractical beforehand to try to suggest where Dominion troops might be sent since they could only be raised for the purpose with the consent of the Australian government. If, however, the Australian government so desired, the General Staff could work out plans for mobilising ‘a certain contingent or force for expeditionary action’. Nicholson suggested that if this were to be done it would be best not to publish a paper on the subject since in some of the Dominions ‘it might be better not to say anything about preparations’. The Dominion leaders considered that this would be politically wise since they felt that in each of their countries there would be a minority who might misconstrue such plans. Pearce, however, maintained and the others agreed that this should not dissuade them from going ahead with plans for a possible mobilisation.34

34 Minutes of Meeting of Chief of the Imperial General Staff with the Canadian, Australian and South African Defence Ministers, 17 June 1911, 20-3, PRO WO106/43, TNA. There was some confusion in this discussion about the mobilisation plans. Even though Pearce had told Nicholson that any Australian expeditionary force would have to be composed of volunteers and would therefore have to be raised separately from Australia’s military forces, Nicholson at one point in making an analogy between how the Imperial General Staff without any such impediment in Britain would prepare and organise an expeditionary force in the British Isles seemed to ignore this distinction. Pearce had not given Nicholson any indication that the Australian government had it in mind to raise and train in peacetime a volunteer force which would on enlistment have consented to go wherever the government chose to send it. Pearce was only talking about having the Australian section of the General Staff make plans beforehand for enlisting, training, arming and organising such a force after hostilities had commenced and the Australian government had agreed to send an expeditionary force to help the Mother Country.
At the end of the conference Fisher believed that the most encouraging result of the discussions was, as he had intimated after taking part in the CID meeting on the Anglo-Japanese alliance, that the Dominions had been brought ‘into the inner councils of the nations’ and had been given an opportunity ‘to discuss the affairs of the Empire as they affect each and all of us’. He still felt that the Imperial authorities did not understand fully the Dominions’ strategic perspective and on the last day of their meeting had recommended that there should be reciprocal visits by British and Dominion ministers and that the next conference should be held in one of the Dominions.

**European Tensions**

The Australians returned home in a very optimistic frame of mind. It seemed that all their hopes for the creation of an Imperial Pacific fleet and for Dominion participation in the making of Imperial policy were in the process of being realised. Yet within a year this promise of imperial consultation and Pacific security was in tatters. As a result the Fisher government, when the full implications of British policy became clear, committed the country to a greatly enlarged naval building program, began to look more directly to the other Dominions for assistance in

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34 cont. There is no reason to think that by agreeing to keep these preparatory plans for an expeditionary force secret, Pearce was conspiring with the British to undermine the fundamentals of the defence policy established by the Deakin and Fisher governments. Australia had sent 16,000 volunteer soldiers to the Boer War and there was no reason to doubt that Australians would respond even more enthusiastically to a war in which the very survival of the Empire was at stake. All Australian leaders conceded this and some few thought it not unreasonable, given the dangerous state of Europe, to make preliminary arrangements for sending forces overseas, including possibly to Germany’s Pacific possessions. Prompt action might be required not only to meet a war in Europe but also to deal with the consequences of such a war in the Pacific. Australia’s defence policy was aimed at preparing the country for defence against Japan. Nothing that Pearce had consented to at the 1911 conference undermined this or the Australian government’s right to decide if and when it might raise a contingent to assist the Mother Country. That possibility had been in the background of defence policy-making since the passage of the 1903 *Defence Act*. Indeed that is exactly why the Act provided that the government could only conscript for the defence of the Australian political community and why it required that the government would have to raise volunteers for overseas service, which of course meant offering aid for the Mother Country. It did not wish to prevent military assistance for Britain, only to make it voluntary. Neither Pearce nor Fisher nor Millen nor Cook was a party to a clandestine plot to circumvent the voluntary principle. See John Mordike, *An Army for a Nation: A History of Australian Military Development 1880-1914* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), 240-1, for the conspiratorial argument.

35 *The Times*, 21 June 1911.
the Pacific and, rebuking the British for their arbitrary action in failing to honour their commitment to a Pacific fleet, pressed for a new conference to reconsider the question of imperial defence.

At the very time that the Labor ministers were travelling back to Australia the British government was being forced to deal with another European crisis centred on Morocco. The French were attempting to extend their influence over Morocco, and the Germans, in order to express their concern about this extension of French influence in North Africa, sent a gunboat to Agadir on Morocco’s Atlantic coast. The British, without consulting the Dominions, once again took France’s side and the Germans backed down and as consolation were given some French territory in Central Africa.

However the Germans did not take their humiliation kindly and retaliated by laying down three more battleships. When in July the following year Winston Churchill assumed the office of First Lord of the Admiralty he found that in order to keep the 60 per cent margin of safety over the German High Seas fleet he would have to find a new naval squadron and three new battleships for the North Seas. Simultaneously the CID was recommending that Britain should also match the naval force of Austria, Germany’s ally, in the Mediterranean which would mean the building of a further three battleships. For Churchill and the Asquith government this posed a great problem. Britain’s defence budget was already the largest in the world. What was being required would place an unacceptable drain on the nation’s resources. To meet this challenge Churchill felt compelled to abandon every other naval commitment that was not central to the survival of the British Isles and he sent an ambiguous signal to the Dominions indicating that Britain might be unable to play its part in bringing the Pacific fleet into being. The Dominions, he said, would have to face ‘real and great facts’, ‘fact as hard as Kruppencemented steel’. Defence of the overseas empire had to be left to the Dominions. And he added, as if to make the pill more palatable, that just as concentration of British sea power in Home Waters had been the noteworthy development of the last ten years so ‘the growth of effective naval forces in the great Dominions overseas’ would be the hallmark of the next few years.36

The Labor leaders only slowly awoke to the full import of what the British were saying about their future naval policy. Both Fisher and Pearce understood Churchill’s speech in exactly the way he hoped they would. Overlooking its implications for the promised Pacific fleet they praised it as an endorsement by

36 The Times, 16 May 1912.
the Admiralty of Dominion navies. In reassuring a questioner about whether Australia’s defence forces would be adequate to protect Australia Fisher replied that ‘we may rest assured that it [the British Government] will not take any action that will weaken its prestige or power in any sea in which it is necessary to maintain its strength’. By the end of the year, however, Fisher could no longer give the British the benefit of the doubt. News that Churchill had persuaded Robert Borden, the conservative Prime Minister of Canada, to ask his parliament for £7,000,000 to fund the three improved Dreadnoughts for the Mediterranean made the British Minister’s intention perfectly clear. Without a word to Australia or New Zealand he was abandoning the obligations that the British had accepted under the 1909 defence agreement, and was taking Canada with him. The Australian leaders were incensed by what they reasonably judged to be shabby treatment. Loth at first to criticise the British authorities publicly they had no such reservations about expressing their feelings privately. In a personal letter Defence Minister Pearce wrote to Australia’s naval representative in London that

We had the Imperial naval conference in 1909 which drew up a scheme for the co-operation of the Imperial government and Dominion in matters of defence. The proposals were not rejected at the 1911 Conference, although they were extant; yet what has happened? Australia is the only one of the parties to the 1909 Conference that has carried out its share of the scheme then arrived at. None of the other governments have stated that they will not carry out their share: they have merely ignored it, and in my mind this action or want of action on the part of these governments is the greatest blow yet dealt to Imperial co-operation … It seems to me that it would have been better for the 1911 Conference to have frankly and clearly advised that the 1909 Conference Resolutions should not be given effect to.

Fisher taking the only course left to him set about improving Australia’s defence posture in the Pacific. He proposed to establish closer co-operation with New Zealand and adopt the full list of Admiral Henderson’s recommendations for building up Australia’s own navy. With the coming to power in New Zealand in August 1912 of a Reform Government the prospects for developing a common defence policy had brightened. The new government, especially Defence Minister Colonel James Allen, was unlike its predecessors openly critical of the British

37 CPD (1912 Session), LXV: 1970, 7 August 1912.
38 Letter, Pearce to Muirhead Collins, 3 December 1912, Pearce Papers, 7/106, Australian War Memorial (AWM). A few months later Pearce did express publicly the same sentiments, even if in rather milder terms: see SMH, 22 January 1913.
for keeping the *New Zealand* battlecruiser – the Dominion’s contribution to the Dreadnought crisis – in the North Sea and not sending it to the Pacific to head the China squadron of the putative Pacific fleet as had originally been agreed. The Reform government shared Fisher’s view that ‘Australia had a position more vulnerable against a foe than any other part of the British Empire’\(^{39}\) and was well disposed towards following the Australian example and developing its own naval unit. In December Allen broke his journey to London and met the Australian Defence Council which included Fisher, Pearce and their chief military and naval advisers. While the minutes vaguely record only that ‘an informal discussion ensued’ it would appear that agreement was reached for planning a joint Australian-New Zealand expeditionary force of 18,000 men which could be drawn upon if either country were attacked.\(^{40}\) Likewise from Allen’s subsequent discussion with the British it would seem that the Australians and New Zealanders saw eye to eye on Britain’s failure to contribute to the 1909 scheme, the urgency of Pacific naval defence and the desirability of Canada participating in the creation of a Pacific fleet.\(^{41}\)

In this desperate situation Fisher felt it necessary to revive the very ambitious naval building program which Admiral Henderson had put before his government in September 1911. Henderson had recommended that Australia over a period of twenty-two years should acquire a fleet of eight battlecruisers, ten protected or light cruisers, eighteen destroyers, twelve submarines, three depot ships and one fleet repair ship. On completion it would comprise fifty-two vessels and fifteen thousand men. The building of the navy was divided into four stages. In the initial stage, 1911-18, the fleet unit which had been accepted at the 1909 defence conference and the bases which would house it would be completed. Further along in this period a depot ship, three more submarines and three more destroyers would be laid down. About equal numbers of the remaining vessels would be built in each of the four subsequent periods.\(^{42}\) Early in 1913 the Naval Board at the request of Cabinet produced estimates for the next three financial years. By this time the Australian fleet unit was now almost complete and so these proposed appropriations were

\(^{39}\) Argus, 19 August 1912.


\(^{41}\) Minutes of the 122nd Meeting, CID, 6 February 1913, CAB 2/3, TNA.

for the acquisition of additional ships and building naval bases. Taking their lead from the Henderson Report they asked for £9,000,000 for the three-year period. Over half of this amount was to be spent on constructing bases and most of the rest on a battlecruiser, three destroyers, two submarines, one supply ship and a naval aircraft. Cabinet agreed and Fisher, in his policy speech for the coming election, announced that the Henderson recommendations had been adopted as a guide to policy and that, if returned, his government would carry out a naval construction program identical to that proposed by the Naval Board.

At the election Joseph Cook, who had succeeded Deakin as leader of the Liberal Party, won a very narrow victory and became prime minister. While preparing the budget he was made aware by the Naval Board of a lack of clarity in Britain’s attitude towards Pacific defence which had implications for naval estimates. Thus at the Board’s suggestion he sent an inquiring letter to Whitehall pointing out that at the 1909 conference it had been arranged that Australia would acquire a naval unit and join similar units of the British naval forces on the China and East Indies stations as part of an ‘eastern Fleet of the Empire’. Continuing, he said that while the Australia naval unit was almost completed it appeared the British government had not taken any steps to provide their units and he wondered whether there were ‘any new circumstances’ which might have arisen’ to cause them to change their mind. If so, following Fisher’s example, he assured the British that Australia would be willing to attend a new conference to review the matter.

By this time the national security community was fully aware that neither the British nor probably the Canadians were going to contribute to an imperial fleet in the Pacific and therefore Australia was going to be left to fend for itself in dealing with Japan, its prospective enemy. In early 1913, accepting that Japan’s most likely form of attack would be at least initially directed against northern Australia, two members of the naval board, Captain C. H. Hughes-Onslow and Commander W. H. Thring, accompanied by the Chief of the General Staff, Brigadier-General, J. M. Gordon, visited Darwin and other parts of the northern coastline in order to determine the best strategy for resisting such an invasion.

43 Minutes of Naval Board meeting, H. W. Manisty, Finance Member and Secretary of the Naval Board, 4 March 1913, Pearce Papers, 3DRL/2222 5/34, AWM.
44 SMH, 1 April 1913.
45 Cable, Lord Denman to Harcourt, 15 August 1913, Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers (1914 Session), Vol. LX, Cd. 7347. Fisher cabled the British government on 19 December 1912, proposing that a new conference similar to the 1909 defence conference be called and that it be held in Australia: ibid.
On their return they drew up substantial reports which proceeded from common premises. Both reports agreed that the British navy could no longer be relied upon to protect Australia. The most likely time that Japan would choose to launch its invasion would be while Britain was at war. But they also commented that even while the threat of a European war existed the British would be tied down by the German navy in the North Sea and so unable to risk sending a fleet to the Pacific. It was also suggested that at the end of a European war the British, even if they were victorious, might be so exhausted that their fleet would not be able to act as a deterrent against Japanese aggression. Nevertheless in the end the Naval Board sent the new minister, Senator E.D. Millen, a statement of principles which merely reaffirmed the earlier optimistic view that by the time the Japanese threat fully emerged – that is with the determination of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty in 1921 – the British empire should have a fleet in the East adequate to contain the Japanese. And the statement added that to ensure this outcome there ought be a new conference representing all British interests in the region. It would seem that when the Board at that time considered the grim picture painted by the reports it was not able to face the alarming alternative, namely that Australia might be left to its own resources to keep Japan at bay.

Gordon also devoted most of his report to the navy since the disposition of military forces was dependent on the nature of the attack and therefore on the strength and character of naval defence. He agreed with the Hughes-Onslow and Thring view that the only 'Power in the east which possesses a strong enough fleet to hold the sea command of the South Pacific is Japan'. While conceding that the Anglo-Japanese treaty might restrain Japan for a time he, unlike his naval counterparts, noted that treaties could be unilaterally terminated or cancelled. Since there was no naval force in the Pacific which could challenge Japan's mastery of those seas there was good reason to study the northern littoral 'from BROOME on the West Coast right across to CARDWELL on the Queensland Coast' for the purpose of preparing defences against the coming onslaught. All the senior naval and military officers were full of apprehension about Japan. Colonel J. G. Legge while in London acting as Australia's representative on the Imperial General Staff, spent his time working out how the Japanese might invade Australia, and he

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46 For the Naval Board’s Statement of Principles, 17 July 1913, and the Reports of Hughes-Onslow and Thring, 29 May 1919, see MP1049/1 14/0285, NAA; for Gordon’s ‘A review of General Naval and Military Considerations affecting the Defence of Australia’, 16 June 1913, see Memorandum for the Minister of Defence, 27 June 1913, B197, 1855/1/6, NAA.
concluded that ‘there is not much doubt that they could easily send 3 divisions to Australia in less than 1 month from the day on which they commenced to mobilise. At the present time that would be more than enough for the job, and the Japs could, if they chose to, do it without giving us even indirect information of more than 7 to 14 days.’ It was not surprising that Cook and Millen were alarmed.

When after two months the Admiralty replied to Cook it explained that because of the German Fleet Law of 1912 it had been compelled in order to maintain Britain’s preponderant power in the North Sea ‘to defer carrying the [1909] arrangements into effect in the precise form contemplated’. They maintained that the original decision to send out to the China and East Indies stations two battlecruisers of the latest Indefatigable class was not made on strategic grounds but merely ‘for the sake of homogeneity’ with the Australian unit. The British naval forces were quite adequate to deal with any possible trouble in the Pacific and they attached a chart showing the superiority of British forces over any possible enemy in the region, Japan ‘being excluded in view off the existing alliance’.

Cook was taken aback by this answer. The Admiralty’s view of the 1909 conference was totally at odds with his own. As Defence Minister at the time he had been responsible for giving effect to the agreement. He had understood it to be a mutual engagement based on strategic considerations related to Australia’s fear of Japan and had argued this case in commending it to parliament. As we have seen Australian leaders and their official advisers had come to regard this Imperial fleet as the sheet anchor for their security in the Pacific. What the Admiralty had done and what they had said in justifying their actions had brought on a crisis over the meaning of Empire, had brought to the fore the innate tension between the demands of the community of culture and the community of interest. Thus Cook in a rebuttal of the Admiralty’s position set out Australians’ alternative view of both the 1909 conference and the Empire, that is their view of Greater Britain. For him the aim of the conference had been one ‘of laying down and consistently developing a basis for Naval Defence, at once Imperial and local’. Its ‘primary object’ was ‘the permanent protection of British interests in the Pacific’. He believed that ‘the immunity of the Commonwealth should not be left to depend on the continuance of such a delicate security as an alliance’. The Admiralty had to understand the unique nature of the British Empire, meaning here Greater Britain.

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47 Letter, Legge, to C.B.B. White, 25 July 1913, MP826/3, NAA.
48 Despatch, Harcourt to Denman, sent 17 October 1913 and arrived 17 November 1913, CP 290/15/12, NAA.
In nothing is the British Empire more unique than in the fact that its component parts, while bound by allegiance and affection to maintain the interests and integrity of the whole, have special international relations and dangers which necessitate local provision for the defence that strategic dispositions of the Fleet for protection of the Empire as a whole may not at all times adequately meet.

Our common aim should be to adopt and consistently develop a scheme of Naval Defence, which as far as possible meets the special, as well as the common danger and which does not admit of the adequacy of a Dominion’s defence being, from time to time, affected by the changing requirements of Imperial interests elsewhere.

Cook was willing to allow that

General naval supremacy, ‘the power to defeat in battle and drive from the seas the strongest hostile navy or combination of hostile navies, wherever they may be found’, is a safeguard and end to be sought alike by the United Kingdom and the greatest Dominions of the Crown.

However, he contended

That local superiority, also, if not always an essential condition of general supremacy, may be of such vital importance to a particular Dominion that provision made for it should not be altered to remove any available defects in provisions for the protection of British interests elsewhere. Both should be aims of a sound Imperial system, and, it is submitted, may without undue sacrifices be attained.

Finally he scolded the British for unilaterally breaking an agreement, even as he called for a new conference to review once again the problem of imperial defence in the Pacific.49

But before Cook’s letter reached London, Churchill, having been deserted by the Canadians, was under great pressure to find the wherewithal to fund the ships necessary to maintain Britain’s margin of safety over the German High Seas Fleet, and in his speech introducing the Admiralty’s record estimates of £ 51,580,000 he made a plea to the Dominions to come to the aid of the ‘heart of the Empire’ and in

49 Letter, Cook to Denman, 28 February 1914, CP 290/15/2, NAA, and despatch, Denman to Harcourt, 3 March 1914, CO 532/66, TNA.
the process he questioned the efficacy of Dominion navies. He praised the wisdom of the New Zealand Government for allowing the British Government to keep the Dreadnought which it had paid for in the North Sea. He denied that the British government had failed to live up to its obligations or had placed Australia or New Zealand in jeopardy. He argued very forcefully that the safety of Australia depended on British naval supremacy and the allies that this could purchase.

No European state could invade or conquer Australia or New Zealand unless the British Navy had been destroyed. The same naval power of Great Britain in European waters also protects New Zealand from any present danger from Japan. While Japan is allied to Great Britain and while Great Britain possesses a sufficient margin of naval superiority, Japan is safe from attack by sea from the great fleets of Europe. In no other way in the years that lie immediately before us can Japan protect herself from danger of European interference.

Giving the quietus to the ‘Yellow Peril’ he concluded that the Anglo-Japanese alliance was based on more than the plighted word; rather, it was based on ‘strong, continuing bonds of interest’. And consequently there was no good reason why any of the new battlecruisers – including, one assumes, the Australia – should remain in the Pacific.

In Australia Churchill’s speech elicited a storm of protest. There were expressions of high indignation, even outrage, in the press. Only the Argus, a conservative newspaper which could not suffer the authority of the Admiralty to be questioned, dared to defend Churchill, asserting that neither of the two great powers in the Pacific, America and Japan, posed a threat to Australia and that therefore the most advanced battlecruisers would do more good for the empire if retained in ‘Home Waters’. This drew from Frederic Eggleston, a disciple of Deakin’s and a leading member of the Melbourne branch of the Round Table movement, a compelling rejoinder which demolished the fundamentals of Churchill’s argument. Eggleston was willing to go along with Churchill’s view that the binding force of a treaty was at its core the mutuality of interests supporting it but he contended that Churchill had misjudged that mutuality in the case of the Anglo-Japanese alliance. It was true, as Churchill had admitted, that Britain lacking an Imperial fleet in the Pacific depended on Japan to protect its interests in the Pacific and therefore Britain obtained benefits from the pact. But, Eggleston continued, the same could not be said for Japan. He refuted Churchill’s claim that Britain’s naval supremacy in Europe safeguarded Japan from predatory ambitions of other European powers. In Europe
there was an equilibrium of armaments and it was this balance of power and not British naval supremacy which prevented European countries from threatening Japan’s position in the Pacific. That is, the British out of fear of Germany and its allies had no choice but to keep its fleet in the North Sea and the Mediterranean. Japan would be protected by these Europeans rivalries and tensions whether the Anglo-Japanese alliance existed or not. The United States was Japan’s only rival in the Pacific but the British in renewing the alliance had made it clear that it was not to apply to America. The alliance therefore differed in what it offered the two parties. What it offered Japan was very little. The alliance was not buttressed by an exchange of equal interests and therefore was a fragile reed on which to rest the security of Australia. Eggleston, like Deakin, Fisher, Cook and Pearce, believed that a proper imperial defence policy had to be one which offered equal and complete security for all parts of the empire. Thus it was his contention that ‘a policy which disregards the Pacific, or leaves it to Japan cannot be regarded as a truly Imperial policy’.50

50 Argus, 31 March and 11 April, 1913. Henry Frei’s Japan’s Southward Advance and Australia (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1991) is a quite valuable contribution to our knowledge of Japanese thinkers’ and publicists’ attitude to Japan’s expansionism in the Pacific. However its criticism of Australia’s fears of Japan and the Deakin-Fisher defence policy is not compelling. Because the Japanese in the decade after the Russo-Japanese war showed no interest in invading Australia it is suggested that Australia’s alarm about Japan and its intentions were not justified. But this line of argument has some difficulties. First, it has to be conceded that aggression and expansion do not always come about from long term planning. Quite often it is opportunity that produces intention. This is certainly true, generally speaking, for much of the growth of the British Empire, which J.R. Seeley said was ‘made in a fit of absence of mind’, and also true more pertinently for the Japanese acquisition of Germany’s North Pacific islands in the First World War. Second, because after a crisis looking back one can see that a feared danger had not eventuated it does not mean necessarily that policymakers were irrational in taking prudent measures against the possibility. It is not self-evident, as Frei assumed, that because Japan remained loyal to Britain during the War Churchill’s pre-war assessment of Japan was ‘right’ and that therefore Eggleston’s critique was irrational and based on ‘fallacious assumptions’ which flowed from a lack of knowledge about Japan and a preoccupation with ‘whiteness’. See ibid., 89-90. Third, while it is the case that a racial view of world politics did tend to heighten Australian leaders’ fear of Japan nevertheless it was not race but Realpolitik, as their arguments and policy-making illustrate, that was the fundamental consideration underlying their strategic assessments. Deakin showed this most clearly in his proposal for extending the Monroe Doctrine into the Pacific where he classically sought to include those powers which shared a common interest with Australia and Britain and to exclude those who were their potential enemies. Thus he suggested bringing China as well as France into the security arrangement and excluding Japan and Germany from it.
The political leaders, each in his own way, echoed Eggleston’s words. Senator Millen, Cook’s Defence Minister, issued with Cabinet approval a scarifying memorandum attacking Churchill’s position. He took the Admiralty to task for its unilateral overturning of the 1909 agreement. What Churchill was now offering the Dominions was instead of ‘a definite inter-Imperial co-operative policy for Pacific development … an unco-ordinated, ephemeral scheme possessing neither permanence nor clear purpose and function’. Ineffective isolated units were to be substituted for ‘a powerful joint Imperial Fleet in the Pacific’. He did not consider that Churchill’s view about the value of the Anglo-Japanese alliance was correct. The alliance had existed in 1909 and 1911 when the original scheme had been drawn up and then confirmed. What, he wanted to know, had changed? Unlike Eggleston he could not openly question the worth of the alliance. But he did allow himself the comment that ‘the pages of history are strewn with the wreckage of fruitless alliances’. And openly defying Churchill he declared that Australia ‘will not be deflected from her course by the pronouncements of the First Lord of the Admiralty for she regards the task she has undertaken as vital to the cause of imperial defence and Imperial union and an essential safeguard for her own protection’. Fisher was delighted by Millen’s memorandum and Pearce, now the shadow minister for defence, applauded it. When asked by the Governor-General to set down his own reaction to the Churchill speech, Pearce, like Millen, focussed on the strategic issue.

We insist that there ought to be a British Fleet for the Pacific: without it British diplomacy is nullified in one of the great oceans of the world and we are compelled to allow our policy to be dictated by our ally.

… A British-Japanese alliance is better for Australia than a German-Japanese alliance would be.

But the alliance is temporary, it suits both Japan and us at present, it may suit neither in a few years.

\[51\] Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Papers* (1914 Session), Vol. II, No. 1, ‘Naval Defence Memorandum by the Minister for Defence, 13 April 1914; together with the Speech of the First Lord of the Admiralty as Reported in Australia’.

\[52\] *CPD* (1914 Session), LXIII, 54, 16 April 1914; letter, Pearce to Denman, 4 May 1914, Denman Papers, MS769/84-91, NLA.
While Australians were engaged in lambasting Churchill and his vision of imperial defence the Colonial Office was engaged in a paper war with the Admiralty. The Colonial Office held that the Australians indeed had some justice on their side in criticising the Admiralty for scrapping a clear agreement without informing or consulting them. It was anxious to accede to the Australians’ wish that the British should summon another defence conference and though Churchill resisted the idea the Colonial Office’s persistence won the day. In preparing its answer to Cook’s latest letter it endeavoured to be conciliatory. It allowed that there had been ‘a certain divergence of views’ over the interpretation of the 1909 agreement and that there was a need for a further conference on naval defence at a not very distant time. This reply to the Australians was despatched to Melbourne on 28 July 1914. But by this time the train of events leading from the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo to the long-anticipated European war had come to overshadow all else. And as a result the British abandoned plans for a conference on naval defence in the Pacific.

With Britain’s entry into the war the political leaders who were engaged in a federal election abandoned their debates over droughts and unemployment and like the electorate at large gave their full attention to the Empire’s cause. Even before the British Cabinet had made its decision Cook had asserted that ‘all our resources are in the Empire and for the Empire, and for the security and preservation of the Empire’, and Fisher, not to be outdone in expressions of loyalty, declared that Australia would stand by the Mother Country ‘to help and defend her to our last man and our last shilling’. The overwhelming desire to help the Mother Country was motivated by sentiment and interest. As at the time of the Boer War Australians as a British people could not resist the call of their kith and kin. Likewise they recognised that their own survival was inextricably bound up with that of the Empire. If Britain were defeated in Europe then they would be left completely at the mercy of Japan and Germany, and so they had a vital interest in assisting the Empire in the European struggle. When Cook announced that Australia would offer a contingent of 20,000 men there was hardly a murmur of criticism in the country. From the second Moroccan crisis in mid-July 1911 senior military officers had been drawing up plans for raising a volunteer expeditionary force, but first Pearce and then Millen rejected these schemes as they all necessarily involved

53 Despatch, Harcourt to Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, Australian Governor-General, 28 July 1914, CP 290/15/2, NAA.
54 Argus, 1 August 1914.
enlisting volunteers for overseas service in peacetime.\(^{55}\) Thus on the outbreak of war the government hurriedly created a separate organisation for the Australian Imperial Force and called for recruits, and within six weeks the troops were ready to leave for the European battlefield.

Yet despite this enthusiastic support for Britain the fear of Japan, which since the Russo-Japanese war had been the driving force behind Australia’s defence policy, gained a new and more intense grip on the nation’s psyche. During the Great War Australians continued to be deeply apprehensive about Japan and its intentions. Captain E.L. Piesse, who commanded the Tasmanian Military Intelligence at the outbreak of hostilities, wrote that he had ‘no mind to volunteer’. He hoped that the War Office in asking for an Australian contingent ‘knows all about the Japanese situation’ and had ‘thought of our interest as well as England’s’.\(^ {56}\) Similarly Australian newspapers were full of editorials discussing whether Japan would enter the war on the Empire’s side and, if so, what role it might play and how reliable an ally it might prove to be. Fisher himself a week after he had promised that Australia would support the Mother Country ‘to the last man and the last shilling’, gave voice to the defence policy which had guided Australian leaders over the preceding decade. ‘My idea of patriotism’, he said, ‘was to first provide for our own defence and if there was anything left over offer it as a tribute to the Mother Country.’\(^ {57}\)

On being elected prime minister in September Fisher was willing to send to Europe all those who volunteered but he did nothing to urge men to come forward. He kept as far as he could to the plans for the defence of Australia that Deakin and he had devised in the previous decade, maintaining the compulsory military training scheme, the building of naval bases and naval vessels, the establishment of ammunition factories and the construction of strategic railways. When in the first months of the war the Japanese, contrary to Australian expectations, took possession of the German islands in the North Pacific and so brought Japan’s naval presence south to the equator Fisher was greatly alarmed and pressed the


\(^{56}\) Neville Meaney, *Fears and Phobias: E.L. Piesse and the Problem of Japan, 1909-39* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1996), 5-6. In March 1916 Piesse became Director of Military Intelligence and in that role he spent the greater part of his time on the Japan question, teaching himself to read Japanese, accumulating a great deal of material on Japanese ambitions in the Asia-Pacific and writing strategic assessments about Japanese intentions in the region.

\(^{57}\) *Argus*, 5 August 1914.
British to summon the promised defence conference to deal with Pacific security. In Fisher’s view Japan, by taking advantage of the war to expand its territory and influence in the Pacific and China, had confronted Australia with a strategic crisis which had ‘no parallel in our history’. Even though the British rejected his call for a conference on Pacific defence, he showed his anxiety about Australia’s danger by continuing to complain that such a meeting was necessary and urgent. Throughout the Great War the Australian national security community remained deeply concerned about Japan. Indeed it might well be said that Australia in those years was engaged in two wars, a hot war against Germany in Europe and a cold war against Japan in the Pacific.

**Conclusion**

In the decade preceding the onset of the European war Australian leaders had struggled with the dilemma inherent in the concept of Greater Britain. Although this dilemma was already evident in the latter part of the nineteenth century the emergence of Japan as the dominant power in the Western Pacific simultaneously with the German challenge to Britain in Europe placed greater tension on the national dichotomy of culture and interest. Faced with this potential threat from Japan in the Pacific, nearly all Australian political leaders looked for a way of establishing an imperial defence and foreign policy which would provide co-operatively and collectively for the defence of Britain and the British-settled Dominions, that is for the British world. Yet the Australian desire to translate this sense of a common Britishness into a common defence and foreign policy was constantly frustrated by the divergence of strategic perceptions which followed from their respective geo-politics.

All the prime ministers who had responsibility for dealing with this problem in the pre-war years had recognised that the only satisfactory solution would be through establishing an Imperial Council or some similar body where representatives of Britain and the Dominions could meet, confer and hopefully agree on a common defence and foreign policy for the Empire. Thus when Deakin found that his first endeavours to gain British assistance in establishing a flotilla to meet the Japanese

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58 Copy of letter, Fisher to T. J. Ryan, Premier of Queensland, 12 June 1915, Fisher papers, MS 2919/3/282, NLA.
60 Ibid., chs 1-9.
danger were resisted by Whitehall he had, even if unsuccessfully, put forward a proposal for such an advisory council at the 1907 Colonial Conference. In 1908 at the time of the Dreadnought affair Fisher, unwilling to weaken Australia’s own defence build-up in the Pacific, refused to provide a battlecruiser to help Britain maintain its capital ship margin of safety over the German High Seas Fleet. Instead he followed Deakin in ordering naval vessels for the protection of Australia’s commerce and coasts and sought a defence conference where the Dominions and the Mother Country could decide upon an imperial naval policy that would protect every part of the British world.

Though both Deakin and Fisher approved of the British 1909 Defence Conference proposal for an Imperial Pacific Fleet they were still concerned that they were not consulted about Imperial Foreign Policy. Deakin was so troubled by British unilateralism that he urged Fisher and his ministers to tell the British at the 1911 Imperial Conference that if they continued to ignore Australian interests, then ‘Australia in spite of herself’ would be ‘forced into a foreign policy of her own because foreign interests and risks surround us on every side’. What he was saying in the clearest terms was that if Australia’s strategic interests were not respected and Australia drawn into the imperial decision-making process then with great reluctance the Australians would be forced to turn their back on the pull of culture and race and act with complete independence in world affairs. The only answer to this dilemma was for the Imperial Conference to be clothed ‘with the powers that rightly belong to it, making it a thoroughly Imperial body, representative of our race in every part of the world, without trenching on the local Government of the Dominions or on the sphere of the British Government’. By the end of that conference Fisher had come to believe that this ideal resolution of the Greater Britain problem was on the point of being achieved. The 1909 Defence Conference had reached an agreement for the establishment of an Imperial fleet for the Pacific. At the 1911 Conference the Dominion leaders had been invited to a meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence, been granted an overview of British foreign policy and asked to approve the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance. For Fisher ‘a community of interests of the highest immediate importance has been created’.

Within two years, however, these high hopes were dashed by Britain’s arbitrary action in tearing up the agreement for an Imperial Pacific fleet and keeping the Dreadnoughts promised for that fleet in the North Sea. This drew from Prime Minister Cook another lecture for the British authorities about the meaning of
Greater Britain. In countering Churchill’s claim that Australia was protected by the Anglo-Japanese alliance Cook asserted that the Pacific Dominions should not be left to rely on ‘such a delicate security as an alliance’. Moreover he pointed out that the Dominions had ‘special international relations and dangers which necessitate local provisions for defence’ over and above those needed for the Empire as a whole which were the responsibility of the British government. Thus for Greater Britain, he remarked that there should be a ‘common aim’ to have a scheme of Naval Defence, which ‘meets the special as well as the common danger’. As Eggleston put it, ‘a policy which disregards the Pacific, or leaves it to Japan cannot be regarded as a truly Imperial policy’.

These Australian arguments about Greater Britain which dominated the strategic discourse between the Dominion and the Mother Country in this era were premised on the assumption that all the British peoples were entitled to equal and complete protection against foreign enemies as united in their national identity they faced the world as one. Given, however, the great diversity of the geo-political interests of the member states inside the Empire and the limits on resources available to provide such universal security this nationalist ideal, though it maintained its hold on the Australian imagination for a half century or more, was a mirage which policy-makers, despite repeated disappointments, followed in their approach to world affairs and the defence of the commonwealth.

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61 Curran, Curtin’s Empire.
Learning from Victory: The Japanese Imperial Army Redefines Itself

Edward J. Drea

Between the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the Japanese imperial army formulated Japan’s first imperial defence strategy, radically altered its operational doctrine, and revised all of its tactical field manuals.¹ These were the most sweeping military reforms of any major power in the decade preceding the outbreak of World War I.

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>squad administrative regulations</td>
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<td>1909</td>
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<td>artillery manual and transport manuals</td>
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The revised 1909 Infantry Manual was the capstone document that connected tactics to operations and to grand strategy. It drew heavily on the army’s recent experiences during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) to rework infantry doctrine. During that conflict, the infantry branch had suffered 93 per cent of battlefield casualties; losses among company-grade infantry officers could not be replaced; and the severe personnel attrition exhausted Japan’s strategic manpower reserve.² To prevent a recurrence of such a bloodbath, the new infantry manual adapted tactics to the changing nature of early twentieth century warfare, but it simultaneously

¹ Fujiwara Akira, Gunjishi (Military history) v. 1 Senzen ben (Prewar) (Tokyo: Nihon hyōronsha, 1987), 127.
elevated the spirit of the offensive, especially the shock effect of the bayonet, to new heights. It appears counter-intuitive that the army could endure the meat-grinder created by modern weapons technology and then enshrine fighting spirit as the essential component of modern warfare. How does one account for the Japanese army’s continuing fascination with élan and the offensive? Appreciating the army leadership’s decisions requires an understanding of the tactical doctrine preceding the Russo-Japanese War, the evolution of tactics during that conflict, and the lessons that professional officers drew from their battlefield experiences.

In 1890 Japan had no overarching military strategy. Japanese planners instead concentrated on protecting the home islands from foreign invasion. They devised counter-amphibious operations anchored by coastal fortifications that would pin invaders on the beaches to allow mobile divisions deployed inland to assemble, move to the lodgment, and overwhelm the enemy. During the early-1890s, staff officers made draft plans for fighting a possible war with Qing China on the Asian continent, but even their final operational plans for war with China in 1894 included a worst-case scenario for a last ditch Japanese stand in Korea that would buy time to prepare homeland defences to repel a Chinese invasion.

Despite a strategic defensive mentality, Japanese infantry tactics were offensive and aggressive, reflecting the influence of the German staff officer Major Jakob Meckel, who had served as an instructor at the army staff college in Tokyo during the mid-1880s. Characteristic of European military thinkers of the day, Meckel was an advocate of the offensive who insisted on close-order formations to ensure command and control of units and speed of movement during the attack. Like his European and Japanese contemporaries, Meckel acknowledged that the densely packed formations would pay a steep price in blood to secure their objectives.\(^3\) Japanese staff officers, for example, projected losses of 25 to 50 per cent during operations against imperial Chinese forces in 1894. However cold-hearted these calculations, they were no different from those of European military thinkers who anticipated similar heavy losses to be the cost of victory in August 1914.\(^4\)

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Aggressive tactical doctrine pervaded Japan’s 1891 *Infantry Manual*, an adaptation of the 1888 German field service regulations. The centrepiece of the 1891 Manual was an attack executed by dense formations (one soldier per metre) massed along a narrow front and relying on overwhelming firepower to break through a static positional defence. Infantry skirmishers developed the enemy position. Then the main body, disciplined to move forward under fire, advanced in four, closely ordered ranks building firepower superiority as it closed with the enemy. An attack did not necessarily imply a frontal assault, which, according to doctrine, would occur only against lightly held positions or when the enemy was in retreat.

These tactics won the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) as tightly packed Japanese formations quickly secured their objectives and, more important, did so with relatively light casualties. The nature of the opponent – Chinese forces were poorly trained, poorly equipped, and poorly led – mattered little. The decisive power of the offensive had proven itself on the battlefield.

The imperial army compiled no comprehensive lessons-learned from the war, although line units submitted postwar reports that identified tactical deficiencies. Troops under fire, for instance, tended to bunch up, which caused indecision and diminished aggressiveness. Soldiers balked at advancing under fire, especially if a nearby comrade was killed or wounded. While esprit improved unit cohesion, individual units were reluctant to sacrifice their solidarity to support neighbouring units, thereby diluting the overall aggressiveness and force of effort.

To correct these shortcomings, the revised 1898 *Infantry Manual* placed greater emphasis on inculcating élan or fighting spirit throughout the ranks. It slowed the pace of the advance and abolished the fourth firing rank to tighten formations, allowing the company commander to retain better control of his compressed unit and mass it for bayonet attacks. The 1898 *Infantry Manual*, like its predecessor, relied on establishing superior firepower to achieve victory. The artillery would open the way for the infantry’s advance and ultimately the combined artillery and organic infantry firepower would overwhelm the enemy defenders, making a breakthrough possible. Firepower was the decisive element of combat.

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5 Endō, *Kindai Nihon guntai*, 100-01.
6 Ibid., 104.
7 Ibid., 105.
Victory over China gained Japan a privileged position in Korea, but with it came the responsibility of preventing Russian domination of the peninsula. Japan's military still had no overarching military strategy even though all military and civilian leaders agreed that Russian domination of Korea would directly threaten Japan's national security. Operational planning remained defensive in nature, but around 1900 the general staff began informally planning to protect Japanese interests in Korea against Russian forces. These were the army's first plans that envisioned forward, offensive military operations on the Asian continent. Although the drafts were not official operational plans, the field research and military intelligence gathered to compile them became the underpinnings for Japan's wartime operations during the Russo-Japanese War. Japan went to war with Russia in 1904 on the basis of draft operational plans and revised infantry tactics.

To prepare for a showdown with Russia, the army had expanded from nine divisions in 1896 to thirteen by 1900; improved its reserve system; and introduced new weapons and equipment to the force. The Russians had done likewise, reinforcing their Manchurian garrisons and equipping them with state of the art weaponry. The Russo-Japanese War consequently became the first major conflict, as Michael Howard put it, where both sides fought with the latest military technology; not only magazine rifles and quick-firing field artillery but mobile heavy guns, machine guns, mines, barbed wire, searchlights, telephonic communications, and trenches. Tactics did not keep pace with emerging technology, resulting in heavy losses in set-piece sieges like Port Arthur (60,000 Japanese casualties) or meeting engagements like Mukden (70,000 Japanese lost).

Japanese staff officers' greatest wartime disappointment was the failure of infantry-artillery combined arms team to live up to expectations. Contrary to assumptions, small arms not artillery accounted for the overwhelming majority of casualties on both sides and repeatedly caused attackers to go to ground, draining the momentum of the advance. The poor showing of Japanese artillery not only caused the breakdown of Japanese infantry attacks but also inflicted proportionately few Russian casualties. In truth Japanese artillery had inflicted more casualties than

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9 Ibid.
its inept Russian counterpart, but a shell shortage and the amateurish handling of the guns prevented their full and effective coordination with the infantry. By the mid-point of the war, even artillery officers had doubts about the effectiveness of their weapons.\[12\]

The general staff’s analysis placed the blame squarely on the artillery. In every engagement, artillery officers were so concerned about silencing the Russian artillery batteries that they failed to support the advancing infantry, especially during attacks against prepared positions. Moreover the staff judged that artillerymen lacked offensive spirit.\[13\] Gun crews had suffered heavy casualties during the opening battles because they advanced with the infantry. Thereafter combined artillery-infantry action almost disappeared from the front lines of the battlefield.

A severe shell shortage also contributed to the artillery’s woes.\[14\] An artillery regimental commander wrote, ‘There were never enough shells during the entire war. Several times we could not give the infantry full support and we lost golden opportunities to inflict damaging losses on the enemy.’ Furthermore too many of the shells massed-produced in Japan’s substandard munitions factories were duds. According to one general staff officer, ‘After our shells are fired, they take a nap.’ This failure understandably frustrated and angered the infantry. After capturing a heavily defended strongpoint, a regimental officer was livid when he saw rows and rows of unexploded Japanese ordnance that had been neatly lined up by the Russians.\[15\]

Senior commanders’ expectations for artillery firepower gradually shifted during the course of the fighting. After the August 1904 battle of Liaoyang, for instance, 2nd Army Commander General Oku Yasukata notified subordinates that ‘Accurate enemy artillery fire can stop our infantry’s advance. Unless the enemy’s artillery is silenced, our infantry’s attack hesitates.’ As the war dragged on, tactics changed. Tightly packed infantry formations gave way to more dispersed infantry configurations. In February 1905, following the Sandepu meeting engagement, the same 2nd Army reported that on flat, open terrain infantry units that

13 Endō, Kindai Nihon guntai, 122.
unhesitatingly braved heavy artillery fire and closed with the enemy suffered fewer casualties from artillery than from small arms fire. It concluded that dispersed infantry tactics nullified the effects of artillery fire.\textsuperscript{16} By that time army leaders were questioning the infantry’s determination to press home attacks, with critics alleging that the infantry’s over-reliance on overwhelming firepower weakened its aggressive spirit.

A postwar assessment of the artillery’s performance completed in May 1907 called for fundamental reorganisation of artillery units, improvement of mountain artillery, establishment of field artillery and howitzer batteries for infantry support, and a light artillery weapon for cavalry.\textsuperscript{17} Meantime a significant intellectual shift occurred among army leaders about the role of firepower on the battlefield. Field commanders who witnessed the failure of artillery time and time again during the war gradually lost faith in the artillery and questioned whether firepower was indeed the decisive ingredient in victory.\textsuperscript{18}

Before the war, most tacticians would have agreed that firepower alone would force the enemy to abandon his defences. Against the tenacious Russian defenders, however, it was the traditional Japanese fighting spirit demonstrated by hand-to-hand combat with cold steel that had carried the day.\textsuperscript{19} After the war, theorists conjectured that future conflict would rarely involve positional warfare. Instead meeting engagements characterised by fast-moving manoeuvre to turn enemy flanks would predominate and this mobile, open-style of combat would create opportunities for decisive bayonet attacks.\textsuperscript{20} Superior firepower at the point of attack was, of course, advantageous when the advancing infantry closed on the enemy with the bayonet. But firepower alone could neither dislodge nor destroy determined defenders.\textsuperscript{21} The most important lesson of the Russo-Japanese War for Japanese and European military thinkers alike was that infantry assaults with the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] Hara, ‘Hohei chūshin’, 272, 282.
\item[17] Hirayama Kanki, ‘Nihon rikugun ni okeru sakusenjō no yōkyū to kenkyū kaihatsu no kankeinosenhō wo shutai toshite’ (Operational requirements and related developmental research in the Japanese army – the case of artillery), \textit{Kenkyū shiryō} 85 RO-2H, mimeo., 1985, 29.
\item[18] Hara, \textit{Meiji}, 554.
\item[21] Hara, \textit{Meiji}, 554.
\end{footnotes}
bayonet were not only possible but necessary. Victory would go to the attacker who could effect a breakthrough with cold steel.

Regardless of the homage paid to the bayonet, the Japanese official military history of the war acknowledged that there were very few bayonet-led breakthroughs. Bayonet actions had occurred at Liaoyang (1904) and at Port Arthur (1904), but bayonet wounds accounted for less than 2 per cent of total Russian casualties and less than 1 per cent of Japanese. Proponents argued that the measure of the bayonet was not the numbers of casualties it inflicted; rather it was the decisive shock effect that cold steel exerted on the defender’s morale and his will to continue the fight.

Wartime experience showed that all frontal attacks launched from 500 metres or beyond had failed. Daylight attacks against strongly held enemy defences rarely succeeded, and the handful of successes usually came against negligible resistance. The best-known successful massed frontal attack occurred early in the war at Nanshan where Japanese losses were so severe that headquarters’ staff officers thought that communications clerks had mistakenly added an extra digit on the casualty totals. In the face of such staggering losses, how could the infantry cross the killing zone to destroy the enemy in hand-to-hand combat?

On 25 September 1905 (just twenty days after Japan and Russia signed the Treaty of Portsmouth ending the war) the Inspector General of Military Education requested each unit commander down to battalion echelon to submit a combat after-action report along with his opinions, based on the unit’s combat experience, about improving tactical doctrine. Commanders submitted the documents by December, and in February 1906 the Inspector General’s staff and unit inspector generals organised the data to serve as basis for the revision of the Infantry Manual, a process that would take more than three years.

While the Infantry Manual underwent close scrutiny, Army leaders concurrently revised their operational plans. Since 1892 the army had submitted an annual operational plan to the emperor for approval. These plans invariably described defensive operations to repel an invasion of Japan’s home islands. The outstanding

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23 Hara, Meiji, 555.
26 Hara, Meiji, 425-6.
characteristic of the 1906 imperial army’s operational plan was the switch from the strategic defensive to the strategic offensive. According to the revised operational plan, the Japanese army would seize the initiative to launch a preemptive offence relying on speed and manoeuvre to encircle and destroy the main Russian armies in Manchuria. Secondary operations would sever the line of communication between Siberia and Manchuria, isolating remaining Russian resistance. All objectives would be achieved as rapidly as possible. On 26 February 1906 the Army chief of staff received imperial sanction for this radically altered operational war plan.27

The conversion to the strategic offensive did not happen overnight. Theories that the offensive was the only way to achieve victory had percolated in modern Japanese military thought since Meckel’s time, and one of his legacies was the enduring influence of German military thought in the Japanese army. The writings of Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz (The Nation in Arms), General Karl Wilhelm Hermann von Blume’s four-volume Strategy, and General Wilhelm Balck’s Tactics were available in Japanese translation.28 Japanese officers were well aware of the latest trends in European military thought and adapted concepts appropriate to Japan’s operational planning requirements. General von Blume’s Strategy, for example, had been published in Japanese in 1891, and his theories of sweeping encirclements, rapid manoeuvre to outflank an enemy, and strategic envelopment found a receptive audience in Japan’s staff college when it was introduced in 1892.29 The same year Major General Ōshima Sadaka’s The Art of Generalship (Suihei jutsu), a four-volume study, argued that the offensive alone could annihilate the enemy.

All of these offensive-minded theorists assumed that properly executed operations would destroy the enemy quickly and thereby limit the damage to one’s own forces. This classic short-war formulation appeared in Japan’s 1906 operational plan, which in turn served as the war minister’s and the chief of staff’s guidance for the development of imperial defence policy.30

Based on the new operational planning, military leaders codified imperial defence strategy for the first time in Japan’s modern history. Lieutenant Colonel Tanaka Gi’ichi, the main author of the army portion of imperial defence policy,
was convinced that Japan’s recently acquired continental commitments mandated an active role on the northeast Asian continent.31 Fashionable notions of Social Darwinism shaped his argument that island nations had to expand to become major powers. If Japan stood passively on the defensive, it would wither. Tanaka sought to integrate political and military strategies, coordinate military expenditures with economic capacity, and provide a guide for joint operational planning for an expansive continental strategy that would justify the army’s paramount strategic role at the navy’s expense.

Four issues emerged during inter-service discussions; the objective of national defence; the alignment of military strategy with national strategy to coordinate military and political goals; the formulation of a joint strategy; and the determination of the force structure required to achieve strategic military objectives. Fundamental differences between the army and the navy over Japan’s main hypothetical enemy, a continental versus a maritime strategy, and the allocation of resources could not be resolved.

As sanctioned by the emperor in April 1907, imperial defence policy was a compromise that would simultaneously expand Japan’s interests in Manchuria and Korea (a continental strategy) and develop imperial interests in the southern regions and the Pacific (a maritime strategy). This accommodation ratified the major shift that had occurred between the services. Since 1872, the army had been the predominant service, but navy’s strategic role during the Russo-Japanese War had earned it co-equal status with its sister service. If imperial defence emphasised a northern strategy, that would make the army primary; if a southern strategy, the navy would predominate. Consequently Japanese military and naval authorities fashioned a dual strategy that allowed the army to focus on Russia while the navy concerned itself with the United States, Great Britain, and France.32

Imperial defence policy itself was a three-part document. Part one identified the hypothetical opponent – Russia for the army and the United States for the navy. The army’s strategy would conduct forward offensive campaigns on the Asian continent, relying on preemptive offensives to win the opening battle decisively in order to end the war as quickly as possible. Part two identified force structure requirements with the army measured against Russia and the navy against the

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31 Ibid.
United States. Part three, the outline of operational employment of troops, stated that as an island nation Japan could not wait passively for an enemy to reach its shores. Henceforth imperial defence was premised on the strategic offensive because Japan had to project an overseas capability.33

In case of war with Russia, the document continued, the army would use the railroads of Korea and Manchuria to concentrate forces rapidly in southern Manchuria, then seize Harbin to sever the Russo-Chinese railway line of communication. Next the ground forces would pivot to strike Valdivostok and end the war. In this army-driven scenario, the navy had a minor role of destroying the regional enemy fleet and seizing coastal bases. The army played a similarly minor part on the navy’s plans for maritime operations.

By 1908 the army had created a strategic doctrine and revised its annual operational plan to emphasise offensive, pre-emptive forward operations. The forthcoming Infantry Manual would set in place the tactical components of the new strategy and revised operations. There were, however, gnawing concerns about the fighting spirit of the postwar conscripts who would have to execute the new doctrine.

The battle-hardened officer and non-commissioned officer (NCO) veterans of the Russo-Japanese War attributed their survival to iron discipline that held units together despite horrific losses. Discipline in turn was the specific manifestation of military spirit and the lifeblood of the army. A disturbing increase in courts-martial, however, threatened these core values.34

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offence</th>
<th>Number Convicted by Court-Martial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>199 (4 officers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insubordination</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disobeying orders</td>
<td>292 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desertion</td>
<td>1,558 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malingering/self-mutilation</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forming a political faction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ōe Shinobu, *Nichi Ro sensō*, Table 3-5, 269.

33 ‘Teikokugun yohei yoryo’ (Outline of operational employment of imperial forces [part three of imperial defence policy]), cited in Bōeichō (eds), *Daihon’ei rikugunbu* (1), 161.
34 Battlefield courts martial during 1904 and 1905 had convicted some 2,040 troops in Manchuria and military courts in Japan convicted another 2,270, the majority for theft (1,307 cases): Ōe Shinobu, *Nichi Ro sensō*, Table 3-5, 269.
These numbers represented a 50 per cent increase over the 1903 convictions, but in terms of the total mobilised force of 878,000 men amounted to a seemingly insignificant one-half of one per cent. (By contrast, the US Army routinely resorted to the legal system to court-martial 12 per cent of all soldiers during World War II.) In Japan, however the army and society prided themselves on using informal peer pressure, not formal legal proceedings, to produce social conformity. In a land where disputes were settled informally, the rise in courts-martial convictions troubled professional soldiers who believed that the increase in wartime offences had undermined military authority. A disturbing trend of lax discipline had moreover infected the postwar army.

Military tribunals convened between 1906 and 1908 seemed to confirm their worst fears. These courts annually convicted an average of 2,000 soldiers for various infractions during this span. This same period witnessed a decline in individual and unit discipline as well as a deterioration of military courtesy. A military police report of September 1906 described such unsettling trends as cadets stealing money or watches at the military academy or thefts at the central cadet preparatory school. NCOs and conscripts in civilian clothes were throwing money around in brothels and teahouses. According to the military police, military courtesies exchanged between NCOs and the conscripts seemed to have disappeared.

Another indication of the breakdown of discipline and morale was the spike in military suicides among conscripts. The rate per 10,000 in 1908 was two-and-one-half times that of the civilian population, and the next year army suicides peaked when 98 conscripts killed themselves. Army investigators attributed just over a third of the suicides to spiritual confusion (22 per cent) or to remorse (12 per cent), but listed the remainder as cases due to unknown causes. Authorities nevertheless blamed foreign influences for spreading spiritual confusion. The introduction of Western socialist and anarchist philosophies spawned political movements in Japan that questioned the status quo authority, the very conformity and obedience the military so desired.

To counter such dangerous thoughts, the army made moral instruction as found in traditional Japanese values the standard for army-wide training. Since unit administration and standards for communal barracks living previously had varied

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37 Ibid., 194.
according to individual regiment, there were no uniform regulations governing
conduct and deportment. In mid-1907, the war minister appointed Major General
Nagaoka Gaishi to chair a board to correct these shortcomings. Nagaoka in turn
rewrote the *Guntai naimusho* (Internal Squad Administrative Regulations) in order
to institutionalise procedures to regulate military conduct and life in the squad
barracks throughout the army.38

The rewritten manual published with imperial approval in November 1908
ascribed innate and intangible Japanese qualities to the individual soldier and by
extension the squad. It described the squad organisation in terms of traditional
family values. The squad members formed a family; the barracks was the family
home; and as a family soldiers mutually shared joys and sorrows, life and death
in the army.

As a household, the barracks regulated the lives of the conscripts who entered
the army and nourished their intense spiritual indoctrination. Barracks life instilled
military discipline that demanded absolute obedience to a superior’s orders. It relied
on peer pressure, collective punishment, and unofficial corporal punishment to
pound home the intangible Japanese virtues of fighting spirit, élan, loyalty, and
obedience. If the barracks was a family, then the infantry company was an extended
family because the revised squad regulations linked intrinsic Japanese attributes
directly to the company’s combat role.

The emphasis on the intangibles of battle meant that the real lesson of the
Russo-Japanese War was that morale, not technology, was the truly important
element in modern warfare.39 The Japanese infantryman, after all, had prevailed
against modern weaponry – artillery, machine guns, small arms, barbed wire –
and so on. Technology had not been decisive. Army leaders looked for indigenous
factors to explain victory, an approach similar to the one their predecessors took
after the great Satsuma Rebellion of 1877. Following the defeat of the rebellious
samurai, government army leaders waxed confident about their doctrine and
leadership abilities, which they attributed to inherent traditional martial values.
There was, it seemed, no further reason to rely on foreign military advisers so the
army terminated the contracts of the French military mission it had employed.
Now, after the Russo-Japanese War, the army again turned inward, identifying
unique values found in Japanese culture as the basis for military reform premised
on fighting spirit.

The Inspector General of Military Education directed the various army investigatory boards to cast off old-fashioned regulations and revise doctrine according to Japan's special characteristics. The Infantry School commandant told the Infantry Board members that any revisions to the current manual had to improve fighting spirit (seishin) not just firepower. Intangible national characteristics such as Japanese spirit as well as racial and geographic determinants drawn from Japan's unique culture, when combined in battle, manifested themselves as the fighting spirit inherent to the Japanese infantryman. More tangible aspects considered the required force structure, modernised weaponry, unit organisation, the hypothetical enemy, and the concept of operations in future warfare. But the emphasis had to be on the spirit of the offensive and the intangible qualities essential for its success.

The army invested more than three years to resolve hotly debated revisions to the Infantry Manual. Along the way, the Infantry Board distributed two instalments of provisional regulations for comment. Part one, published in November 1907, was straightforward, dealing with force structure, organisation, and equipment. It elicited little reaction. Part two, issued in May 1908, dealt with roles and missions. It was contentious because it assigned the primary combat role to the infantry and gave it the mission of seizing the initiative and attacking relentlessly with the bayonet, regardless of artillery support.

As Major General Nagaoka Gaishi, now the head of the powerful Military Affairs Bureau, explained to the Infantry Board in January 1909, 'From the Gempei Wars (late 12th century) through today, hand-to-hand combat has been Japan's way of warfare and the world recognises it as an unparalleled and an outstanding Japanese skill.' The spirit of the attack permeated Japanese history and the early twentieth century infantryman was the heir to these special martial traditions. Japanese spirit would overcome material disadvantages.

Army leaders tried to hammer out a consensus during several conferences held at the infantry school. In the end, however, the Commandant of the Infantry School packed the review board with infantry branch officers who outvoted the single artillery officer on the revamped committee. The board's final recommendations were the crossroads for Japanese tacticians because they assigned priority to the infantry and relegated the other branches to supporting roles.

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40 Endō, *Kindai Nihon guntai*, 133.
41 Hara, 'Hohei chūshin', 276.
43 Hara, 'Hohei chūshin', 276, 279-80, 283.
44 Ibid., 280.
A conference chaired by the inspector general endorsed the Infantry Board’s findings, which the war minister, the chief of staff, and the inspector general quickly ratified in the final draft. Next the Board of Military Councillors approved the revised infantry manual in October 1909 and submitted it to the throne for imperial assent. On 23 October, the emperor sanctioned the revisions, which stressed the importance of a soldier’s spiritual indoctrination and discipline in modern warfare. The imperial imprimatur made fighting spirit dogma and questioning it became taboo.45

The 1909 *Infantry Manual* proclaimed that offensive spirit was the foundation of tactics and identified fundamental, unchanging principles of warfare:

1) infantry is the decisive force in combat and will execute operations without the cooperation of other arms;
2) a bayonet charge will render the final decision in battle;
3) military discipline is the lifeblood of the army;
4) strengthen the offensive spirit throughout the army;
5) high morale will seize the initiative.46

Substantive changes from the 1898 *Infantry Manual* included making the infantry the primary arm; elevating a bayonet charge to the decisive element in battle thereby relegating firepower to a secondary role; insisting that fighting spirit was more important than material superiority; emphasising the intangibles of battle, and relying on national characteristics as the basis of the army’s tactical doctrine.

The infantry adapted more open formations and emphasised manoeuvre to turn flanks. When closing with the enemy, infantry units would make use of terrain features or engineer-constructed approaches to minimise casualties. Dawn attacks offered the best chance of success because the infantry could approach the enemy positions concealed by darkness and, following a brief artillery preparation, drive home their attack with the bayonet.47 Thereafter night combat instruction was a hallmark of Japanese tactical training and doctrine.

45 Endō, *Kindai Nihon guntai*, 133-4. The Board of Military Councillors, established in 1887, comprised selected generals as well as the Board of Field Marshals and Fleet Admirals, who advised the emperor on major military matters. Their expertise was also available to the services.
Artillery support would ideally neutralise or at least reduce the defender’s resistance at the point of attack. Even without artillery fires, the infantry still had to attack independently and continue its advance unaided. Infantrymen were expected to attack even when outnumbered and hold all ground regardless of the danger of being surrounded, isolated or overextended.48

The injunction to hold any gains at all costs was attributable to the Russo-Japanese War experience. Successful Russian counterattacks that recovered lost ground not only drove the Japanese back but also so demoralised them that it was impossible for officers to revive the attack. To ensure that hard won gains would not be lost, the new manual eliminated the 1898 regulation that following a breakthrough units could execute a tactical withdrawal to safer or more easily defensible ground in order to repel anticipated counterattacks. Units now had to hold their ground or pursue the enemy to inflict maximum casualties.49

Underlying the aggressive doctrine was an unspoken concern that if troops did not take the offensive they would fall prey to doubts and anxieties and refuse to advance. Put differently, army authorities identified the cause of the failure to renew the attack after a repulse as a problem of courage not material.50 Improved spiritual training could correct the lack of offensive spirit reflected in the soldiers’ loss of confidence. Ultimately, though, it was the commander’s responsibility to make his men fight. If unit commanders invoked the spirit of the offensive, the 1909 Manual declared, the ranks would respond by displaying offensive élan.51 The Infantry Manual’s renewed emphasis on fighting spirit and discipline linked it to the new squad administrative regulations that the army revised expressly to inculcate fighting spirit and tighter discipline.

In January 1910 the Inspector General of Military Education General Ōshima Hisanao (who commanded the 9th Division during war) assembled all brigade and regimental commanders and their deputies in Tokyo to explain the reasons for changes to the Infantry Manual.52 Ōshima identified five fundamental and unchanging principles of warfare for those present:

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48 Endō, Kindai Nihon guntai, 131.
49 Ibid., 122-4.
50 Ibid., 116-7.
51 Ibid., 126.
52 Kuzuhara, “Sentō yōryō” no kyōgi’, 20
1) In training and tactics, stress kokutai, national characteristics, and geographic uniqueness the basis of the national army (kokugun).
2) Emphasize élan and intangibles of battle.
3) Besides military proficiency, well trained units must exhibit military courtesies and customs.
4) The infantry is primary; the other arms supporting.
5) Offensive spirit and spirit of the bayonet are decisive.\(^{53}\)

In less than a decade the army had completely transformed its strategy, operational plan, and tactics. Japanese military strategists and tacticians had created an interlocking strategic concept, operational plan, and tactical doctrine. The revised 1909 *Infantry Manual*'s insistence on mobile, aggressive tactics to turn enemy flanks to encircle opponents dovetailed with the new operational plan for a rapidly moving, decisive campaign in Manchuria that in turn elaborated the strategic guidance found in imperial defence policy's short war strategy. The horizontal foundation of discipline, fighting spirit, and obedience to orders across the army supported the vertical integration of tactics, operational planning, and military strategy and fused battlefield performance directly to the core values of the military. It is but a slight exaggeration to say that the army's revisions to doctrine and planning between 1905 and 1914 remained unchanged throughout the imperial army's existence.

\(^{53}\) The Commandant of the Infantry School, Major General Oba Jirō, drafted the principles.
Should we ‘be drawn into a maelstrom of war’: New Zealand Military Policy on the Eve of the First World War

John Crawford

Introduction

During the parliamentary debate in December 1909 on a radical defence act New Zealand’s Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, Sir Joseph Ward, stressed the need to reform the Dominion’s military forces because of the danger that New Zealand would ‘be drawn into a maelstrom of war’.¹ The passage of the 1909 Defence Act, which introduced compulsory military training and set the scene for a complete reorganisation of the New Zealand military forces ushered in a five-year period of reform that would transform New Zealand’s military capacity and enable the Dominion to make a comparatively substantial contribution to the British Empire’s war effort between 1914 and 1918. In this paper I will examine what lay behind this period of reform, set out its main elements and assess its achievements. The events of 1911, which was in many respects a pivotal year, will receive particular attention.

The Background to the 1909 Defence Act

There is no doubt that the wide ranging proposals incorporated in the 1909 Defence Act enjoyed strong support both within Parliament and outside. There were those who denounced it as a product of ‘Imperialism’, ‘Germanophobia’ or the ‘Yellow-scare’.² The dominant view, however, was that the proposed reforms were a sound response to the threatening international situation facing the Empire. As one

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¹ New Zealand Parliamentary Debates (NZPD), vol. 148: 1027.
leader writer put it: ‘the march of events has shown that the safety, nay the very existence, of the British Empire is threatened by ambitious and powerful nations’. Germany was clearly identified as the power most likely to threaten the Empire and the New Zealand Government’s proposals were lauded as preparing ‘the nation for any emergency that may arise’ and as ‘sound, practical, and patriotic’. Although Germany was seen as the immediate threat, in the longer term the danger posed by Japan and China was seen by many informed observers as being sufficient reason in themselves for wide-ranging military reform.

A combination of local and international developments lay behind the comparatively ready acceptance of a program of sweeping defence reform. There was within New Zealand an almost universal recognition that the local forces, which consisted of a 12,000-strong Volunteer Force and a tiny regular force of 366, were incapable of defending the Dominion. New Zealand’s Volunteer Force in some respects still resembled the Volunteer corps first established in Britain during the late eighteenth century. Corps still elected their officers. The battalions and regiments into which the force was divided were largely paper formations; real authority still resided with the more than 200 individual corps, which jealously guarded their independence. The standard of training within the New Zealand Volunteer Force was low, there were grave deficiencies in organisation and equipment and the regular force lacked the capacity to properly administer and train the citizen soldiers.

Although the New Zealand forces were badly organised and lacking in efficiency, military service of at least a part-time nature was very popular. In 1905 the British commandant of the local forces had noted that: ‘in no country that I know of does so keen a martial spirit exist as in New Zealand … the percentage of Volunteers to available population … must be extraordinarily large’. In 1906, for example, about 3 per cent of New Zealand males were serving in the Volunteer Force. Volunteering appears to have been more popular in New Zealand than it was in the United

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3 *Marlborough Express*, 6 December 1909, 4; *Evening Post*, 3 December 1909, 2; Governor New Zealand (Gov NZ) to Secretary of State for the Colonies (SSC), 8 December 1909, CO 209/270 (copy), Archives New Zealand, Wellington (ANZ).

4 Robin to Allen, 22 August 1913, Allen1, M1/18, ANZ.


Kingdom. As far as the program of military reform is concerned the popularity of military service meant that there was within parliament and in the wider New Zealand community a substantial constituency of current and former Volunteers whose experience of military service had been pleasant and relatively undemanding. This fact explains, in part, the relatively ready acceptance of compulsory military training in New Zealand.\(^7\)

New Zealand’s senior regular officers had since 1905 been convinced that only a complete reorganisation of the local forces combined with the introduction of some form of compulsion would remedy their failings. In private they unsuccessfully pressed Ward’s Liberal administration to embark on such reforms.\(^8\) The efforts of reform-minded regular officers in private were mirrored in public by the effective campaign for the introduction of a Swiss-style scheme of compulsory military training and a complete reorganisation of the New Zealand forces by the National Defence League that was formed in 1906. Branches of the league were quickly established right across New Zealand and its publications were widely read and discussed. The program of the National Defence League was championed by many community leaders and virtually all New Zealand newspapers.\(^9\) Australia’s moves to introduce compulsory military training were closely followed in New Zealand and the subject of favourable comment.\(^10\)

Those pressing for military reform regularly pointed to the increasingly ominous international situation facing the British Empire. It was the dreadnought crisis, a panic over the pace of German naval expansion and the strength of the Royal Navy, which began in the United Kingdom early in 1909 and soon spread to New Zealand that finally prompted the Dominion’s government to accept that major reforms were needed. Ward who was, if nothing else an extremely astute politician, responded to the scare by offering to pay for one of the dreadnought’s supposedly

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needed to redress the balance of power with Germany. This initiative was received with much acclaim in New Zealand and it appears convinced Ward that there was a real public appetite for comprehensive military reform and a willingness to find the necessary funds. Before he departed for the Imperial Defence Conference in London which sprang from the crisis, Ward committed his government to introducing a thoroughgoing, but unspecified scheme of military reform before the end of the year.¹¹

The conference examined how the empire's naval and military forces could cooperate more effectively. The main conference focused on naval affairs, but more significant for New Zealand was the sub-conference on military issues. At the military conference the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir William Nicholson, outlined the organisation of the British Territorial Force and stressed the need for the training and organisation of the Dominion forces to be harmonised with those of the British Army so that in the event of a major war they could be employed in an effective manner. Ward recognised that the New Zealand Volunteer Force could not be reconfigured into the kind of substantial, well-organised and balanced force required to meet these objectives.¹²

The New Zealand Prime Minister sought advice from Nicholson on how the New Zealand forces should be reorganised to meet the requirements of Imperial military cooperation.¹³ Within a short period of time Nicholson provided Ward with a scheme for the reorganisation of the New Zealand forces. He advised that New Zealand needed a force with a peacetime strength of 20,000 that could be expanded to 30,000 when mobilised. The Dominion’s four military districts would each provide a quarter of the force. Each district would have an establishment based round a brigade of mounted rifles and an infantry brigade with artillery, engineer and other support units. In addition there were to be garrison artillery and other coastal defence units. The force, Nicholson suggested, should be organised on a ‘territorial’ basis with units being recruited from a defined area within each military district. In his view this organisation would enable New Zealand to readily provide

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¹³ Ward to Nicholson (copy), 7 August 1909, AD10 16/6, ANZ.
an expeditionary force of about 10,000 men, based on a mounted rifles and an infantry brigade. Nicholson also suggested that men be asked in peacetime to volunteer for overseas service in the event of an emergency. Thus from the outset the new structure of the New Zealand forces was specifically designed to facilitate the raising of an expeditionary force.  

Ward accepted Nicholson’s proposals as a sound basis for future action, a stance endorsed by his cabinet. Nicholson had not advocated compulsory military training, but the New Zealand government recognised that the new organisation could not be effectively implemented without a system of compulsory training along the lines already under consideration in Australia.

The 1909 Defence Act

The Defence Act passed in December 1909 provided for the Volunteer Force to become the Territorial Force and for the end of officer election. Existing officers were confirmed in their ranks and posts. Like Volunteers, Territorials could not be compelled to serve overseas, but there was provision for them to signify their willingness to serve overseas in an emergency. The legislation introduced compulsory military training for boys in the junior and senior cadets between the ages of 12 and 18. Once youths reached the age of 18 they would be posted to the Territorial Force in which they would serve until the age of 21 after which men were to be transferred to the reserve until they turned 30. Defence Rifle Clubs, which received support from the government, were to assist with the training of Territorials and were to form a second line reserve for the force.

Work began on implementing the new scheme as soon as the act was passed, but the government decided to take no substantial initiatives until after it had received a report from Field Marshal Lord Kitchener. Ward’s government asked Kitchener to visit New Zealand, inspect the local forces and advise it on the introduction of compulsory training and related issues. Kitchener visited New Zealand in February 1910 after carrying out a similar mission in Australia. He concluded that what

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15 NZPD, 1909, vol. 148, 1027; Evening Post, 30 September 1909, 7; McGibbon, Path, 185-7.
16 Defence Act 1909. The junior cadets (12 to 14 years) were not a success and they were abolished by the Defence Amendment Act (1912).
he proposed for Australia was equally applicable to New Zealand and made a comment that ‘the young men of New Zealand and Australia, though showing some markedly different characteristics, are splendid material for creating a first-rate fighting-machine’.17

Kitchener made three important recommendations: that the period of compulsory training should be extended from 18-21 years to 18-25 years; a change which meant that the force could be brought up to its full strength more quickly; that for the purposes of the defence scheme New Zealand should be divided into 55 rather than 32 areas, an initiative that would require a significant increase in the number of regular officers from approximately 60 to 100; and finally that the Council of Defence should be replaced by a commandant with full powers of command. The government accepted Kitchener’s recommendations, passed the necessary amendments to the Defence Act and selected a British officer, Colonel Alexander Godley, as the new commandant.18

**Major-General Alexander Godley and the Development of the Territorial Force**

Godley, who was given the local rank of major-general, arrived in New Zealand in December 1910. He brought with him a small team of fourteen British staff officers who were to play a key part in the military reform program. New Zealand suffered like the other Dominions from a shortage of properly trained staff officers that would take some years to remedy.19 The new commandant had a haughty manner that many New Zealanders found disagreeable, but he was a capable staff officer and gifted trainer of soldiers. Godley was to prove to be a good choice.20 The new commandant’s work can be divided into two main parts: first, the establishment and development of the Territorial Force and strengthening the capacity of New

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18 Memorandum by Robin, 10 April 1910, AD10, 19/1, ANZ; *Defence Amendment Act* 1910; Mc Gibbon, *Path to Gallipoli*, 192.
Zealand’s regular forces, and second, enhancing Imperial defence links and planning for the creation of an expeditionary force. Initially Godley concentrated on the development of the Territorial Force.

1911: A Pivotal Year: Establishing the Territorial Force

During 1911 the transitional arrangements that had existed since the passing of the 1909 act came to an end and the new defence system was properly set in place. After his arrival Godley quickly set about reorganising his headquarters, designating the operations and training elements of his staff as the local section of the Imperial General Staff. He also toured New Zealand carrying out inspections and a campaign of public speaking during which he ably set out the importance of the new defence arrangements.21

At the beginning of 1911 Godley organised a special two-and-a-half-month-long training camp at Tauherenikau for regular officers and NCOs. In addition the extra regular officers and NCOs needed to implement the new defence scheme were selected and trained at Tauherenikau. The camp was an outstanding success that set in place a common understanding of how the new system was to be implemented and operated. Godley endorsed the order of battle proposed by Nicholson. He also where necessary amalgamated existing units and formed new units. One of the weaknesses of the Volunteer Force had been its unbalanced nature. It had lacked many of the units normally expected to be found in a force of its size. Under the new structure, for example, the first New Zealand Army Service Corps companies were established. The force’s new order of battle was promulgated in June 1911. Initially a great deal of effort was also put into establishing the system of Area Groups and Areas upon which the compulsory military training scheme and Territorial Force were based.22

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21 Godley, ‘Notes on the Volunteer System of Military Training which was in Operation up to 28/2/1911’, AD1, 10/703, ANZ; Gov NZ to SSC, 28 December 1910, CO209/271 (copy), ANZ; Godley, Life, 143-4.
The Territorial Force 1914

Includes Senior Cadet Companies, NZ Veterinary Corps sections, Chaplains, Nurses, Ordnance detachments, and Defence Rifle Clubs.

Sources: The Quarterly Army List of NZ Forces for April 1914, Corkett 1970, ANZ.
Godley also set about selecting the Territorial officers to command the new units, beginning with the mounted rifle and infantry brigades. He adopted a strictly merit-based policy for appointments. It was decided that in future all initial appointments to commissions would be from men already serving in the ranks. Considerable emphasis was placed on the democratic nature of the new arrangements and the idea ‘that the officers of a Citizen Army should necessarily be drawn from any particular corps or class in the community’ was explicitly rejected.23

Although Territorial officers were to command the units of the force, regular officers of the New Zealand Staff Corps and NCOs of the New Zealand Permanent Staff had a vital staff, training and support role. The 300-strong Royal New Zealand Artillery provided support and a substantial degree of technical expertise to the Territorial artillery. The regular officers and NCOs provided the new force with the staff capacity, professional expertise and support that the Volunteer Force had lacked. Between 1911 and mid-1914 the number of regular military personnel increased from 427 to 726. By 1914 the Staff Corps had reached its designated strength of 100 and there were just over 200 Permanent Staff NCOs carrying out administrative and instructional duties. Under the new scheme there was a greatly increased emphasis on the professional development of regular and Territorial personnel.24

Links with the British Army and the Australian forces were strengthened. The number of serving regular officers who were sent overseas for further training or on attachment or exchange was sharply increased. In late 1911 of the 79 New Zealand regular officers, eight were in the United Kingdom and three in India. In 1911 only one regular officer was a staff college graduate; by 1914 there were three. Although the numbers were small, the officers concerned were to hold key posts in New Zealand and overseas during the First World War.25 Trans-Tasman co-operation was more marked during this period than it would be the decades to come. New Zealand agreed to train future regular officers at the Royal Military

24 AJHR, 1911, H-19 1-3, 15; 1912, 2-3; 1913, 2-3; 1914, 12; 1914, H-19a, 6; Godley, ‘Citizen Army’, 319-22.
College of Australia, Duntroon. As a result when the college opened in June 1911 its foundation class of cadets consisted of 31 Australians and 10 New Zealanders. A scheme to exchange regular officers with Australia was instituted. Plans for a similar program with respect to South Africa and to send senior Territorial officers to India for training were halted by the outbreak of war in 1914. The officers posted to the United Kingdom provided the military authorities in Wellington with a wide range of up-to-date information on British practices and policies and on technical matters. The appointment of a senior New Zealand officer, Colonel Alfred Robin, to the Dominion Section of the Imperial General Staff in London in February 1912 was particularly important in this regard. When, for example, New Zealand’s Minister of Defence visited London early in 1913 Robin was able to provide him with a comprehensive brief on key defence issues. Included in his comments was his impression that the French military authorities were concerned about the small size of the British Expeditionary Force and saw the kind of compulsory military training scheme introduced in New Zealand and Australia as one way of addressing this issue. Robin regularly provided the authorities in Wellington with useful insights into the state of opinion in the United Kingdom. In August 1913, for instance, he commented on the way senior British officers ‘keep hammering away at the certainty of war at an early date’, but that like many non-military observers he did not think ‘the outbreak is near’. The experience and expertise gained by the officers sent overseas helped to significantly improve the capabilities of the New Zealand forces.

During the first half of 1911 work began on registering all those liable for service. By July 1911, 22,000 men had been registered for service in the Territorial Force and nearly 30,000 youths for service in the Senior Cadets. The registration process revealed that there were more men available than initially thought. In response it

26 Godley to Allen, 12 December 1910, AD1, 252/10/1, ANZ; McGibbon, *Path to Gallipoli*, 196-8.

27 ‘Training of Senior Territorial Officers in India: Conditions of Attachment’, n.d. (but July 1914) and related papers, AD1, 38/42, ANZ; Prime Minister to Gov NZ, July 1914, and related papers, AD1, 38/41, ANZ; *New Zealand Army List April 1914*, 18-19; Heard to Secretary, Department Defence, Melbourne, and related papers, AD19, 68/210, ANZ; *AJHR*, 1914, H-19, 9.

28 Robin to Allen, 7 February 1913, and enclosure, Robin to Allen, 6 April 1913 and 22 August 1913, Allen1, M1/18, ANZ; Richardson to Allen, 10 April 1913, Allen1, box 11, loose papers, ANZ.

29 French to Godley, 28 March 1913, and related papers, Godley 3/287, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LHCMA), London.
was decided to maintain the Territorial Force at its mobilised strength of 30,000 in peacetime. Once the registration process had been completed work began on posting men to their units. Personal preferences and circumstances were taken into account during the posting process, but the principal determinant was location. It was stipulated in the scheme that no man should have to travel for more than one hour to attend drills. Because of this requirement sparsely populated areas were exempted from the operation of the compulsory military training scheme.30 Territorial Force units formally came into existence in mid-1911.31

The 1909 Defence Act contained very limited provisions for exempting men from military service, and the proportion of the population compelled to serve was very high. As a result the force created by the New Zealand defence scheme was on a population basis substantial. In 1913, for example, the New Zealand Territorial Force had a strength of 23,919 which equated to just under 4.5 per cent of the Dominion’s male population. Less than 1.5 per cent of Australian males were citizen soldiers in 1913. At this time the British Territorial Force had a strength of 245,779 or less than 1 per cent of the male population of United Kingdom.32

Under the New Zealand scheme Territorials were required annually to complete 30 drills (20 of which were to be out-of-door parades); 12 half-day or six whole-day parades and a seven-day annual training camp (exclusive of the days of arrival and departure): a total of approximately 123 hours of training. Reservists were required to undertake two half-day parades or their equivalent with a Territorial unit. This regime was somewhat more onerous than that faced by most Australian citizen soldiers.33 The training requirement for New Zealand citizen soldiers were

31 New Zealand Gazette, nos 27 and 47, 1911.
33 The Australian scheme required the artillery and engineers to conduct 150 hours of training annually and the other soldiers/personnel to conduct 96 hours: AJHR, 1911, H-19, 26-7; Official Yearbook of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1901-1912 (Melbourne: Commonwealth Bureau of the Census and Statistics, 1913), 1055. The figures for Australia could in fact be somewhat lower as they do not stipulate that the time in camp excludes the days of arrival and departure.
also substantially more demanding than the standard required of British Territorials in order to be deemed efficient.\textsuperscript{34}

With the Territorial units formed, men posted to them and the administrative and training support structures in place, the training of the new force could begin. The policy laid down by Godley and his staff in 1911 stressed the need to first undertake the basic training needed by the new recruits and to inculcate a high level of discipline in the force. The training policy memorandum declared that the ‘efficiency of an army has its foundations on the bed-rock of elementary training, otherwise the instruction is not progressive, the ultimate results are disappointing, and may in time of stress bring about a disaster more far-reaching in its effects than may be anticipated in times of peace’.\textsuperscript{35}

Once the basics had been mastered training would move on to more advanced matters. Territorial officers and NCOs were to have the principal responsibility for training those under their command. It was acknowledged that the demands on these men would be particularly heavy in the early stages of the scheme when men were entering the Territorial Force with little or no previous military training. Territorial officers responded well to this challenge, and in his 1912 report Godley noted that most officers took ‘their military responsibilities very seriously’ and praised their determination to ensure ‘that their military knowledge shall suffer no more than can possibly be helped from the fact that they are not able to devote all their time to soldiering’. Once the scheme had been in operation for a few years men entering the force would have already acquired basic military skills through their service in the cadets. A key feature of the New Zealand and Australian schemes was the idea that requiring youths to undergo several years of cadet training would obviate the need for the two or three months of full-time basic training that was a feature of the Swiss system.\textsuperscript{36}

Training began late in 1911 and concentrated on basic drills and musketry. During the training year that ended on 31 March 1912 Territorials were only required to carry out a proportion of the training laid down in the Defence Act. Somewhat more advanced training did not begin until the first Territorial unit camps held between mid-February and mid-June 1912. A total of 45 unit camps


\textsuperscript{35} \textit{AJHR}, 1911, H-19, 28.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 28-32, 1912, 13.
and ten casual or casualty camps for men who could not attend their regular camps, were held. In total 17,831 men undertook a week’s training in camp.\textsuperscript{37}

The average attendance at all the camps was 82.49 per cent, which Godley ‘considered most satisfactory’, especially when the fact that most of the men attending were new recruits and the highly mobile nature of New Zealand’s population were taken into account. He had visited most of the camps and was struck by the ‘zeal, energy and goodwill’ shown by both instructors and recruits. Much better progress had been made at the camps than he expected, and this confirmed his opinion ‘that the youth of this country have a remarkable aptitude for military work’. Godley thought that the ‘general physique of the recruits was excellent, and their conduct exemplary. Many men who came into camp reluctantly left it unwillingly.’\textsuperscript{38}

### Planning for an Expeditionary Force

Beginning in 1911 New Zealand’s military planning increasingly focused on arrangements for the establishment of an expeditionary force rather than home defence. At the Imperial Conference in May 1911 Ward made it plain that although New Zealand had not committed itself to the dispatch of an expeditionary force in the event of a major war, it would do so. Papers prepared for the conference by the Committee of Imperial Defence concluded that as long as the Anglo-Japanese alliance remained in place and the Royal Navy was undefeated the worst New Zealand could expect was small raids on its ports.\textsuperscript{39} Such raids would at most involve an attacking force of 1,000 men and when this is considered it is quite apparent that the New Zealand Territorial Force was much larger than required to deal with such a threat. Although a new local defence plan was prepared in 1913, home defence ceased to be a high priority after 1911 and spending on New Zealand’s coastal defences virtually ceased.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 1912, H-19, 4-5, 7; Evening Post, 25 November 1911, 9; 15 January 1912, 8; 4th Regiment (Otago Rifles) Commanding Officer’s Report, for period ending 31st May, 1912 (Dunedin: The Regiment, 1912), 8-10.

\textsuperscript{38} AJHR, 1912, H-19, 4, 14; Wellington District: Report on Training for the year ending May 31st 1912, AD19, 84/8, ANZ.

\textsuperscript{39} ‘New Zealand. Scale of the Attack under Existing Conditions’, CID77-C, 4 May 1911, ‘Australia and New Zealand: Strategic Situation in the event of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance being Determined’, CID 78-C, 4 May 1911 G40/11, ANZ; Sir John Findlay, The Imperial Conference of 1911 from Within (London: Constable, 1912), 14-15, 154-62; McGibbon, Path to Gallipoli, 238.

\textsuperscript{40} Allen to Massey, 17 April 1913; Cochrane to Military District Commanders, 18 June 1913, AD11, 7/11, ANZ; AJHR, 1911, H-19, 2, 1914, H-19, 24.
The Swiss system of compulsory military training was designed to meet the needs of home defence, but in New Zealand, as in Australia, it could also provide the Dominion with an affordable way of creating the substantial pool of trained personnel and putting in place the structures and systems needed if an expeditionary force had to be formed. The capacity to readily raise an expeditionary force was, therefore, dependent on having an efficient Territorial Force.

The capacity to readily raise an expeditionary force was dependent on having an efficient Territorial Force. Godley initially concentrated on getting the Territorial Force and the other elements of the New Zealand Military Forces established on a sound footing. By the time the new Reform government was elected in mid-1912 sufficient progress had been made with this task for Godley and his staff to devote more attention to planning for an expeditionary force. Godley set out his proposals to the new Minister of Defence, James Allen, in August 1912. He wished to put in place more detailed planning for the expeditionary force envisaged in Nicholson’s 1909 paper. It appears that Allen was reluctant to consider expeditionary force planning just after entering office. He was a former senior Volunteer coast defence gunner and was, it seems, initially rather more concerned with home defence than the Commandant. He did not reply to Godley’s paper and in October Godley again raised the issue with him. Godley stressed that any new European war was likely to be short and violent and that, therefore, every nation endeavoured ‘to be ready for war at a moment’s notice, and put the utmost possible force into the Field [sic] of action’. He identified Germany as the British Empire’s most probable opponent and set out what he thought were the most likely roles for a New Zealand expeditionary force. In his view a New Zealand force would be best employed alongside the ‘British Expeditionary Force in the main theatre of operations’. Other options included operations against Samoa and other German possessions in the Pacific, and in the event of the Ottoman Empire entering the war reinforcing British forces in Egypt in order to oppose a Turkish advance. Allen eventually responded to Godley’s paper and agreed that further work on raising an expeditionary force should be conducted.

41 Godley to Allen, 2 August 1912, AD10, 16/6, ANZ.
42 Allen to Cabinet, ‘Memorandum re Defence’, 25 November 1912, and related papers, Allen1, D3/6, ANZ.
43 Godley to Allen, 9 October 1912, AD10, 16/6, ANZ.
44 Ibid., Allen to Godley, 28 October 1912.
The Australian Chief of General Staff Brigadier-General Joseph Gordon was also considering the need to prepare plans for an expeditionary force. Early in October 1912 he suggested that in view of the ominous situation in Europe it would be opportune to discuss expeditionary force planning with Godley during his visit to Australia the following month. The suggestion was taken up by the Australian Government and agreed to by Prime Minister William Massey of New Zealand. At this conference, which took place in Melbourne in November 1912, various matters, including the purchase of military supplies from Australia by New Zealand and intelligence cooperation, were discussed, but the main focus was on the actions to be taken in the event of a major war. Godley and Gordon considered that as long as the Royal Navy maintained its command of the seas their forces would be able to deal with any likely raid and that the Royal Navy suffer some catastrophe neither Dominion would be able to reinforce the other.

It was also agreed that the two Dominions did not need to undertake a definite commitment to provide an expeditionary force before a crisis so long as plans were prepared beforehand... it might be left to the government of the day, when a crisis arose, to say whether those plans should be put into operation; the rest might safely be left to the spirit of the British people. Gordon and Godley also agreed that the two Dominions should be ready to conduct operations against foreign territories in the East Indies or Pacific. They divided this area into two spheres with Australia taking responsibility for territories east of the 170° of longitude and New Zealand territories to the west of that line. This agreement implied that New Zealand should focus its attention on German Samoa, and operations against that territory were a significant element of Godley's thinking until 1914. Both the Australian and New Zealand representatives were well aware of the advantages of joint action and concluded on the basis of the forces committed during the South African War that an appropriate contribution to the Empire's war effort would be an Australasian division made up of about 10,000 men from Australia and 6,000 to 7,000 from New Zealand or a smaller joint mounted force. The New Zealand contribution to this combined division differed significantly from that proposed by Nicholson in 1909 in that it did not include mounted rifle brigade.
Allen had in mind a significantly larger New Zealand force based on an infantry brigade and a mounted rifles brigade and was not well disposed towards the establishment proposed at the Melbourne conference, which in his view was ‘not equitable’. He was also concerned that such a joint force would restrict New Zealand’s freedom of action and compromise the national identity of the Dominion’s contribution. The Minister of Defence wanted a force that could cooperate effectively with Australian or British forces. He discussed expeditionary force planning with the War Office during a visit to London at the beginning of 1913. New Zealand’s representative on the Imperial General Staff, Colonel Alfred Robin, stressed to Allen how anxious the War Office was to get definite commitments from dominions about the strength of expeditionary forces they would provide in an emergency. Robin was well aware of the vital need for sound expeditionary force planning, but had made it clear that public opinion in New Zealand would not support a definite peacetime commitment, but that planning could continue secure in the knowledge that ‘there would be a clamour of men’ in the event of an emergency. The British authorities advised Allen that the Dominion’s force should be as proposed in 1909.47

The question of asking Territorials to commit to overseas service in peacetime was a difficult one for the New Zealand Government. After the 1909 conference, Ward had given some thought to establishing a special section of the Territorial Force that would undertake to serve overseas in an emergency. This plan did not proceed far, however, as it was thought that such a policy would be unpopular and in particular foster opposition to the new defence system.48 Allen initially favoured asking men to volunteer for overseas service before any emergency, as was done with limited success in the United Kingdom. Godley, however, thought that this would lead to the Territorial Force being effectively split into two different organisations with an adverse overall effect on the standard of training. He also believed that in an emergency plenty of volunteers would come forward.49

47 Robin to Allen, 7 January 1913, Allen1, M1/18, ANZ; ‘Defence Memorandum: Submitted to Members of the Cabinet by Hon. Col. Allen prior to departure to England in November 1912’, Allen1, D3/6, ANZ; Allen, ‘Defence Proposed Organisation for Expeditionary Force’ (extract from report to the Prime Minister, n.d. (but early 1913); minute by Allen, n.d. (but December 1912), AD10, 16/6; McGibbon, Path to Gallipoli, 241.
48 Gov NZ to SSC, 31 March 1911, Secret Quarterly Report, CO209/273 (copy), ANZ.
49 Godley to Allen, 2 August 1912, AD10, 16/6, ANZ; French to Godley, 28 March 1913, Godley 3/287, LHCM; Godley to Allen, 6 June 1913, AD10, 16/6, ANZ; ‘That Sorry Past, Opposition Journals’ Blunder, about the Expeditionary Force, against Foreign Service’, n.d. (but early 1914), Allen1, D1/25, ANZ.
position was accepted by the government after Allen's return to New Zealand and in June 1913 Cabinet formally approved further planning for an expeditionary force, as outlined by Nicholson in 1909 and more recently by the War Office, but without any provision for a peacetime commitment.\(^{50}\)

Later in 1913, Godley visited Britain and held talks with the Secretary of State for War and senior British Army officers. A substantial part of the visit was devoted to discussions about preparation for an expeditionary force. Lieutenant-General Sir Douglas Haig, for instance, was, Godley wrote, 'very insistent that I should see everything possible of all the up-to-date organisation and latest equipment of his command' and 'impressed upon' the New Zealand Commandant 'the likelihood that it would not be long before I should be called upon to produce an expeditionary force from New Zealand, for service in Europe'. By the end of 1913 plans for a New Zealand expeditionary force were well advanced. They centred, as suggested by Nicholson in 1909, on raising a quarter of the force from each of the four military districts. Consideration began to be given to more detailed issues such as the criteria to be used in selecting the officers and other ranks of an expeditionary force.\(^{51}\)

By 1913 there was a widely held view within New Zealand that given the menacing international situation planning for the formation of an expeditionary force made good sense. The New Zealand authorities made no secret of the extent to which their defence preparations revolved around developing the capacity to form an expeditionary force, although they were careful to stress that men would not be forced to serve overseas.\(^{52}\)

In his 1912-1913 annual report, for example, Godley set out the rationale for such preparations in some detail:

If the experience of the South African War, when New Zealand loyally came to the support of the Mother-country, may be taken as a guide, it is fair to assume that, in the event of the Empire becoming engaged in a serious war, where the preservation of its existence is at stake, there would be an

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\(^{50}\) Marginalia by the Secretary to the Cabinet on Godley to Allen, 6 June 1913, AD10, 16/6, ANZ.

\(^{51}\) Robin, 'Expeditionary or Overseas Contingent', enclosure to Robin to Allen, n.d. (but January 1913), Allen1, M1/18, ANZ; Godley, *Life*, 148-9; Major-General A.J. Godley, 'The New Zealand Mounted Rifles', *The Cavalry Journal* 8: 32 (October 1913), 466. Investigation of the detailed planning for an expeditionary force is severely hampered by the loss of the relevant operations staff files.

\(^{52}\) *New Zealand Times*, 4 February 1913; *Evening Post*, 7 February 1913, 1912-13 clipping book, Defence Library, HQ NZDF Wellington; 'That Sorry Past', Allen1, D1/25, ANZ.
Should we ‘be drawn into a maelstrom of war’

instant demand on the part of the people of the Dominion for the despatch of troops to assist the Mother-country.
The value of any assistance, however willingly and enthusiastically given, will be greatly lessened if not altogether nullified, by waiting until the outbreak of hostilities.

It has therefore become necessary to work out thoroughly in peace time full and complete plans (organisation, transport equipment, etc) for an overseas Expeditionary Force, in order that efficient machinery may exist for the immediate execution of the wishes of the people. This previous preparation will, moreover, result in very large saving of expenditure.

Such an Expeditionary Force will consist entirely of those serving Territorials who come forward and offer themselves for services [sic] overseas to assist the Mother-country to preserve the integrity of the British Empire in time of great emergency.53

The New Zealand Military Forces on the Eve of the Great War

Concern that New Zealand might soon be required to provide an expeditionary force apparently led Godley to hold brigade camps in 1913. His staff opposed this decision on the basis ‘that we were trying to fly before we could walk’. Although he fully appreciated the importance of sound basic training, Godley thought it ‘still more important to let people see the higher organisations and the higher training up to which they have to work’.54

These camps were substantial events. More than 2400 men were, for example, present at the Auckland Infantry Brigade camp, near Cambridge, in April 1913. As at other camps the training at this brigade’s camp proceeded on a progressive basis, with the first four days being devoted to company and battalion work and the final three days of the camp being largely given over to practising for a review and an exercise by the whole brigade.55 Godley inspected many of the camps and was generally well satisfied with what he observed, even if he may have rather overstated the standard achieved when he wrote in a British military journal that; the Wellington Infantry Brigade’s ‘attack across intricate country … would have done no discredit to Regular troops’.56

53 AJHR, 1913, H-19, 9.
54 Godley, Life, 146.
The picture that emerges from the reports on the training camps and the confidential unit reports compiled between 1911 and 1913 is of a force that was steadily improving, but which faced significant challenges. The development of the Territorial Force continued steadily during the early months of 1914. Arrangements for the year’s annual camps were altered so that the visiting Inspector-General of the Overseas Forces, General Sir Ian Hamilton, would see as high a proportion as possible of the force in camp. Godley’s intention was to build on the progress made in 1913 by holding major all-arms camps in each district, which were designed to match as closely as possible a divisional organisation. Such camps would, he considered, improve the ability of the Force’s different elements to operate effectively together.

Hamilton was a well-known opponent of compulsory military training and had reported favourably on the voluntary Canadian defence scheme. The government and Commandant were, therefore, concerned that he might report unfavourably on the New Zealand scheme and thereby give a powerful boost to opposition to the compulsory training regime. These concerns were, however, assuaged before Hamilton’s arrival by his staff officer who informed Godley that the Inspector-General fully appreciated that ‘the smiling face of the Jap and Chinaman over the Pacific is quite sufficient cause for sterner measures in N.Z. than in Canada’.

Hamilton arrived in New Zealand late in April 1914, after completing an inspection of the Australian forces. Godley arranged a punishing itinerary for the Inspector-General, which centred on visits to the all-arms district camp that were attended by nearly 16,500 men. After he completed his tour of inspection Hamilton prepared a detailed report, which was published later in 1914. His findings were very positive. He concluded, for instance, that after ‘a comparatively short period of continuous training the Infantry would, in my opinion, be ready for war as regards their tactical efficiency’.

57 Comments by Colonel Logan, 23 April 1913, confidential unit reports, AD 37/26, ANZ.
58 AJHR, 1913, H-19, 9, 1914, 11.
59 Ellison to Godley, 21, 24 October 1913, Allen1, M1/15, ANZ; Hamilton to Allen, 28 February 1914, Hamilton 5/1/85, LHCMA; McGibbon, Path to Gallipoli, 203.
60 Australasian Tour 1913-14 Diary, Hamilton 5/2/17, LHCMA; Jeffrey Grey, The Australian Army (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 34-5.
61 Hamilton to Lady Hamilton, 24 April 1914, Hamilton 5/1/76, LHCMA; Evening Post, 16 March 1914, 8; AJHR, 1914, H-19, 28-31; Godley, Life, 152-3.
62 AJHR, 1914, H-19a, 24-5.
On the basis of the exercises he had observed, the Inspector-General formed the view that more work was needed on the conduct of defensive operations. He noted that the positions selected were often not ideal and that troops were deployed in insufficient depth. He was more satisfied with the way in which the New Zealand Territorials attacked, commenting ‘that there was less piecemeal frittering away of forces than I have sometimes seen at big manoeuvres in England or on the Continent. Almost always there was an intelligent attempt to hold the enemy in one part of the field and to hit him a blow in the vitals with the main force in another.’ In private Hamilton was also complimentary about the New Zealand forces. He described most of the New Zealand Territorials as being ‘country men’ who had ‘far greater individuality and intelligence than yokels of the old world, while equalling them in physique, hardy-hood and nerve’. In his view the New Zealand forces and those of the other Dominions would be able to make a substantial contribution to the Empire’s strength in any major war.

Although he was impressed by military developments in Australia and New Zealand, Hamilton remain convinced that compulsory training was not suitable for the United Kingdom as it would undercut support for regular forces. He remarked to a friend that if ‘a home defence army’ based on compulsory military service was introduced ‘in the United Kingdom it might be a great success in itself, [but] the result would be the absolute wiping out of our regular forces on the home establishment, including our Expeditionary Force’.

In mid-1914 the strength of the Territorial Force was nearly 25,684. The force was numerically twice as strong as the Volunteer Force had been in 1909 and it was much better organised, trained, equipped and led. It was expected that the Territorial Force would reach its full strength of 30,000 during 1915 and after that its reserve would begin to grow. Godley and his senior officers were carefully preparing for the development of the Territorial Force, with plans for more advanced training and additional equipment. Events on the other side of the world, however, were within a few months to dramatically intervene.

63 AJHR, 1914, H-19a, 22.
64 Hamilton to Amery, 11 May 1914, Hamilton 5/1/59, LHCMA.
65 Hamilton to Douglas, 5 April 1914, 16 May 1914, Hamilton 5/1/63, LHCMA.
66 Godley to Allen and encls, 24 July 1914, Allen1, Box 11, ANZ; AJHR, 1914, H-19, 11-13, H-19a, 5. The total strength of the defence forces was 58,048 (regular forces 726; Territorial Force 25,684; Senior Cadets 25,336; Defence Rifle Clubs 6,306).
Raising the New Zealand Expeditionary Force

After the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne on 28 June 1914 propelled Europe into a crisis, preparations began in New Zealand for raising a voluntary expeditionary force. On 30 July and 2 August district commanders were given instructions setting out how volunteers were to be selected and other administrative measures that would have to be taken if a force was raised. When war broke out on 5 August (New Zealand time), Prime Minister Massey immediately announced in Parliament that the services an expeditionary force would be offered to the British government. The government’s offer and those of its counterparts in Australia and Canada were seen as demonstrating, as Sir Joseph Ward declared, ‘that an Empire widely sundered by geographical situation was yet one in spirit and in action’. By 12 August, when New Zealand’s offer was accepted, approximately 14,000 men had offered to serve in the expeditionary force.67

Earlier, on 6 August, Britain asked the Dominion to carry out ‘a great and urgent Imperial service’ by capturing the German radio station at Apia, the capital of German Samoa. The government promptly agreed to this not unexpected request, and preparations were immediately put in train to dispatch a small expeditionary force made up of volunteers from the Territorial Force to seize the colony. The 1,374-strong force sailed from Wellington on 15 August and fourteen days later made an unopposed landing at Apia. The prompt seizure of what was the second German territory to fall into Allied hands was made possible by the careful planning undertaken by Godley and his staff before the outbreak of war.68

The organisation of the Dominion’s main contribution to the imperial war effort, the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF), almost exactly matched that of the force approved in 1913 and outlined by Nicholson in 1909. The NZEF was based on a mounted rifles brigade and an infantry brigade. Territorial units were tasked with providing an appropriate contribution from their recruitment area. Each infantry battalion, for example, provided a company for the NZEF battalion drawn from their district. In an initiative to foster ties between the

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67 Evening Post, 6 August 1914, 10; 1914 New Zealand Expeditionary Force Europe (1914) War Diary (Wellington: Government Printer, 1915), 3-4; Christopher Pugsley, Gallipoli: the New Zealand Story (Auckland: Reed, 1998 (1st edn 1984)), 53; McGibbon, Path to Gallipoli, 248.
Territorial Force and the NZEF each expeditionary force infantry company and mounted rifle squadron was named after the Territorial unit from whose area it was drawn. The authorities made it clear that although the Dominion was in the grip of a tremendous outburst of patriotism, there would be no ad hoc arrangements for raising units as there had been during the South African War, and similarly that direct approaches to politicians or senior officers by volunteers, which were a feature of the recruitment of New Zealand’s South African contingents, would not meet with any success.

Mobilisation was, in keeping with the Territorial system, decentralised. Territorials could only volunteer to serve in the NZEF in the arm in which they were serving and had to apply through their commanding officer or unit adjutant. Some units held special parades at which men were asked if they wished to volunteer to serve in the NZEF. Reservists and civilians had to apply through the nearest defence office or Territorial unit commander. A mobilisation camp was established in each military district. For instance, volunteers for the Canterbury Infantry Battalion were first medically examined at their local drill hall and, if passed, were then sent to the headquarters of the area’s Territorial infantry regiment and from there to the district mobilisation camp in Christchurch. The mobilisation process was generally well and speedily conducted. The New Zealand mobilisation plan was quite similar to that developed by the Canadian Chief of General Staff in 1911, but not implemented in 1914.

Godley adopted a policy of selecting the best available officers for NZEF units and gave ‘all possible preference to officers of the Territorial Force’. Regular officers, former Volunteer or South African contingent officers were appointed to

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70 Hawera and Normanby Star, 1 August 1914, 5; Poverty Bay Herald, 6 August 1914, 4; Colonist, 6 August 1914, 3.
71 Colonist, 6 August 1914, 3; Ashburton Guardian, 6 August 1914, 5; Evening Post, 7 August 1914, 8.
the expeditionary force only when there were no suitable Territorial candidates.\textsuperscript{74} The decision to base the expeditionary force on composite units meant that the best available personnel were utilised. In many cases younger, capable officers were chosen in preference to more senior officers. The growth in the number of regular officers available since 1909 was crucial to the successful raising of the NZEF; as it was, there were barely enough suitably qualified officers for important staff positions.\textsuperscript{75}

The development of the Territorial Force had necessitated the purchase of sizeable amounts of new equipment. This ranged from uniforms and personal equipment to small arms and new field guns and howitzers. This acquisition program meant that in 1914 New Zealand was relatively well placed to equip its expeditionary force.\textsuperscript{76}

The NZEF’s Main Body was ready to sail in late September, but did not finally leave Wellington until 16 October 1914. Of the just over 8,400 officers and men of the Main Body, 6,925 had previous military training. The largest components of this group were 3,602 serving Territorials. The other men with previous military training consisted of 1,543 former Volunteers and 515 men who previously served in the Territorial Force or Defence Rifle Clubs. The Territorial Force provided 285 of the Main Body’s 338 officers.\textsuperscript{77}

New Zealand was as a result of five years of military reform comparatively well prepared for war in August 1914. As those who drove the reform process had envisaged the system of compulsory military training, the Territorial Force and the other elements of the New Zealand military system withstood the test provided by

\textsuperscript{74} Godley to the editor, \textit{Evening Post}, 29 August 1914, Allen 1, M1/15; Godley to Allen, 19 August 1914, Allen 1, M1/15, ANZ; John Bell McClymont personal file, ANZ; \textit{NZEF 1914 War Diary}, iii-xxviii, Appendix V; Pugsley, \textit{Gallipoli}, 51, 47, 49-53.

\textsuperscript{75} Godley to Pearce, 21 October 1919, 419/39/1, Australian War Memorial, Canberra; \textit{Supplement to the Quarterly Army List of the New Zealand Forces, for October 1914 showing officers of the NZ Expeditionary Force} (Wellington: Government Printer, 1914), and related papers, Allen 1, D1/11, ANZ; \textit{AJHR}, 1915, 7-9; John Crawford (ed.), \textit{The Devil’s Own War: The First World War Diary of Brigadier-General Herbert Hart} (Auckland: Exisle, 2008), 20-3; Crawford (ed.), \textit{No Better Death}, 41-3.


\textsuperscript{77} Because the Territorial Force had not reached its full strength and because of the minimum age for service in the NZEF Godley’s hope that all members of an expeditionary force would be drawn from the force or its reserve proved impracticable: Pugsley, \textit{Gallipoli}, 47-8, 364, McGibbon, \textit{Path to Gallipoli}, 252-3.
a maelstrom of war between 1914 and 1918. A robust military system had been put in place that was well able to provide for the defence of the Dominion and to form the basis for a substantial contribution to the Empire’s military effort, which saw more than 100,000 men sent overseas from a country with a population of a little over a million during the Great War.\textsuperscript{78}

In the decade before the First World War, the military forces of Great Britain and Canada held to systems of voluntary recruitment while Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa each enacted some form of compulsory military training. At the end of the nineteenth century, none of these countries had possessed a strong tradition of peacetime conscription, Great Britain, in particular, remaining aloof from what was commonly regarded as a continental European institution. Safe behind the English Channel and defended by the Royal Navy, since the end of the Napoleonic Wars the depth of Britain’s concern for its landward defences had been demonstrated by the abolition of the militia ballot in 1836 and a tendency to treat its citizen military forces as a collection of uniformed social clubs until the formation of the Territorial Force in 1908.1 Even a succession of invasion scares during the late nineteenth century inspired little more action than the construction of coastal fortifications and a growing enthusiasm for the Militia, Yeomanry, and Volunteer movements – citizen formations that, however bewildering in their variety, were invariably raised by voluntary enlistment.

In the words of Richard Cobden, the voice of nineteenth-century English liberalism, the conscripted armies of Europe were ‘not kept up by the governments of those countries for the sake of meeting foreign enemies, but for the purpose of repressing their own subjects’.2 In this, Cobden was hardly alone in regarding conscription and a ‘standing army’ as being antithetical to British traditions. So deeply engrained were these traditions by the end of Queen Victoria’s reign that

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an aversion to conscription had come to be regarded as the common cultural heritage of Britain and its Dominions. Prior to the Boer War of 1899-1902, military service was regarded as a British subject’s duty only in time of war, and yet within the decade Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa each revised their Defence Acts to establish universal military training or ‘boy conscription’ in peacetime. Despite the best efforts of the British National Service League and the Canadian Defence League, however, both the mother country and its senior Dominion adhered to the voluntary principle until 1916 and 1917, respectively, by which time the First World War necessitated the enactment of wartime conscription as an emergency measure.

The focus of this paper will be to show that Canadians before the Great War were neither ignorant of, nor unaffected by developments in Australia and New Zealand. Some Canadians, in fact, hoped to follow the examples the ‘sister Dominions’ had provided. Further, in the years immediately preceding the First World War the establishment of compulsory military training in Australia and New Zealand presented Canadian military reformers with a persuasive argument in favour of their own country adopting comparable legislation. For example, between 1909 and 1914 Canadian compulsory training advocates cited Canada’s recent enactment of compulsory cadet training in several provinces as a first step towards following the example Australia and New Zealand had provided. By 1911, a Conservative electoral victory and the appointment of Colonel Sam Hughes as Minister of Militia seemed to indicate even more strongly that Canada would soon be heading in the same direction as its ‘sister Dominions’:

With Colonel Hughes at the head of the Dominion Militia Department it will not be long before the principle of universal service is adopted in Canada. He has already discussed the question with a committee of officers after ascertaining the views of the Government. Consequently the time is not far distant when all the Daughter Nations will be strong and well-organized military units based on the compulsory principle. The mother country alone stands aloof from the movement. Surely the stimulus of her children’s example must stir her to consider defence from an entirely different point of view ... If we will not take the advice of experts directly, let us take it indirectly through the example of the dominions.

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By 1913, Colonel Hughes himself went so far as to state publicly that he could ‘not see why, in the course of the next five years, universal training should not be introduced into Canada’. In this, however, Hughes could not have envisioned conscription for overseas service on the model that would ultimately be enacted by Canada’s Military Service Act of 1917. Rather, he was looking forward to the day when Canada might establish cadet and compulsory military training on the same model as Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.

Canadian naval historians have already demonstrated that Australia and New Zealand exerted an important influence on Canadian defence policies before the First World War. Roger Sarty, for example, has contrasted the centralising policies of the Australasian colonies, particularly New Zealand, with Canadian Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier’s determination to establish a fledgling navy under Ottawa’s control. From 1905 to 1910, Australia and New Zealand each at various times seemed to prefer direct financial contributions to an imperial fleet over the formation of independent naval forces – policies that were frequently cited by Canadian anglophiles and imperialists as an example of how a loyal Dominion should behave, thereby undermining support for Laurier’s Naval Service Bill of 1910 and contributing to his defeat in the general election of 1911. Richard Preston’s study of the imperial defence movement, meanwhile, has shown that the combined opposition of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand at various imperial conferences effectively blocked British proposals for a united imperial army based on set contributions by each of the Dominions. Together these works have gone some way towards understanding the influence of the sister Dominions in shaping Canadian defence policies, and yet Canadian responses to compulsory military training schemes adopted by Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa before the Great War have received far less attention. The result is that while Australian historians have quite often underlined Canadian influences on the military policies of their country, Canadian responses to developments

in the Australasian Dominions have received far less attention. Nevertheless, a survey of publications, speeches, and other documentary evidence from the period confirms that Canadian observers were keenly interested in Australian military developments before the First World War, most particularly the Commonwealth’s experiment with universal military training.

In Australia there is a well-developed body of literature discussing the enactment of compulsory military training laws before the First World War, including Tom Tanner’s *Compulsory Citizen Soldiers*, John Barrett’s *Falling In: Australians and ‘Boy Conscription’*, and Craig Wilcox’s *For Hearths and Homes*, all of which recount the history of Australian citizen soldiering during this period. From these works two common themes emerge: first, the pivotal role played by the Labor governments of both Australia and New Zealand in establishing compulsory training laws, and second, the degree to which an uncomfortable proximity to Imperial Japan influenced the adoption of universal military training laws. In regards to Japan, the origins of Australia’s 1909 *Defence Act* have been indirectly traced to the legacies of both the South African War and the Russo-Japanese War. Both wars had effectively sapped the imperial and racial self-confidence of Australians, one by exposing the glaring deficiencies of the British Army in South Africa and the other by showcasing the defeat of a European great power by an Asian opponent. Recent disasters attending Britain’s effort to subdue the Boers – most notably the humiliations of ‘Black Week’ in December 1899 – inspired Darwinistic fears of imperial and racial decline and raised intense public concern for the security of empire, both in the British Isles and its overseas Dominions. What seemed particularly disturbing to Britons throughout the empire ‘was the probability, increasingly accepted during the first decade of the new century, that in the very near future the British fitness to survive would be put to the test by an adversary even stronger and better armed than the Boers’. From their isolated vantage points in the South Pacific, the relative decline of British imperial strength and rising power of Imperial Japan was often an even more terrifying prospect for Australians and New Zealanders.

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By 1902 these fears for the future of the British Empire led to the formation in England of the National Service League (NSL), an organisation whose goal was to lobby in favour of compulsory military training and whose membership rolls included notable public figures such as Lord Roberts of Kandahar, Lord Garnet Wolseley, Admiral Charles Beresford, Rudyard Kipling, Lord Derby, and an estimated 2,000 other members by 1905. Although its campaign would ultimately fail to achieve its goals, not only did the NSL grow to include as many as 270,000 members by 1914, but it also inspired the creation of similar lobby groups overseas, such as the Australian National Defence League that was formed in 1905 under the leadership of Labor politician William Morris Hughes. With Hughes arguing that if all men had a duty to defend their country in time of war, reason demanded that they be prepared to do so in peacetime, by 1909 he and his supporters succeeded in having the Defence Act of Australia amended to allow for compulsory cadet drill for boys. This legislation was soon extended in 1911 to require physically fit boys from the ages of twelve to fourteen to receive preliminary training in school, followed by Senior Cadet training from the ages of fourteen to eighteen. Upon leaving school, these young men would graduate to Australia’s citizen force, to which they would be required to devote sixteen days of military training per year. New Zealand enacted legislation similar to Australia’s at approximately the same time. By its act of 1 July 1911, boys from the ages of twelve to fourteen underwent elementary ‘military’ training, mostly consisting of physical exercises conducted by the Education Department, albeit with an increasing emphasis on military drill from the ages of fourteen to eighteen. At eighteen, the young men were enlisted in the territorial militia, which was liable for service anywhere in New Zealand and to which they gave fourteen days training every year until the age of twenty-five. Beyond the age of twenty-five, they remained in the reserve force for at least another five years, or longer if they opted to join a civilian rifle association – something they were ‘strongly encouraged to do’. The following year, the Union of South Africa proposed a system in which boys were enrolled in cadet organisations from the ages of thirteen to seventeen, followed by their choice of serving in a coastal garrison force; enlistment as regular soldiers in the South African Mounted Rifles; or


11 ‘New Zealand [from The Army and Navy Gazette]’, *CMG* 26: 23 (12 December 1911), 15.
compulsory, unpaid training in the citizen force until the age of twenty-five, at which time they passed into the reserve.12

News of these developments throughout the far corners of the Empire reached Canada by various channels, ranging from telegraphed accounts in the daily press to a widely reported visit to the Dominion by a troop of Australian cadets, who passed through Vancouver and attended the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto while en route to a tour of the British Isles.13 Also available in Canada, British service periodicals such as the Broad Arrow, United Service Gazette, and the Army and Navy Gazette made frequent reference to developments in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, usually by relating events in the overseas Dominions to the organisation of Britain’s own Territorial Force. Almost invariably, these British commentaries on colonial military reforms were fitted into an ongoing and increasingly divisive debate that the National Service League’s campaign had created in the home country. In this, Lord Roberts’ proposals for universal training had come to represent a thorn in the side of Richard Haldane, who as Secretary of State for War in the Liberal government of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman sought to reorganise Britain’s assortment of militia, yeomanry, and volunteers into a Territorial Army. Determined not to alienate popular support for his program, Haldane retained voluntary enlistment over the NSL’s calls for peacetime conscription, a stance that drew the ardent support of the United Service Gazette. Meanwhile, in 1911 the Broad Arrow, unrelenting in its support for the National Service League and Lord Roberts, reported as follows on the state of the colonial militias:

It is not so much a matter of natural aptitude as of training and environment. In the Dominions two out of every three possible citizen soldiers can both ride and shoot … But in England, where the town-bred swamps the rural population, a Citizen Army cannot be brought into being so easily. This difference in the raw material at home and on the frontier is overlooked by the advocates of the Voluntary System.14

12 ‘South African Defence Scheme’, Canadian Defence 3: 12 (June 1912), 339.
13 ‘Australia’s Cadet System’, Toronto Mail and Empire, quoted in Canadian Defence 3: 4 (October 1911), 94; Saskatoon Daily Phoenix, 10 January 1911, quoted in Canadian Defence 3: 9 (March 1912), 292-3.
Glowing reports such as this presented Australians and South Africans in terms that many Canadians wished to see applied to themselves, and in many respects British references to the ‘town-bred’ swamping the rural played equally on Canadian fears of physical and moral decline amid the rapidly expanding cities like Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. That these British reports found a ready audience in Canada is evidenced by repeated references to the National Service League and the sister Dominions in military periodicals like the Canadian Field, Canadian Defence, and the Canadian Military Gazette. Each of these journals typically provided their own commentary on these events, for example by stressing the democratic and egalitarian nature of universal military training in Australia and New Zealand in an attempt to strengthen its appeal to a North American readership. Such was certainly the case when the Canadian Field, quoting from the Melbourne Standard of Empire, described the Australian system as a ‘truly democratic defence. [It] is the only system of defence which … can be equitable, honourable, just, and void of hardship for any section of the community.’

For Canadians before the First World War, the argument that other British Dominions were taking steps that their own country was not could be a bitter pill to swallow. From 1911 onwards, envious comparisons to the sister Dominions were frequently contributed to Canadian discussions of compulsory military service, including those taking place at two important militia conferences organised by Sam Hughes in 1911 and 1913, as well as speeches delivered to the Canadian Military Institute and other patriotic clubs, or published accounts

15 See also the contribution by Sir George Ross to The Defence Idea: ‘The Defence League begins with the home … In Ontario there is as much work to be done defending the home as in any other department of the public service. In modern civilization the rural districts are being vacated. The people are leaving the farms and migrating towards our towns and cities. Every page in British history and in ancient history as well as modern history is written with the dangers and losses to the national life through this profuse migration from the country. Is there anything that this League could do to idealize the rural home and to make the young man of Canada more contented?’: George Ross, ‘Canadian Individual Responsibility’, in The Defence Idea: Report of the Addresses at the First Convention of the Canadian Defence League, 9 September 1910 (Toronto: n.p., 1910), 10-12. The campaigns of the National Service League in Britain carried the same message, as seen in Lord Milner’s address to a Canterbury audience in October 1910: ‘War is an evil and a tremendous evil, but military training is not. It is a positive benefit to most nations. To none that I can imagine would it be a greater benefit than to a nation which suffers so much as ours does to-day from the congestion of its people in great cities’: ‘Universal Training and National Defence’, Canadian Field 2: 8 (February 1911), 18.

appearing in the daily press and military periodicals. Together, these sources provide numerous examples of Canadians drawing on the experience of the sister Dominions to argue the merits of universal military training. In this, however, no Canadian was a greater advocate of following the Australian model than Lieutenant-Colonel William Hamilton Merritt. On 21 November 1910, Merritt addressed an audience at the Canadian Military Institute on ‘The Old Militia Law of Canada, the New Militia Laws of Australia and New Zealand, and Lord Kitchener’s Report’. In this paper, Merritt contrasted the situation that recent British tours of military inspection had encountered during visits to Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.17 While British Inspector-General Sir John French was said to have encountered in Canada ‘a complete indifference to the matter of defence, and a marked disinclination to make personal self-sacrifice’, Lord Kitchener, according to Merritt, had discovered ‘in the Southern Seas a Commonwealth and a Dominion which had just adopted systems of naval and military training quite in line with modern progressive thought’.18 Merritt’s paper, subsequently reprinted for public distribution, was calculated to appeal broadly to both the nationalist and imperialist sentiments of Canadians. For example, Merritt followed his comparison of French and Kitchener’s tours with a discussion of the conditions existing in Canada before the British Conquest and under the terms of the early militia acts of Upper and Lower Canada. In citing these examples of compulsory militia service from the colonial period, Merritt aimed to convince Canadians they had somehow lost the spirit that ‘saved the country in the War of 1812’ – an argument that was well-calculated to play upon the sentiments of his readers. Meanwhile, he pointed out that Australia and New Zealand now had the honourable distinction of being first within the British Empire to adopt the principle of universal military training. While this was not strictly true, Natal having passed a law in 1906 compelling its young men to drill, Merritt’s message was clear: Canada was falling behind.19

Partially as a result of Merritt’s publications and speaking engagements, the Australian example soon became a popular topic for after-dinner speeches delivered to patriotic societies and mess dinners across Canada, such as when

19 Wilcox, For Hearths and Homes, 57.
Lieutenant-Colonel William Hendrie of the 48th Highlanders addressed the St Andrew’s Society of Toronto in 1912:

Look at Australia: Not nearly so wealthy a country as Canada, with, I should think, a future not possibly as good, with about half the population … and see what they are doing in that country … On the first of this year, she inaugurated this Universal Service or Military Training System, and there have been enrolled over 17,000 men in her Militia, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five … I firmly believe that a Universal Military Training System, for the young men of this country, would do a tremendous lot of good in teaching them some discipline, some manners, and some respect for their elders and superiors in office.20

Another example of the Australian scheme being conveyed to Canadians may be found in the speeches of Major Richard C. Holman, an Australian officer who arrived in Ottawa in 1912 as part of an exchange between members of the Canadian and Australian headquarters staff.21 In a series of speeches delivered in Ottawa and Montreal, and while assisting in the summer training of mounted militia regiments in the British Columbian interior, Holman rarely missed an opportunity to comment on the moral and physical benefits that were expected to accrue from the training of young Australians. In his country, he said, the social utility of military training was considered paramount, as evidenced when Alfred Deakin’s Labor government combined the new compulsory service laws with child labour legislation that imposed strict fines on any employer who prevented a boy from attending training. In describing these social aims of the new law to an Ottawa audience, Holman noted as well that the completion of military training would soon be made an eligibility requirement for public positions in Australia.

After Ottawa, Holman carried this presentation to Montreal, where he spoke to both the Victoria Rifles and the engineer regiment at Pointe St Charles.22 Finally, in delivering his speech to a substantial gathering of railway employees at the library of the Grand Trunk Literary and Scientific Institute in November 1912, he is reported to have said little regarding the military function of a citizen army, instead concentrating on the physical and moral benefits Australian boys

would derive from military training.\textsuperscript{23} To workers who were keen on protecting their jobs against immigrant labourers, he noted how the Japanese defeat of the Russians had aroused a great fear in his country owing to ‘the defeat and humiliation of a white race at the hands of Orientals’.\textsuperscript{24} Always conscious of his audience, Holman described how the army of Australia had for years been the plaything of every political party until the Labor Party took power and something was finally done. Although Australia’s new government did not ‘intend to upset every social and domestic condition, nor turn the industrial world upside down’, Holman did remark to the assembled railway employees that

\begin{quote}
the chief objects of the party were to help the man at the bottom, to abolish slums, and altogether to produce a healthier and better feeling among what was commonly called the working classes. In Australia, however, there was only one class, and that was a working class. There was a very large number of rich men, but there was absolutely no aristocracy, and there was an entire absence of that segregation and caste so prevalent in older countries. Consequently, when the Labor party decided on the creation of a citizen army … it was resolved that there should be no exemption, that the rich man’s son and the poor man’s son should train side by side.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

Holman’s lectures were followed the next year by a widely reported speaking tour by Colonel James Allen, New Zealand’s minister of defence, education, and finance. In the spring of 1913, Allen presented a series of addresses to patriotic organisations across Canada while passing through the country on his return to New Zealand from the recent Imperial Defence Conference in London. To Canadian Club meetings in Montreal, Ottawa, and Vancouver, and both the Empire Club and Canadian Military Institute of Toronto, Allen spoke on issues relating to imperial defence and New Zealand’s new system of compulsory training that was by this time in its second year of operation. By all accounts, Allen was warmly received in Canada and his visit, quite predictably, became the occasion for expressions of imperial solidarity, ‘showing not only a well reasoned loyalty to the whole Empire, but a sound appreciation of the younger nations, fast becoming its most important parts’.\textsuperscript{26} The content of his speeches,

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{23} ‘Montreal’, \textit{CMG} 27: 21 (12 November 1912), 9-10.
\textsuperscript{26} ‘New Zealand’s War Minister’, \textit{CMG} 28: 9 (13 May 1913), 6.
\end{quote}
meanwhile, highlighted several points of similarity between Allen's policies for New Zealand and those of Minister Sam Hughes in Canada. In addressing the Canadian Club of Ottawa, for example, Allen commented on the apathy that most New Zealanders felt towards national defence and military preparedness, saying, ‘You cannot make the people take an interest until you utilize their own national aspirations. We shall in New Zealand be determining on some policy that will give us more interest from our people.’27 His comments, delivered to an Ottawa audience just after Sam Hughes’s military conference of 1913, where the focus had been on proposals for increasing public interest in the militia, invited clear comparisons with the Canadian minister’s efforts. At this time, Hughes was doing everything in his power to extend compulsory cadet training throughout all provinces and to broaden the appeal of militia service by stressing the social utility of military training. Finally, in a comment that underlines another point of similarity between Hughes and Allen, the New Zealand minister took the opportunity to comment on the mother country’s ongoing refusal to move in the same direction as its overseas Dominions by enacting compulsory military training: ‘There are some … who cannot see beyond the shores of England. There are some prominent English statesmen whose minds are contracted. They cannot see that we colonies are getting our legs. We are away from the nursery strings. We want to feel that we ourselves are men.’28 Already, he said, compulsory military training in New Zealand had produced good results in terms of the better physique of young people and a higher order of patriotism. In time, such benefits only seemed to promise a greater future for Allen’s corner of the empire.

Although Colonel Allen’s tour drew a significant amount of Canadian attention to his country’s very successful system of compulsory training, by 1912 there were already indications from Australia that compulsion could not always be made to operate without its share of difficulty. While New Zealand experienced few problems, aside from a noisy deputation of socialist, labour, and peace organisations that demanded an audience with Allen – who apparently listened to their views but then delivered a sermon of his own on universal

28 Ibid.
training as a physical, social, and industrial benefit to a nation that adopted it twenty-nine – the situation was more difficult in Australia. In July 1912, the Montreal Gazette reported that the ‘Australians Won’t Drill’ and went on to describe how in the first year of compulsory training there had been over ten thousand prosecutions of Australian youth for failing to attend drill. Five thousand of these cases had been reported in Sydney alone, where magistrates were being kept busy imposing £5 fines before turning the young men over to military custody. By this time, the Australian Freedom League was handing out pamphlets to incoming immigrants explaining in graphic detail how their children would be conscripted into the army should they elect to remain in Australia. Although Australian military historian Jeffrey Grey has pointed to these thousands of prosecutions under the Defence Act as evidence of significant resistance to universal training in Australia, he does stress that it is the overall ratio of prosecutions that needs to be kept in perspective. With some 27,749 prosecutions between 1911-13 representing only 2 percent of those Australian boys who became eligible for training during this period, and with many of these charges resulting from only minor infringements, Grey concludes that such prosecutions were ‘not in themselves symptomatic of an attempt to buck the system’. But when viewed from across the Pacific, the difficulties Australia was experiencing were certainly enough to raise doubts. From a Canadian perspective, Australia’s adoption of universal training had not been without hardship, an experience that counselled caution should Canada seek to follow its lead.

Meanwhile, Australia’s experience of compulsory training was already being fitted into an ongoing British debate, with those who were either for or against the proposals of the National Service League seeking to bend reports from Sydney or Melbourne to suit their own particular agenda. The United Service Gazette, for example, invariably highlighted the negative and disruptive aspects of the new Australian laws:

> Australia, a far distant part of the British Empire, isolated from other white men’s countries, and within striking distance of the swarming yellow hordes, has thought it prudent to introduce compulsory military training.

29 On New Zealand’s experience, see ‘The New Zealand Defence Act [from Broad Arrow]’, CMG 27: 10 (28 May 1912), 15.
and the danger must be considered indeed great, since it induced a Labor
government to take such a step. But what already is the result? Difficulty
in getting the men to obey the law as to service in the ranks, and further
difficulty in getting the officers, ‘nearly all men who have to earn their own
living, as distinguished from the man with private means and unlimited
leisure,’ to sacrifice the time necessary to become really familiar with active
service duties.32

The Broad Arrow, meanwhile, continued in its support for Lord Roberts and
his National Service League by taking a completely opposite view of compulsory
training in Australia. In 1913, it reported that ‘for the first time young Australia
beyond the cadet stage has been assembled in camp, and the country was able
to judge for itself the effect. As from all quarters there was nothing but praise,
the compulsory principle is held to justify its adoption ... The opponents of the
principle, on the other hand, have seen all their prophecies falsified’.33 Clearly these
opposing interests in Britain were simply taking from Australia whatever ‘lessons’
would best support their own arguments – bending their accounts as necessary
and in accordance with their views on the National Service League’s campaign in
their own country. This tendency of the British press even became the subject of a
complaint by Thomas Mackenzie, New Zealand’s high commissioner in London,
who in 1913 told a British audience at a Trafalgar Day dinner that the only
difficulty his country had experienced in its new military training scheme had
been a result of the ‘impertinent interference of those in Great Britain who were
only concerned with pointing to New Zealand as proof of the failure of universal
training’. He then recounted one notable example where a Scottish newspaper
had printed ‘a half column of abuse directed at New Zealand’, but then refused
to print Mackenzie’s reply unless he paid for it at advertising rates.34 Meanwhile,
the Canadian Military Gazette continued carrying selections from both sides of
the debate, its editor remarking laconically that some degree of difficulty had to
be expected: ‘Men may vote, as in Australia, for some kind of compulsory service,
but the voter seems to have the idea that the other fellow will have to do the work.
And so it comes about that when the ranks have to be filled and the officers to be
educated, there is a hanging back, and a difficulty in enforcing the law.’35

32 ‘Compulsory Service Difficulties in Australia’, United Service Gazette, 2 May 1912, quoted in
33 ‘Compulsory Service in Australia [from Broad Arrow]’, CMG 28: 14 (22 July 1913), 14.
34 ‘A New Zealander Says Some British Papers Are Unfair’, Canadian Defence 5: 5 (November
1913), 79.
By 1913, enough was known about compulsory military training in Australia and New Zealand for Canadians to conclude that the system was working, though not without difficulty; that it was costing more than originally anticipated; and that the conditions which had led Australia and New Zealand to adopt their new laws differed significantly from those prevailing in Canada. Foremost among these differences was the uncomfortable closeness of the Australasian Dominions to Imperial Japan, a rising and aggressive nation whose alliance with Britain was due to expire in only a few short years. Although speeches delivered by Holman, Allen, and other supporters of compulsory training legislation had usually preferred to stress the progressive and egalitarian elements of compulsory training in Australia and New Zealand, just as important in enacting the new laws had been an overriding desire by these two countries to preserve their sparsely populated territories for white settlement. South Africa faced a comparable situation, with the combined British and Dutch population outnumbered by indigenous Africans by a ratio of ten to one, an imbalance that provided the necessary justification for the Union to propose its own version of compulsory service. By this reckoning, however, the factors that had led Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa each to invoke compulsory military training found few direct parallels in Canada – a fact that Canadian opponents of compulsory training lost no time in pointing out. In the House of Commons, for example, Frank Carvell of Carleton, New Brunswick, accused Sam Hughes of confusing Canada’s position with that of the sister Dominions in a blatant and unnecessary attempt to increase spending on the militia: ‘My honourable friend does not tell us why they are training their people in Australia and New Zealand. He knows there is an excitement [there] that can never affect Canada … He knows that it is because of the fear of an oriental invasion … and I do not think he could conceive it as possible that those conditions could arise in Canada for generations to come.’ At a time when President Woodrow Wilson was openly promising before all the world that ‘the United States will never again seek one additional foot of territory by conquest’, differences between the strategic positions of Canada and the other Dominions were such that a clear majority of Canadians saw no pressing need

36 See Tanner, Compulsory Citizen Soldiers.
37 ‘The South African Defence Bill [from Broad Arrow], CMG 26: 24 (26 December 1911), 11.
38 Frank Carvell, House of Commons, Debates, 19 March 1912, 5506-7.
for their country to follow the examples provided by Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.

Yet, for a minority of Canadians who remained unconvinced by President Wilson’s promises, or who supported compulsory military training on principle, or for its perceived social utility, Australia and New Zealand continued to serve as examples of what could be achieved by progressive British Dominions that were intent on fostering discipline and good citizenship among their young men and boys. In this regard, it is important to remember that New Zealand, in particular, was considered by many to be a uniquely progressive part of the British Empire – something that must have given pause to anyone in Canada who automatically associated compulsory training with a ‘standing army’ and ‘Prussian militarism’.40 Meanwhile, those who grounded their support on military necessity – whether their horizons remained limited to the defence of Canada itself or whose view extended to the British Empire overseas and the darkening situation in Europe – emphasised the social utility of cadet training and pointed to the examples of Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa as offering a vehicle by which their arguments might be made more acceptable to the Canadian public. According to one contributor to the Canadian Military Gazette,

There is only one way to overcome the indifference of the people regarding the necessity of providing a proper defence force and that is to adopt a modified form of universal service … To meet existing needs in times of peace and to prepare ourselves against the day of crisis we must put aside our ideas of a voluntary and highly paid militia and reconstruct our views on the lines adopted by Australia and New Zealand and shortly to be adopted by the Union of South Africa.41

Still others were even more emphatic in their references to the sister Dominions, apparently less concerned with educating public opinion than with enlisting sentiments of envy and shame in support of their cause: ‘When New Zealand, Australia and South Africa are leading the way, it would not seem to require much


courage for Canada to follow. Let us hope that our national intelligence may rise to this opportunity and cease to listen to the clap-trap and empty twaddle of the peace-at-any-price party.”42

By 1912, any hopes that Canadian military reformers might have entertained of their country following the examples set by the sister Dominions would have centred on the extension of compulsory cadet training in Canada. With such training already established in several provinces under the auspices of the Strathcona Trust of 1909, there is ample evidence that significant numbers of influential Canadians, including the minister of militia and defence, viewed compulsory cadet training as the thin edge of the wedge and a necessary preliminary before Canada could adopt a more extensive system of compulsory training. Far-fetched as this might seem with the benefit of hindsight, from 1912-14 Canadian supporters of this idea could have pointed out that in every other British Dominion where compulsory cadet training had been adopted, its introduction was soon followed by more far-reaching legislation extending military training to young men as well. That was certainly the objective of the Canadian Defence League (CDL), an organisation that drew frequent reference to Australia and New Zealand in urging that all Canadian boys should receive preliminary military training while in school, followed at the age of eighteen by four months of recruit training in the militia and shorter periods of compulsory training for the two summers after that. Despite its small numbers, including a total of 831 members at the end of 1911, by 1912 the CDL appeared confident that its campaign would, in time, achieve its goals. This all changed in the winter of 1914, when a severe economic recession in Canada disrupted its fundraising efforts. Meanwhile, the growing threat of war in Europe called into question the need for reorganising Canada’s defences on a home defence model, rather than preparing to send an expeditionary force to Europe. In January of 1914, faced with the necessity of at least postponing its campaign, the Canadian Defence League’s journal explained the situation as follows:

Australia is already trying compulsory service, but Australia had in the ‘yellow peril’ something to quicken the understanding of the Australian voter. For all that, we notice that strong opposition is growing up there, and further, that the scheme is costing infinitely more than the estimate,

an increase of disquieting amount. To ask the people of Canada at the present time, a time when many are feeling the squeeze of tight money, and all the excessive cost of living, would be to set back militia efficiency for a decade.43

It would be impossible to conclude whether Canada, in time, might have followed Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa’s lead by enacting compulsory military training in peacetime. Had there been more time before the First World War, or had different economic circumstances allowed the Canadian Defence League to continue its campaign past the winter of 1914, the results might have been different or exactly as they were. What is clear, however, is that the examples provided by imperial ‘siblings’ in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa were compelling ones for Canadians before the First World War, and that proposals for compulsory military training in Canada were often phrased in terms of what was being accomplished in the sister Dominions. It is impossible to say with certainty whether Canada’s retention of voluntary recruiting owed more to a perceived absence of threats close to home, a growing realisation that Canada’s next war would be fought in Europe, an unquestioning adherence to British models of military organisation by militia authorities and government officials in Ottawa, or, as was argued by the editor of the Canadian Military Gazette, the differing cultural heritages and ethnicities of the individual Dominions:

The population of Australia is very homogenous, and is practically entirely of British extraction. There are some five millions of the Anglo-Saxon breed in that country to draw from. Are there more than that number of the same race in Canada? We doubt it very much. We number, at a low estimate, two and a half millions of French-Canadians, and we have besides tens of thousands of immigrants who have come to us from the United States, from Galicia, and from other non-British countries, within the last few years. It may be argued that we have no right to exclude the French-Canadians from our numbers when making a comparison, since this war is as much theirs as it is ours, and their mother country is as deeply involved as is Britain herself.44

43 ‘Recruiting a Failure’, CMG 29: 1 (13 January 1914), 6.
Whatever the cause, one clear consequence of Canadian inaction before the war, however, was that when the country did finally introduce conscription in 1917, it did so on account of a wartime emergency and in a manner that proved so divisive that it nearly tore the country apart.

Consequently, by the third year of the war it had become clear to Canadians that Australia, with a population of only five million as compared to Canada’s eight, had mobilised and sent overseas an army of close to the same size as the celebrated Canadian Corps. From this perspective, Australia appeared to be pulling a proportionally greater weight in the conflict, a difference that Canadian observers readily attributed to the country’s pre-war system of compulsory training: ‘Alone in the South Pacific, she has had perforce to arm, and the outbreak of the war found her much better prepared for the conflict than was Canada.’ 45

Despite these laws, every soldier that Australia sent overseas during the conflict was a volunteer, the country twice rejecting conscription for overseas service in plebiscite votes. Canada, meanwhile, without such system in place before the war, was by 1917 forced into the desperate expedient of conscripting its young men under the Military Service Act and sending them to the front, where the first Canadian conscripts arrived in 1918 to take part in the bloody Hundred Days’ Offensive that ended the war. Clearly, despite their many similarities and common heritage, Canada and Australia ultimately endured very different experiences of war and conscription, a difference that Canadians might easily have attributed to Australia’s more thorough-going system of military training before the First World War.

45 Ibid.
This year marks the centenary of the founding of the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in 1911. The College has had a fundamental impact on the Australian profession of arms. Although College graduates had served in the First World War, they were few and had minimal wider impact. The small cadre of permanent officers continued to exist to support the larger citizen militia. But by the Second World War, graduates had commanded divisions and held staff jobs at the highest levels. By 1946, the College had graduated 690 Australian officers. Moreover, after 1947, the profession of arms in Australia had matured to the extent that Duntroon graduates would serve in a standing, regular army, rather than train and administer a largely citizen one.

That Duntroon had an impact is undeniable but what influence did it have on the professionalisation of the officer corps? To answer this, one must first define professionalism and professionalisation. As such, this paper will be divided into four parts. First, I will discuss briefly the development of the professions generally, with special reference to the profession of arms in Australia. From here, the criteria by which we can judge whether an avenue of human endeavour may rightly be called a profession will be stated. Against these criteria, I will examine the status quo ante of the pre-1911 Australian military forces to see what professional developments had taken place. As I will demonstrate, crucial foundations for the military profession were laid during these decades. Next I will discuss the initial intent for Duntroon and examine how this contributed to creating or perhaps cementing the profession of arms in Australia. Lastly, to determine the extent to which RMC professionalised the officer corps, I will briefly examine the Army in the period up to 1947 against these established criteria.
The Military Profession

What is a profession and professionalism? These terms have tended to be over-used or indeed, misused to describe certain occupations. One definition of a profession is:

a relatively high status occupation whose members apply abstract knowledge to solve problems in a particular field of endeavour. The definition identifies three elements critical to the idea of a profession: high status, which (is linked to) a notion of legitimacy; applied abstract knowledge (which is) the source of expertise; and a field of endeavour or jurisdiction for problem solving ... we can refer to these three simply as expertise, jurisdiction and legitimacy.¹

Another broader definition is that

a profession is an occupation that requires advanced training in a specialised field. The purpose of long and intensive training is to maintain high levels of achievement and conduct according to standards set either by the rules of the organisation or opinion of peers ... (a profession also) needs to be able to serve the client to the best of (its) abilities.²

The concepts of expertise and legitimacy are well understood. There are two other pre-conditions for a profession. The mastery of this body of knowledge or 'professional theory' must be distinct and acquired only through education provided by the occupation in question.³ As such, this mastery of theory gives the professional a certain authority over non-professionals (or other professionals from another occupational group) and demonstrates the uniqueness and social worth of this profession vis-à-vis others.⁴

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⁴ In this regard, the sociologist Andrew Abbott has argued that the history of professions is best understood as a continual clash over areas of work or jurisdictions. He believes that professions tried to claim or create jurisdictions over various forms of work by inventing forms of abstract knowledge to accomplish said work. From here, they sought recognition of this jurisdiction within the wider workplace, in public opinion and before the state itself. Logically, this jurisdiction also leads to a certain level of autonomy granted to the profession. This is because the profession has a monopoly over its specialised knowledge and skills and a monopoly on judging who is competent within the profession. See Andrew Abbott, 'The Army and the Theory of Professions', in Matthews (ed.), The Future of the Army Profession, 534, and Stephen John Harris, Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 2.
Moreover, a profession cannot exist without a dual relationship: it must serve a client and that client must deem the profession to have utility. A profession must also be deemed as such by the society in which it operates. “The acceptance by society of a group of experts with specialised knowledge is important in establishing the status and prestige of that group within that community.” Enforcing professional standards as the sine qua non of professional competency and demonstrating the continued need for the unique skills of the profession are the two key determinants in maintaining that prestige.

With this basic understanding in place, let us turn to the military profession in particular. Morris Janowitz considers the military professional to be unique because

7 Most sources agree that military professionalism as a concept did not emerge until after 1800. This does not suggest that professional traits or characteristics did not exist prior to this. Mercenaries and amateur aristocratic officers alike often demonstrated considerable interest, skill and devotion to their trade; however their motivations were most likely pecuniary or bound with honour and adventure respectively. Undoubtedly, some attributes of a professional army officer had been demonstrated over time, but it would take some key developments over a number of centuries to usher in the preconditions for true professionalism to take root. The first of these was the growth of the nation-state. The shift from a feudal society meant that the military professional was now loyal to a government, a nation and its people rather than essentially a private employer in the form of a lord. The nation became the ‘client’ for the military’s services. Secondly, only the nation state could generate the wealth to maintain large, technologically-advanced standing armies; the state became the sole potential employer of the military professional which reinforced his loyalty to the state. With the nation state and its militaries, came arms races. Brian Bond has suggested that the rate of military professionalisation in a given country was related to the extent to which that country felt its security threatened by a neighbour. Furthermore, bursts of reform of the military profession usually only followed a disastrous military defeat; hence the rise of Prussia as the pre-eminent military power in the nineteenth century after its humiliation in 1806. For Britain, it would take the poor performance in Crimea for such reforms to begin; more pertinent to this study, were the reforms pertaining to professional education and the higher command after the British Army’s performance in South Africa. So by the mid to late nineteenth century, most armies began to realise that the increasing complexity of military technology and the demands of raising and then effectively wielding large militaries, effectively ended the possibility of military service being a part-time or amateur pursuit. Importantly such developments led to the recognition that would-be officers needed to be specially educated in military schools before commissioning, rather than trained haphazardly after commissioning. This also meant that the military would, in future, place a ‘greater premium than hitherto on professional zeal, qualifications and length of service as against privilege stemming from birth, influential connection or wealth’. See Morris Janowitz, The Professional Soldier: A social and political portrait (New York: The Free Press, 1960), 6, and Brian Bond, The Victorian Army and the Staff College, 1854-1914 (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), 13.
he ‘is an expert in war-making and in the organised use of violence’. Moreover, the officer corps represents the elite of the profession because entry into it requires ‘prolonged training’ which equips him to ‘render specialised service’. A profession however, is more than a collection of people with a specialised skill. A profession also develops a group identity and a system of self-regulation; this self-regulation includes the evolution of its own ethics, standards of performance and internal administration. Professionalism, in the case of the military, also implies that this ‘management of violence’ could no longer be conducted by any other than those who have committed to a career of such service.

In the military context, the danger has been to conflate the notions of a regular soldier with that of a professional and a standing army with that of a professional military. Much of this is due to misunderstanding the nature and purpose of training, which disseminates skills by instruction, and professional knowledge which is the theoretical and practical understanding of a subject. As such, most academics believe that only officers, who have devoted themselves to mastering the esoteric body of corporate knowledge over extended periods, can rightly be called military professionals. Samuel Huntington has argued that while enlisted ranks form part of an army’s organisational bureaucracy, they are not part of its professional bureaucracy. Moreover, they could not be considered professional because they do not bear the professional responsibility which the officer corps

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9 Ibid., 5.
10 Ibid., 6.
11 Ibid., 178-82. The officer corps must therefore be experts in the management and command of violence to defeat an enemy. Samuel Huntington largely agrees with Janowitz. In his classic work, *The Soldier and the State*, he wrote that ‘the modern officer corps is a professional body and the modern military officer a professional man’. The key tenets he believed that the military profession demonstrated were special expertise, responsibility to society as a whole, and group unity and identity. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1957), 7-18.
12 Matthew Moten, ‘Who is a member of the military profession?’, *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 62 (July 2011): 15.
must accept; he classed them specialists in the *application* of violence rather than its management.\textsuperscript{14}

This is not to suggest that enlisted personnel cannot demonstrate elements of professionalism. One recent article on the subject offered that enlisted soldiers ‘may not be lacking in professionalism because of anything inadequate or missing within them. Rather, the structure of military service – the way they are treated, trained, educated, and developed – prohibits many soldiers from being considered professional.’\textsuperscript{15} For the purposes of this paper, I will only consider the question of military professionalism via the prism of the officer corps and the establishment of RMC.

So, based on what we have discussed, we may deem that the military is a profession and by inference, the officer a military professional. For our purposes in examining the rise of military professionalism in Australia, we may state that the following are a profession’s tenets:

- a profession demonstrates unique expertise within a distinct area that is deemed to solve a societal problem;
- this expertise may only be gained through formal, theoretical education;
- this education can only be obtained through schools controlled by the profession;
- the profession controls entry to those schools and maintains its own administration and ongoing standards for performance and behaviour;
- the profession serves a client, in this case the nation, and its own standards reinforce this notion of service;
- these demonstrable standards also grant it a degree of autonomy from society; and
- the profession is considered a ‘calling’ whose members identify strongly with it, have a group identity and is highly regarded by society as a whole.

\textsuperscript{14} Huntington, *Soldier and State*, 17-18.
\textsuperscript{15} Kevin M. Bond, ‘Are We Professionals?’, *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 58 (July 2010): 67. Bond discusses the two approaches to determining whether a sphere of endeavour may rightly be considered a profession. He refers to the first and most commonly accepted method, as ‘essentialism’, that is identifying the essential features of a profession. This is the method which Huntington, Janowitz et al. have used. The second and less accepted method is known as ‘functionalism’, which aims to justify professionalism in terms of function within society.
The First Steps: Professional Developments to 1911

What was the state of the nascent Australian military profession in the decade post-Federation? The establishment of RMC in 1911 did not represent a ‘Year Zero’, although it was the seminal event in the progression of the military profession in Australia. Instead there were small stirrings, false starts, bold moves and policy missteps before RMC was eventually established. Nonetheless, many of the foundations of professionalism were present and more importantly, there were officers, both British and Australian, who recognised the need for professionalism to take root in the Australian military.

Albert Palazzo, when describing influences which affect military organisations, has noted:

Each country possesses national characteristics that help shape the organisation of its army according to the requirements of its individual situation … these characteristics tend to be inflexible and exert their influence over considerable lengths of time.16

The development of the post-Federation Australian military is a case in point. Upon Federation, the new nation inherited six disparate military forces from the former colonies, all of which had their own organisations, traditions and traits. Until the Defence Act was proclaimed in 1904, the new army in fact continued to operate under the six sets of previous colonial legislation.17 Ironically, when one considers the ardent, nationalistic debates concerning the future of Australian defence policy, the new nation also inherited military forces at war as part of an imperial campaign, with some colonial elements serving overseas in South Africa at the time of Federation.

These former colonial forces also brought with them the traditional British mistrust of standing armies and a preference for part-time and volunteer (both paid and unpaid) forces. This was underpinned by faith in the Royal Navy’s supremacy and despite concerns about being committed carte blanche to imperial adventures, most Australians held a general belief in the efficacy of operating within the imperial defence framework. With the so-called Braddon clause in place –

which required three-quarters of all Commonwealth customs and excise revenue to be remitted back to the states for the first decade – the new Commonwealth Government sought to spend as little on defence as possible while maintaining the control of its overall defence policy.\(^{18}\) The notion of a professional military was almost non-existent. To provide some context, when the former colonial militaries were inherited by Commonwealth in 1901, there were around 1,400 permanents and 26,000 militia and volunteers.\(^{19}\) These permanent soldiers were instructors, administrators, engineers and garrison artillerymen only.\(^{20}\) The Defence Act would enshrine the reliance on part-time forces for economy, belief in the efficacy of the citizen soldier and concerns that a larger permanent force might lead to European-style militarism.

Military professionalism in Australia can rightly be traced to the colonial commandants, those British officers employed in the decades immediately before Federation by their respective colonies to improve all aspects of defence therein. Most, if not all, took to this task with zeal and competence. When the last of the British regiments left in 1870, a vacuum was created which was never filled by the hodge-podge of militia and volunteer units. It also removed the only source of professional independent military advice available to colonial governments.\(^{21}\)

Much has been written about the imperial agenda that the commandants brought with them. At the time there were constant laments that suitable Australian officers should command the colonial forces; however Australian officers with the requisite training, operational experience and organisational capacity did not exist. As Stephen Clarke notes, ‘it was a matter of professionalism ... it was not a prejudice against colonial officers per se as a quest for professional officers’.\(^{22}\)

To be sure, there were imperial agenda at work; some of the commandants looked ahead to a time when their colonial forces might be integrated to a wider imperial army. In many ways, the despatching of colonial contingents for service


\(^{19}\) Peter Dennis et al., *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, 2nd edn (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2008), 131.

\(^{20}\) For a consolidated table of the various strengths and composition of the colonial military forces upon Federation, see Craig Stockings, *The Making and Breaking of the Post Federation Australian Army, 1901-1909* (Canberra: Land Warfare Studies Centre, 2007), 10.


\(^{22}\) Ibid., 21.
in South Africa realised this aspiration and was testimony to their success in raising forces to a minimum standard. Whatever controversy they generated in relation to their imperial scheming or otherwise, the colonial commandants – and later the first and only General Officer Commanding, Major General Sir Edward Hutton – transferred the practices of the modern British Army to Australia, mentored a number of up-and-coming Australian-born officers, established schools of instructions, and laid the foundations so that one day, Australian officers with the requisite knowledge and experience would command at the highest levels.23

Hutton, as GOC, was directly (and solely) responsible to the Minister for Defence for all matters military. During his tenure from early 1902 through to late November 1904, he worked in a time of extreme ambiguity with no Defence Act or cogent defence policy in place, financial parsimony, and from some politicians and media, an aggressive nationalistic public debate. He was an early advocate of an Australian military college, but he also believed that the citizen soldier should be the foundation of the new nation’s defence.24 His lasting contribution was unifying the colonial forces into one Commonwealth military and then ambitiously organising it into mobile field forces and static garrison units. Despite his well-documented faults, Hutton’s profound contribution to the development of the Australian military and military professionalism cannot be denied.

The Australian military continued to benefit with the close association with British forces, especially since there were a number of military reforms taking place at this time pertaining to military education, administration and the higher command of its forces. In 1904, after weaknesses were identified in the British staff during the Boer War, an inquiry recommended the establishment of a General Staff, specially selected, divided into branches and responsible for providing professional advice. It also recommended the abolition of the position of General Officer Commanding and that it be replaced by an Army Council. The Defence Act, when it was finally implemented, reflected these changes and Australia followed suit with the creation of the Military Board in 1905, along with an Inspector-General who would act as an independent auditor. Later, in 1909, the position of Chief of General Staff, and first member of the Military Board, was created and then in 1911, positions and responsibilities were codified further for greater accountability. The

23 Ibid., 318-19.
24 This belief was as much a vote of approval in the efficacy of citizen soldiers, as much as his political belief that a military obligation was a duty and right of the Anglo-Saxon communities throughout the world.
establishment of the Military Board represented what was considered best practice at the time, provided greater accountability to the Minister and also a greater degree of professional regulation with the military itself. Moreover the implementation of a general staff system, designed to act in concert with an imperial general staff, focussed the limited number of permanent staff officers on what we might call today ‘core tasks’, that is the planning of operations, collection of intelligence and the training and equipping of forces ready for war.25

The nascent Australian military also profited from exchanges with the United Kingdom to improve their professional knowledge. Some permanent officers were attached overseas on regimental service while others benefited greatly from exchanges to the United Kingdom for specialist training.26 For example, in 1897 the then Lieutenant (later Major-General and Chief of General Staff) Walter Coxen of the Queensland permanent artillery was sent to the School of Artillery at Shoeburyness to complete courses in garrison and field artillery. This allowed him to become Chief Instructor at the School of Gunnery in Sydney in 1902.27 In 1904, Hutton argued for an officer to attend the Staff College at Camberley, and nominated the then Lieutenant C.B.B. White to attend.28 The Australian military profession surely benefited from White's attendance, as he was later to become perhaps Australia’s finest staff officer. This said, between 1904 and 1911, only four Australian officers attended either Camberley or Quetta, meaning that for a long time, many staff positions had to be filled with ex-British Army or non-staff college trained officers.29

There had been other occasional sporadic steps towards creating and maintaining a corpus of professional knowledge, such as the establishment of the Royal United Service Institute in a number of cities, which allowed officers to keep abreast of news ideas and developments. Later military ideas would also be disseminated by the Commonwealth Military Journal. It was short-lived; established in 1911, it ceased publication in 1916, and the military profession would have to wait until the end of

28 Wood lists the figure of thirty-four officers during 1901-1910: Wood, The Chiefs of the Australian Army, 1901-1914, 46.
29 Bond, The Victorian Army and the Staff College, 238.
the Second World War for similar means to be recreated. Tentative steps toward a more formal military education were taken in response to developments in Britain. The University of Sydney Diploma of Military Science was the first formal military qualification issued in Australia and was offered from 1906 to 1916. Significantly, the course was designed primarily for the betterment of militia officers, rather than the professional education of permanent officers. It offered subjects in military topography, military history, administration and military law, strategy and tactics and military engineering. Figures vary, but it seems that at its peak it had around thirty students enrolled, with a larger number of students attending lectures or taking the odd subject as part of other studies. When the course finally fell into abeyance, no more than twenty-five full diplomas had been awarded.

So in those decades prior to the establishment of RMC, some of those prerequisites of professionalism were already evident in the embryonic Australian military. With the Defence Act, no matter how flawed the document itself, the Australian military was granted the political legitimacy to exist and hence recognition that it was meeting a key societal need. Moreover, the Defence Act confirmed civil control the military, enshrining the notion that the military served the Government; therefore the nation would be the client of this budding profession. Distinct and unique expertise was slowly developed within the Australian military. This was through the emulation of developments abroad and the garnering of operational experience on colonial service. However, it was the direct and indirect transmission of knowledge via colonial commandants and British-trained officers in Australia and the training and exchanges of selected staff overseas that really began to generate the unique military expertise within Australia required to be acknowledged as a profession.

Yet for all these tentative steps towards a military profession in Australia, there remained a number of obstructions that hindered its full development. The Australian Government decided to rely on part-time soldiers and maintain a very small cadre of professional soldiers. This retarded any meaningful growth of the profession. Moreover, these professional soldiers most likely did not consider themselves fellow members of the one profession. The organisation of the post-Federation permanent forces generally reflected the structures inherited from the

colonies, namely administrative and instructional staffs and a limited number of specialists such as gunners and engineers. These were considered separate organisations; each body had its own training requirements, career progression and maintained its own seniority lists. Although permanent soldiers were variously referred to as members of the ‘Permanent Forces’ or ‘Permanent Military Forces’, there was no overt group cohesion or collective self-identification with this nominal organisation. Moreover, the issue of prescribed establishments also meant that there were limited opportunities to first join, and then later be promoted in, these organisations. This meant that it was difficult to portray a career in the permanent forces as a particularly lucrative or attractive choice.

Respect and societal standing are preconditions for a profession; in many ways the worth by which a society views a profession can be gauged by the remuneration of its members. For most politicians, the post-Federation permanent forces were most likely viewed as an expensive, but necessary evil to maintain the nation’s citizen army. Thus the size of the permanent forces was kept at the absolute minimum to train and administer the militia. Moreover, the personnel costs of this small force were constantly under scrutiny. The proceedings of the Military Board during this time are full of minutes, submissions and discussion on pay and conditions, with the Board often deliberating on the merits of individual pay claims for relatively minor amounts. The Military Board was concerned, quite correctly, that the pay and conditions of the permanent forces, relative to other professions, made it a less than attractive career choice. The citizen army – and therefore the foundation

33 For a breakdown of the different establishments for officers in the permanent forces, see A2653, Military Board Proceedings, 1912, ‘Table A to Item 12 for meeting of the Board held on 10 June’, June 1912, National Archives of Australia (NAA). By 1912, the establishment of permanent officers was spread across six separate areas viz: The Administrative and Instructional Staff (A & I Staff), the Australian Field Artillery (RAFA), the Australian Garrison Artillery (RAGA), Royal Australian Engineers, Australian Army Service Corps, Australian Army Medical Corps. The various colonial artillery units had been grouped together to form the Royal Australian Artillery by Hutton, but following developments in Britain, Australia delinked the field and garrison units into separate entities in 1911.


35 See for example Grey, The Australian Army, 31; A2653, Military Board Proceedings, Minutes, 10 May 1912, and A2653, Military Board Proceedings, Minutes ‘Proposed Rates of Pay for Establishment of Officers of the Permanent Forces’, 17 June 1910, NAA. MP 367/1, Item 558/1/381 is full of letters and minutes discussing pay and conditions (specifically superannuation) for SNCOs: NAA.
of the nation’s defence – relied explicitly on members of the small permanent force to train and administer it. Any of lack of public confidence in a career in the permanent forces therefore had ramifications for the efficiency of the military as a whole.

At any rate, the small Australian permanent military lacked, on the whole, the wider, higher regard normally shown towards professions. Indeed, politicians may have granted the military its legitimacy, via the Defence Act, but they rarely bestowed upon it the praise or respect accorded to other professions. Moreover, as the discharge of the army’s unique skill-set – that is the ‘management of violence’ – would be largely be undertaken by part-time forces, can we rightly claim that a professional jurisdiction was in place? To be sure, permanent officers and NCOs would train these part-time forces and permanent officers on the staffs would conduct the operations. Nonetheless, part-time officers commanded the units in peace and would lead them in wartime. Furthermore, most Australians believed its citizen soldiers were equal to, or better than, other soldiers. The contention that the organised use of violence required specialist expertise possessed by professionals only, must have seemed specious to most in the decade post-Federation.

It appeared that the permanent forces’ professional jurisdiction, already challenged by the militia, would be diffused further by the introduction of universal military service in 1911. An inspection by Lord Kitchener at the government’s behest in 1909 had endorsed the scheme, with Kitchener himself completing the finer organisational details. His would be a territorially-based scheme of 215 training areas producing a peacetime army of 80,000 soldiers. Twenty-one infantry brigades, twenty-eight light horse regiments, fifty-six batteries of artillery along with supporting troops would be generated from these training areas. The crux of the scheme would be the junior and field grade permanent officers assigned to administer and train the troops in these training areas. Kitchener stressed that it was

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36 For an example of the political debates and discussion on defence policy and the military generally, see Thomas W. Tanner, Compulsory Citizen Soldiers (Waterloo, NSW: Alternative Publishing, 1980), and Christopher Wray, Sir James Whiteside McCoy: a Turbulent Life (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002).

37 Support for some form of compulsory military training grew on both sides of politics when the 1905 Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War focussed attention on the deficiencies of the all-volunteer army. The raw staff work behind a scheme had been completed by Lieutenant-Colonel J.G Legge over a number of years. Amendments to the Defence Act were passed in 1909 to introduce a universal military service. The scheme would include service in cadet units for youths aged 12-18 and then service in the militia for men aged 18-26.
a ‘national necessity’ that these area officers were ‘carefully selected – thoroughly
grounded in their profession and scientifically educated’ so that they were ‘good
leaders, strict disciplinarians and thoroughly competent officers’.38

Universal military training, based on a part-time obligation, reaffirmed the
primacy of the citizen soldier. This seemed to be a further diffusion of the military
professional’s jurisdiction. Instead, the scheme justified the establishment of the
Royal Military College to furnish competent young officers with a broad military
education to train this citizen army and staff its headquarters. Moreover, as 350
permanent officers would be required, the scheme validated the creation of a
staff corps with sufficient employment and career progression for its members.39
Ironically, it would be this decision to base the nation’s defence on a partially-trained
mass army which led to the creation of RMC. With its own military educational
institution, the emerging military profession in Australia would develop slowly,
but with growing purpose over the coming decades.

‘Knowledge promotes strength’: the concept and purpose of RMC

Discussions on the need for an Australian military college had taken place for
decades. Over time, the colonial commandants, Hutton, various Australian
politicians and officers had advocated such a college. In 1903, provisions had
been made in the Defence Act, which gave the Governor-General the power
to establish a college; in 1909, the Act was amended to state that such a college
would be established. The models, utility and output of various overseas officer
institutions were studied. The CGS, Major General J.C Hoad, thought that the
college might provide commissioning training for permanent and citizen officers,
as well as act as a staff college.40 Previously, as Chief of Intelligence, Colonel W.T.
Bridges had expressed a strong regard for West Point and RMC, Kingston, noting
that its graduates benefited from years of ‘strict discipline and had acquired the
elements of a sound military education’, in contrast to the current system whereby
Australian officers necessarily must ‘obtain most of their professional knowledge
after being commissioned’.41

38 MP 367/1, 424/16/169, ‘Memorandum on the Defence of Australia by F.M. Viscount Kitchener
of Khartoum, GCB, DM, GCSI, GCMG, GCIE’, Melbourne, 12 February 1910, NAA.
39 This figure included staff for RMC, headquarters and staff immediately employed within the
universal military training scheme.
40 Wood, Chiefs of the Australian Army, 129.
41 Coulthard-Clark, Duntroon, 14. Bridges himself had attended RMC Kingston, but did not
graduate.
However Kitchener, upon whose professional advice the government relied, made it clear what the college must achieve and for what ultimate purpose its graduates would serve. The college was to produce self-sufficient area officers wholly responsible for the training and administration within their own areas, not young subalterns who would benefit from mentoring and on-the-job training provided by normal regimental soldiering. As such, the emphases and curriculum of the college had to reflect this. Indeed, Kitchener famously remarked that these area officers, whom he described as the cornerstone of the UMT, had to be ‘given a complete military education (and) brought up to realise that their career depends upon their ability to do their duty and on that alone’. 42

Kitchener preferred the West Point model as he saw it as successfully combining strict military virtues with an adherence to the wider democratic ideals of that country. But the final vision of RMC would be provided by Bridges after he completed his whistle-stop tour of a number of overseas academies in the first half of 1910. Afterwards, he reaffirmed his belief that the longer West Point course, with its emphasis on character, discipline and formal education, coupled with a rigorous selection process and unhesitating removal of poor-performing cadets, best suited Australia’s requirements. 43

It must be stressed that some selection standards for commissioning into the permanent forces were in place prior to RMC’s establishment. In fact, Bridges recommended that the educational examination for RMC be based on the extant initial examination set up in 1909. But the path to a permanent commission had been somewhat disjointed. For example, a candidate’s application was first considered by a special military board, which would determine whether the candidate could sit the educational examinations. The board was required to ensure that the candidate’s moral character was ‘satisfactory in all respects’ and determine whether he had the wherewithal to ‘exercise command efficiently and secure respect from those around him’. Therefore the board also had to consider a candidate’s general intelligence and bearing, whether he had any prior military service and whether he had been a sporting team captain. 44

42 MP 367/1, 424/16/169, ‘Memorandum’, 12 February 1910, NAA.
44 A2653, Military Board Proceedings, 1905/1907, ‘Instructions for the guidance of the President of the “Special Military Board” appointed to report on the general fitness and personal aptitude for military service of candidates for commissions in the Permanent Forces of the Commonwealth of Australia under Regulations published in paragraphs 12-18 of Part III of the Commonwealth Military Regulations’, 4 April 1905, NAA.
From here, recommended candidates had to sit the educational examination. For example, a candidate for the Administrative and Instructional Staff was required to pass this examination if he had not previously passed a public or matriculation examination for a civilian university. Candidates for the technical arms of the artillery and the engineers had to meet different educational prerequisites. These examinations took place in various capital cities over the course of a week. At this point, successful candidates were put on a period as probationary officers during which time they had to pass military confirmatory examinations before those first appointments were confirmed. It was assumed that the candidate would have access to the various manuals, participate in and witness the regimental duties to be examined and be mentored by other staff during this probationary period.45

The confirmatory examinations were tailored to the branch of service, and covered such subjects as regimental duties, drill and field training, tactics and military law. If more applicants than vacancies existed, these examinations were competitive and candidates were ranked in order of merit. It was intended that if an officer failed to pass these examinations, his commission would not be confirmed. Moreover, regulations stated that the District Commander, under whom the candidate served, was to state whether the candidate performed his duties satisfactorily and whether he was likely to become a suitable staff officer.46 The Military Board advised that such suitability would be demonstrated by ‘energy and commonsense’, the power to instruct citizen troops, ‘the faculty of administration’, and a general knowledge of all arms.47

Bridges based admission into RMC on the competitive open entrance examination.48 But RMC represented a marked change from the old system of

45 Commonwealth Military Forces of Australia, Regulations and Syllabuses of Examination for Candidates to, and Confirmation of Probationary Appointment in, the Permanent Forces, and Instructions for Boards of Examination (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1909), 5-17. For example, candidates for RAA and RAE had to pass a higher level of mathematics and had a longer probationary period than that of the A & I candidates.
46 Commonwealth Military Forces of Australia, Regulations, 14-40.
48 Coulthard-Clark, Duntroon, 26. There were many debates about concerns that a privileged military caste might arise or that only boys from private schools would have the ability to qualify for RMC. Egalitarianism was one of the original intents for RMC, in that professional officers would not come solely from a leisured or dilettante class as was thought to be largely the case in England. So that candidates from non-private schools were not disadvantaged, the educational standard was initially kept low or at least not unduly taxing; Bridges mitigated this by extending the RMC course to four years’ duration. Such an examination process was used so that charges of favouritism on selection choices could not be made. Moreover, it selected candidates who had sufficient education to take advantage of the college’s curriculum.
examinations and probationary appointments. Previously, a candidate was required to demonstrate considerable officer qualities prior to commissioning and would be required to acquire the bulk of his professional knowledge after commissioning. Now RMC would prepare a cadet fully within its four-year course, prior to commissioning and assuming his area officer responsibilities.⁴⁹

Reflecting pragmatism and no doubt his own pro-British inclinations, Bridges sought to secure the best possible staff for the college from overseas. As such, most of the military staff was British and this would remain so for a number of years.⁵⁰ Bridges also designed the curriculum to equip future graduates with a thorough grounding across all arms. Generally speaking, the course was more academically focussed in the first two years, with cadets undertaking more military studies in the later two years. The military subjects would progress over the four years with infantry and light horse training providing the foundations for studies in artillery and military engineering later on. In accordance with Kitchener’s original vision of a military college with severe discipline, cadets would have the equivalent rank of private; scrutiny would be constant and living conditions austere.

The military profession in Australia now had its own ab initio institution to educate, train and commission its officers. Bridges had left his stamp on the new college. He had essentially cherry-picked a number of successful elements from various overseas colleges, amalgamated them and tailored them for Australia’s specific purposes. A protégé of Hutton and generally considered an imperialist, Bridges nonetheless selected a college modelled largely on the American institution, West Point. In doing so, he created a college for the distinctly Australian environment that selected on merit, provided a thorough and complete education, and scrupulously maintained the quality of its cadets. The college’s motto Doctrina Vim Promovet or ‘knowledge promotes strength’ appropriately represented Bridges’ belief that a broad military and civil education was the best

⁴⁹ Moreover, it was decided that the college would not charge fees, despite Kitchener’s initial recommendation. As such, the government met all expenses, granting the college a greater freedom to remove non-performing cadets. Not only did this mean that a cadet was remunerated for his training, he also acquired a return of service obligation for a considerable period post-graduation. Together, this indicated that one of the characteristics of professionalism, namely the inter-relationship between a profession and its client, was strengthened. The cadet was beholden to the government for his livelihood and career, while the government had a growing body of trained and educated military professionals to address a societal need, in this case the management of the universal training scheme.

⁵⁰ This included the first Director of Military Art, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Gwynn, who would later write the seminal ‘small wars’ text, Imperial Policing.
means to prepare officers for their profession. But he also understood that, for all his work, the college would ultimately be judged by the calibre of its graduates. On his departure from Duntroon, Bridges urged the cadets to remember that ‘the degree of utility of the College to the Australian Forces depends on whether you maintain its prestige or not’.51

Even so, one must not overstate RMC’s immediate impact. For example, the Military Board was well aware that the army would rely on citizen officers and newly commissioned former NCOs to act as area officers for a number of years before enough RMC graduates were in the system.52 At that time, it was planned that the current system of commissioning in the PMF would remain until 1 June 1916, whereupon only graduates of RMC would be appointed officers in the PMF.53 It would still be some years before Duntroon’s impact would be truly felt; the senior professional officers who rose to prominence in the First World War had all been commissioned under the old system.

‘A success exceeding the most sanguine hopes’
RMC and the profession of arms

Despite universal military service being the immediate catalyst for the college’s founding, Duntroon cadets would graduate early to serve in the newly raised Australian Imperial Force (AIF), not to act as the scheme’s area officers. The exigencies of war threatened to dilute the standards established at RMC. Many of the British officers at the college, employed specifically to establish those professional standards, left for the war. Ironically, Bridges, who was tasked to raise the AIF, might also have threatened such standards when he requested that Duntroon cadets graduate early into that organisation. Nonetheless, the war would prove the worth of the College and cement its reputation early in its existence. During the war, RMC would continue with its traditional course as well as providing staff and facilities for special commissioning schools for militia

51 Coulthard-Clark, *Duntroon*, 53.
52 A2653, Military Board Proceedings, 1911-1912, ‘Adjutant-General’s recommendation on the inability of area officers to carry out the duties of Adjutants in addition to their area duties’, NAA.
53 A2653, Military Board Proceedings, 1914, Item 74, ‘Appointment of Graduates from the Royal Military College’. However the arcane and tortured seniority system would be simplified with all graduates placed on one seniority list from this time, regardless of what branch of service they entered: see A2653, Military Board Proceedings, 1913, Agenda 46/1913, Minister’s Decisions, 13 November 1913, NAA.
officers and officer candidates in the AIF. In its first eight years of existence, RMC had graduated 181 permanent officers of whom 42 were killed and 65 wounded. Although Duntroon graduates had won praise throughout, their numbers were minute within the context of the five divisions of the AIF.

After the war, with RMC established and its reputation secured by the performance of its graduates, societal esteem and recognition – one of the hallmarks of a profession – was often lacking. Much was due to the belief that the success of the citizen soldier in the AIF obviated the need for professionals. In 1921, the Inspector-General of the AMF lamented:

Because … our citizen army did so extraordinarily well during the late war, there is a tendency on the part of the Australian public to discount the value of the professional soldier, and to doubt whether he is necessary at all … people do not realise that the framework of the army … had been gradually built up for years before the war by the efforts of a small body of professional soldiers (and) that all the AIF formations were largely staffed by permanent officers … and that the officers of the Citizen Forces who attained great distinction during the war were in nearly all cases those who had devoted years of hard work and close study to their duties under the direction of such men as Sir Edward Hutton, General Bridges and other professional soldiers.54

War-weariness inevitably followed the war and the attractiveness of a professional military career waned accordingly. In the post-war period, issues of pay, cost of living increases, lack of a robust superannuation scheme and forced retirements also plagued the permanent forces.55

Matters would get worse before they got better. The universal military training scheme had continued throughout the First World War, but was scaled back in 1922 and scrapped altogether in 1929. This placed immediate pressure on career

55 To some extent, matters of seniority and therefore a degree of certainty pertaining to a permanent officer’s career were clarified when the Military Board approved the creation of the Staff Corps in October 1920. All permanent officers would now be on one seniority list, with their date of graduation from RMC or their date of receiving a substantive commission being the date upon which seniority would be considered. Those holding honorary commissions such as those granted to warrant officers to act a quarter-masters would not be part of the Staff Corps, nor would specialist officers such as in the medical, remount, finance sections. Importantly, brevet rank would not be considered for the purposes of seniority.
opportunities as permanent officers reverted back to their customary role of trainers and administrators in a drastically reduced all-volunteer militia. Promotions slowed to a snail’s pace. The onset of the Great Depression saw more redundancies, with many officers leaving and transferring to other armies or to the public service. The practice of sending new Duntroon graduates overseas to British or Indian units for regimental experience, which commenced after the war, was discontinued in 1931. In 1930, in order to prevent wholesale redundancies, the Military Board devised a scheme of work rationing whereby permanent soldiers and officers took varying period of leave without pay depending on their salary.56 This was followed by a reduction in salary under the auspices of the Financial Emergency Act of 1931, which remained in place until certain pay and allowances were restored under the Financial Relief Act in 1934.57 Between 1931 and 1936, RMC was relocated from Duntroon to Victoria Barracks in Sydney. Professional advice tendered to the government by a number of senior generals in the 1930s about defence planning within the dubious context of the Singapore Strategy was ignored or punished.58

Ultimately, it would take the Second World War to restore the profession’s fortunes. The famed Staff Corps/Militia feud in the Second World War does not need elaboration as it well known and documented by a number of historians. When the 2nd AIF was raised, there were concerns among permanent officers that only citizen officers would receive commands. Initially this seemed the case. However, senior permanent officers were keen to see Staff Corps officers gain operational and regimental experience and agitated on behalf of their junior counterparts to gain command opportunities. Some 540 Duntroon graduates served during the Second World War. Although small relative to the overall size of the 2nd AIF, the Staff Corps was now cohesive, self-aware and in enough positions of influence to look out for the interests of its members. At the war’s end, General Blamey commented that Duntroon graduates ‘formed a highly educated and practically trained accomplished corps of staff officers [able to] carry out staff work of the greatly increased army and [hold] high places amongst the leaders of the Australian Army’.59 Duntroon and its graduates had arrived.

56 B1535, 859/1/227, Military Board Instruction 33-36, ‘Enforced leave without pay for members of the PMF’, 28 March 1931, NAA.
57 B1535, 856/2/172, letter from Adjutant-General to Minister, 9 October 1933 and excerpt from Financial Relief Act, 1934, NAA.
58 Grey, Australian Army, 82.
59 General Sir Thomas Blamey, 10 June 1947, forward to Lee, Duntroon, x.
With the decision to raise a standing, regular army in 1947, RMC and its graduates could perhaps rightly claim to be part of a fully mature Australian profession of arms. It had taken some thirty-odd years after the college had produced its first graduates, with all the travails of the inter-war period, along with two wars, before the government accepted the need for a standing army. During this time professional officers were constantly required to justify their existence and validate the military profession. The ideal of the citizen soldier and brilliant amateur, the bête-noire of the professional officer since Federation, was not immediately extinguished with the creation of a regular army. The widespread belief in the citizen soldier would continue for another decade, abetted by the first national service scheme and the post-war service of high quality and very experienced Citizen Military Force (CMF) officers. However by the 1960s, the regular army was dominant, the part-time component existed to augment the full-timers, and fewer politicians felt compelled to take up the citizen soldiers’ cause in parliament. To be sure, the disputes on the utility and existence of the Reservist ‘part-time professional’ remains; but that is another debate.

Conclusion

Today all officers in the Australian Army, regular and reserve, general service officers and specialists alike, graduate from the Royal Military College. In the last fifty years, there have been other commissioning institutions such as Scheyville and Portsea, each with their own courses and each producing a different type of officer. And RMC itself has evolved over time. But these developments remained consistent with that fundamental tenet of professionalism, namely that entrance to the profession was conditional on specific expertise gained at a professional institution.

The theme for this conference is ‘1911: Preliminary Moves’. In a set of orders, such as those given by a Duntroon-trained officer to his men, preliminary moves refer to those pre-requisite actions which must be conducted before a plan may be executed. For the officer corps in Australia, the creation of the Royal Military College in 1911 was the key development for its long-term professionalisation. However, it was a series of small, incremental steps, made by British and Australian-born officers alike, which allowed the framework for an Australian military profession to take shape. It was these preliminary moves which laid the foundational schema of professional military attributes and supported the ultimate justification for a
military college. Elements of professionalism existed, in an incomplete way, prior to 1911. But with its own college, the small permanent Australian officer corps could now rightly be considered part of a profession – the emerging Australian profession of arms.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{60} The title of this segment is taken from Major-General Sir Charles Gwynn’s 1946 forward to Colonel Lee’s 1952 history of RMC. ‘Duntroon’, he wrote, ‘has proved a success exceeding, I frankly admit, the most sanguine hopes of General Bridges and his original staff’: Lee, \textit{Duntroon}, xii.
Ambition and Adversity: Developing an Australian Military Force, 1901-1914

Jean Bou

In September 1909 a group of Australian army officers filled a room at the United Service Institution of New South Wales to hear Major W.F. Everett, a permanent officer then appointed the brigade-major of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade, deliver a lecture entitled, ‘The future use of cavalry, and our light horse’. Having recently attended the 1909 autumn manoeuvres of both the British and French armies, as well as visiting the battlefields of the Russo-Japanese War, Everett had returned to argue in his lecture that the regiments and brigades of the Australian light horse, being neither proper full cavalry nor the more limited mounted infantry, needed to be organised and trained ‘on definite lines’. There was nothing extraordinary about Everett’s lecture, nor the discussion that resulted from it. They were but a contemporary example of the professional discussions about military developments that then occurred at officer gatherings and in service journals, much as they still do today. At this lecture, however, the officers, in discussing what form Australia’s mounted troops should take, were not simply debating questions of organisation or armament, but trying to grapple with some fundamental matters about the military system of which they were part. These matters stemmed in large part from an ambitious desire to create a modern, efficient and effective military force from an organisation where almost all officers and soldiers were part-time and the resources, of all kinds, were far from plentiful. One of the officers present at Everett’s lecture, Colonel George Lee, by then a senior permanent officer and respected veteran of the Boer War, noted:

1 Major W.F. Everett, ‘The Future Use of Cavalry, and our Light Horse’, Journal and Proceedings of the United Service Institution of New South Wales XXI, lecture LXXXVIII (1909), 91-103, at 91. The light horse were organised as an abbreviated form of cavalry known at the time as mounted rifles. Mounted infantry, as understood at the time, was merely infantry made more or less permanently mobile by the addition of horses or some other riding animal. For more see Jean Bou, Light Horse, A History of Australia’s Mounted Arm (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 69–71, passim.
It is absolutely impossible to train our mounted troops up to the standard of Imperial cavalry … We can put into the field first-class irregular light horse … I have no hesitation in saying that with the material we have in Australia an exceedingly useful force can be made available.²

In broad terms this is what Australia had supplied to fight in the Boer War of 1899-1902, which, if sometimes very imperfect, had been adequate – but what about the next war? As Major Everett pointed out in his lecture, ‘we will not have the Boers to fight again, and much higher training will be required against European troops’.³ And so it would prove to be.

Between the Boer War and the First World War the Commonwealth Military Forces, as Australia’s army was then known, was first created and then, just a few years before the Great War, almost completely recreated. In both cases the schemes implemented reflected the fundamental ambition to create something effective and efficient, but each time the efforts would be severely troubled by the problems that beset them.

The Commonwealth Military Forces, as the army was then known, came into being just a few months after Federation when, on 1 March 1901, the now state governments passed the control of the various colonial forces they had maintained to the new federal government and the Department of Defence, established in Melbourne. In most of the colonies, efforts to maintain some form of local defence force had begun with a degree of seriousness in the 1850s, but generally speaking it had only been since then mid-1880s that the larger colonies had become prosperous and developed enough to maintain them on an ongoing basis; a resolve that had been severely tested during the economic depression of the 1890s. The forces that the Commonwealth inherited were all recognisable as examples of British-pattern nineteenth century citizen-based part-time forces, but were widely varying in their administrative and organisational forms, level of training, size and, it was soon discovered, quality. As part-time paid troops or completely unpaid part-time volunteers their members also tended to be proud of their status as citizen soldiers, and the units they belonged to had also often

developed their own distinctive cultures and ethos. The result was that they could be vocal in their own defence. The fact that many officers were also pillars of their local, and sometimes, colonial societies meant that they could also create political waves if they were so inclined.

To meld this disparate conglomeration into a federal force the Commonwealth government, after several refusals, secured the services of the British Army officer, Major-General Sir Edward Hutton. An experienced officer with record of active service in various colonial campaigns in Africa, Hutton was a vocal proponent of mounted infantry and perhaps an even more vocal advocate of imperial defence cooperation. He was no stranger to Australia and had been the commandant of the New South Wales military forces between 1893 and 1895. In that appointment Hutton had undertaken a great deal of useful reform and revealed a vigorous energy when trying to improve the colonial forces under his control. He had, however, also clashed with his civilian masters and shown himself to be undiplomatically outspoken, often tactless, and dismissive and scornful of those with differing views. These were traits that came to the fore again in 1899-1900 when he got into serious trouble with the Canadian government while commanding their militia and was quickly removed to a face-saving field command in South Africa where he led a mounted infantry brigade made up mostly of Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders.

Hutton arrived for his second stint in Australia in early 1902 and quickly outlined his plans for Australia’s new army. In broad strategic terms he reiterated the long-held view that though the Royal Navy was the ultimate guarantor of Australian safety, there was the possibility that it might be temporarily unavailable and a unified defence force needed to be available as a backup. In this regard

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6 Hutton, ‘Minute Upon the Defence of Australia’, B168, 1902/2688, National Archives of Australia (NAA).
Hutton’s basic ideas were not revolutionary, for this strategic assessment had been a staple of colonial defence thinking for some decades. Similarly the idea of creating a unified mobile military force to meet such an eventuality, in addition to the maintenance of coastal fortresses, had been part of local military thinking since another British officer, Major-General J. Bevan Edwards, had proposed it to the colonial governments in 1889. It was an idea that the various colonial commandants of the 1890s, including Hutton in New South Wales, had pursued, but that had never gained the political and popular support necessary for it to be realised.

With the opportunity to finally effect something like what Edwards had proposed, Hutton quickly outlined his plan to the government. There was no desire from anyone to upend the pre-Federation reliance on part-time military service, and under Hutton’s scheme the number of permanent soldiers would be limited to that required to man the more technically demanding corps associated with the forts, mainly the coastal garrison artillery and the associated submarine miners. There would also be a small permanent administrative and instructional cadre that would tend to the requirements of keeping the forces running smoothly and teach the other members of the forces their duty. More numerous were to be the two kinds of part-time troops. First the unpaid volunteer, predominantly infantry, units that Hutton had inherited would be accommodated by attaching them to the coastal fortresses for local protection, and together with the gunners and other troops in the forts they would constitute the Garrison Force. More numerous and significant in developmental terms was to be the Field Force, which was to be predominantly made up of part-time paid troops with a stiffening from the permanent cadre in time of war. With a wartime establishment of 26,000 men, this element was intended to be highly mobile, well trained and prepared to move to threatened areas as required. Showing his imperial thinking Hutton also intended that troops of the Field Force could be embarked and sent to defend Australia’s ‘interests’, however they may have been defined, should it be necessary. This last idea was not in line with the government’s thinking, however, and after making it clear to the British Government at the Imperial Conference of 1902 that

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7 Major-General J. Bevan Edwards, ‘Correspondence Relating to the Inspection of the Military Forces of the Australasian Colonies’ Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, August 1890, British Parliamentary Papers, 1890, C. 6188.
9 Hutton, ‘Minute Upon the Defence of Australia’, B168, 1902/2688, NAA. The war establishment of the Field Force was 26,019 men, with 15,334 of these in the three infantry brigades and 10,485 in the six light horse brigades.
no Australian troops would be earmarked for imperial use, it oversaw the passage of a defence act that ensured that Australian troops could serve outside Australian only if they specifically volunteered.\textsuperscript{10}

Because of the requirement for mobility the Field Force was to have a very high proportion of mounted troops with six of the nine brigades arranged to be made up of light horse, which under Hutton’s scheme were a type of abbreviated cavalry known at the time as mounted rifles. The other three brigades were to be infantry, but in keeping with Hutton’s thinking they were to be organised and prepared to take up the role of mounted infantry if required. These brigades were to be balanced, self-sufficient formations that included artillery, engineers and service branches, and the intention was that a component of virtually any size could be drawn from it for independent operations.\textsuperscript{11} The emphasis on mobile forces and the establishment of formations that were in many ways readymade ‘columns’, not dissimilar to those that had recently been ranging across the veld of South Africa, was no accident, and Hutton believed that if a war had to be fought against an invader on Australian soil then it was likely that the campaign would closely resemble that which the British had just fought against the Boers.\textsuperscript{12} It was not the only precedent, however, and the idea that fast-moving, firearm-equipped mounted troops supported by artillery could have a dramatic effect on the course of a campaign was a concept that had excited theorists of mounted warfare, including Hutton, since Union troops had marched deep into the Confederacy in the final years of the American Civil War.\textsuperscript{13}

Hutton’s Field Force was an ambitious goal that would require a good deal of reform and improvement from the disparate forces inherited from the colonies. In the first instance it would require a dramatic expansion and reorganisation. Only

\textsuperscript{11} Hutton, ‘Minute Upon the Defence of Australia’, B168, 1902/2688, NAA; Defence Scheme for the Commonwealth of Australia, July 1914, B168, 1904/185, NAA.
\textsuperscript{12} Hutton, ‘Minute Upon the Defence of Australia’, B168, 1902/2688, NAA.
\textsuperscript{13} Major-General Edward Hutton, \textit{The Defence and Defensive Power of Australia} (Melbourne: Angus & Robertson, 1902), 15–19; Bou, \textit{Light Horse}, 30–1, 61–2. For more on mounted troop theory during this period see Gervase Phillips, “Who Shall Say That The Days of Cavalry are Over”: The Revival of the Mounted Arm in Europe, 1853–1914’, \textit{War in History} 18: 5 (2011), 5–32, at 29–30, and Stephen Badsey, \textit{Doctrine and Reform in the British Cavalry 1880–1918} (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), passim. The contemporary literature is large, but for an example that seems to have been influential with Hutton see George T. Denison, \textit{Modern Cavalry: Its Organisation, Armament and Employment in War} (London: Thomas Bosworth, 1868). The American experience was not the only inspiration, but it was a prominent one.
in New South Wales had there been an attempt to create a military organisation above that of the regimental level before Federation (under Hutton’s direction in the 1890s) and aside from the larger eastern colonies such a step would have been futile given the number of troops at their disposal. With nine brigades to be created, including some that included units drawn from across state boundaries, existing units would have to be split and expanded, and some country infantry units would be required to convert to light horse. Men who could command these new entities, at all levels, would also have to be found, a problem that was made all the more critical because of two factors. The first was that Hutton’s vision of the Field Force required the pushing of responsibilities downwards through the ranks and a great deal from regimental level officers who were expected to act independently on campaign if required. The second was that in order for defence costs to be kept down the Field Force was to be established on a cadre basis, that is that though each unit was to have close to its full complement of officers and non-commissioned officers, peacetime soldier numbers were to be kept to a minimum, meaning that upon mobilisation much would be expected of regimental leadership and the more experienced rankers to bring the new recruits up to the required standard.

Not surprisingly training was a significant matter and the men of the infantry and light horse would be expected to attend sixteen days’ training per year; artillery and engineers would do more. Essential to the program was the annual completion of the assigned musketry course and an inspection by the state commandant. For city infantrymen this meant an annual camp, usually of four days, plus a series of night and weekend activities. For men in the country, particularly the horse owners of the light horse, the training was concentrated into a regimental- or brigade-level continuous camp of eight days, supplemented with a smaller program of local unit-run parades. Officers had not only to make this basic commitment, but be prepared to study in their own time, attend the new ‘Schools of Instruction’ that Hutton instituted, pass examinations for promotion or confirmation in rank, be prepared to conduct administration on their own time, and if possible

14 Australian Regulations and Orders of the Military Forces of the Commonwealth, provisional edition, 1904, part 8, section 11, A2657, vol. 1, NAA.
15 Militia and Volunteer Peace and War Establishments, B168, 1902/2688, NAA; Australian Regulations and Orders of the Military Forces of the Commonwealth, provisional edition, 1904, part 8, sections 8 & 10, A2657, vol. 1, NAA.
16 Hutton, ‘Minute Upon the Defence of Australia’, B168, 1902/2688, NAA.
17 Australian Regulations and Orders of the Military Forces of the Commonwealth, provisional edition, 1904, part 8, section 37, NAA, A2657, vol 1, NAA; Hutton, ‘Minute Upon the Defence of Australia’, B168, 1902/2688, NAA.
they were to take part in staff rides (tactical exercises without troops) run by state commandants.\textsuperscript{18} Given that before Federation soldier training had been usually limited to the traditional four-day Easter camp and a mixture of local evening or weekend parades, and that officer training programs do not seem to have existed in any meaningful way, this new training requirement was a substantial new commitment that caused considerable disquiet.\textsuperscript{19}

Hutton’s ambitious plans ran into trouble almost from the start, however, and the problems he faced quickly seemed to outweigh the opportunities presented. The most pressing matter, not surprisingly, was one of money. The new Federal Government had limited taxation powers and there were strong parliamentary calls for military expenditure to be kept down. Hutton’s first funding requests, based on an assumption that his budget would equal the combined colonial defence budgets, had totalled more than £480,000 over four years, estimating that if this were kept up the Field and Garrison forces would be fully equipped by 1908.\textsuperscript{20} This proved overly optimistic, however, and upon submitting these and other spending proposals to the department Hutton was informed that his budget for the first year was not to exceed £50,000, which quickly stymied many of the changes afoot.\textsuperscript{21} The effects were obvious at the unit level and the light horse would have to continue using their completely unsuitable civilian-pattern saddles, the field artillery would not get replacements for their obsolete guns, machine-guns could not be bought, the infantry would have to continue with the old pattern equipment they brought from the colonial stores, and there was no hope of creating the logistical train required to support the Field Force if had to be mobilised.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{18} Hutton, ‘Minute Upon the Defence of Australia’, B168, 1902/2688, NAA.
\textsuperscript{19} Before Federation, officer training, such as it existed, seems to have occurred only within the regimental environment, perhaps with supplementation through personal study and attending lectures at colonial service forums such as the United Service Institutes, where they were established.
\textsuperscript{21} Secretary of Defence to Hutton, 1 June 1903 & Hutton to Secretary of Defence, 8 July 1903, AWM3, 03/624, Australian War Memorial.
\textsuperscript{22} Hutton wanted to spend over £10,000 on saddlery for the light horse and other branches, but had to settle for spending £90 to produce a small number of sample saddles: Secretary of Defence to Hutton, 1 June 1903, and Hutton to Secretary of Defence, 8 July 1903, AWM3, 03/624; ‘Narrative of Instructional Operations by a Cavalry Division … and remarks Thereon by Major-General Sir Edward Hutton’, B168,1902/618, NAA; Palazzo, \textit{The Australian Army}, 33.
Moreover it meant that attempting to expand the establishments to meet Hutton's targets could not be contemplated.\textsuperscript{23} Dismayed, and typically for him, enraged that civilian politicians could be so difficult and obstructionist, he could do little but amend his budgets and point out that no guarantees of military efficiency could be offered to the government any time soon.\textsuperscript{24}

The problems extended well beyond those associated with money, however. The requirement to convert rural volunteer infantry into part-paid light horse, for example, ran into difficulties when the affected men pointed out that buying horses was beyond their means. In one instance the men of the Kerang company of the Victorian Rangers found this such an impost that they enlisted the local newspaper and Member of Parliament to their cause and then, having gained the ear of the Minister for Defence, managed to fend off Hutton's changes to their unit. Other units complained about reorganisations, the trampling of what they saw as their identities and traditions, and their being broken up to facilitate expansions.\textsuperscript{25} Senior regimental officers, such as Lieutenant-Colonel William Braithwaite of the Victorian Mounted Rifles, who were judged incompetent by Hutton, were replaced and responded by venting their grievances in the newspaper, which led to more difficulties for Hutton and the government.\textsuperscript{26}

More fundamentally it was obvious that the quality of many units allotted to the Field Force was far from high. With the experiences in South Africa still fresh, training activities during the Hutton years often sought to draw on them. In Victoria, for example, both the 1903 and 1904 annual camps were conducted in areas chosen because of their physical similarity to the veld and which could be used to demonstrate characteristics of the fighting there.\textsuperscript{27} But these and other camps quickly demonstrated that despite the smattering of Boer War

\textsuperscript{23} Grey, \textit{A Military History of Australia}, 68.
\textsuperscript{24} Hutton to Secretary of Defence, 2 June 1903, AWM3, 03/624.
\textsuperscript{25} The infantrymen of the Victorian Rangers were most vocal in their opposition to becoming light horse, but they were not the only unit to do so. The Melbourne Cavalry and New South Wales Lancers both also made complaints about the changes being forced on them regarding organisation and armament: Bou, \textit{Light Horse}, 74–80; see also Craig Stockings, \textit{The Making and Breaking of the Post-Federation Australian Army} (Canberra: Land Warfare Studies Centre, 2007), 19.
\textsuperscript{26} Braithwaite was commander of one VMR battalion and the senior regimental officer. Hutton, with the concurrence of the state commandant, brought in a NSW permanent officer to command an ad hoc brigade created from the two VMR battalions for a camp in 1903: see Bou, \textit{Light Horse}, 79–80; Wilcox, ‘Australia’s Citizen Army’, 189–92.
\textsuperscript{27} ‘Narrative of Instructional Operations by a Cavalry Division’, B168,1902/618, NAA; Wilcox, ‘Australia’s Citizen Army’, 163.
veterans present, the overall quality of the troops and their training was low and that they possessed only, as Hutton put it, an ‘elementary knowledge’ of their duties. Hutton had a poor opinion of the Victorian forces he had inherited and believed that only New South Wales and Queensland, which had maintained the highest proportions of part-time paid troops, had maintained reasonably effective organisational and instructional standards before Federation. In the other states he felt the limitations of pre-Federation budgets and poor instructional standards had severely limited the development of their forces. Upon his first visit to South Australia, for example, he had been so alarmed at the lack of instructors available that he immediately arranged for the despatch of more from other states that could better afford the loss.

Despite the effort to inject rigour, learning and professionalism into the militia and volunteer forces, the likelihood of success was always going to be diminished by the inherent problems of the defence scheme’s structure and resources. Sixteen training days per year including, at most, an eight-day annual camp was a good deal better than the more relaxed pre-Federation arrangements, but was still not a period of time sufficient to create competent soldiers, let alone effective units or brigades. There was some hope that the leavening of South Africa veterans would help, but this was a small and diminishing pool whose talents were often open to question given the patchy performance of many the Australian contingents in that war. Moreover, it was becoming increasingly clear that finding enough men to fill even the limited peacetime establishments was a challenge. The strength of forces that Hutton had inherited from the colonies had been artificially high thanks to a spurt of martial enthusiasm that had accompanied the Boer War, in much the same way that war scares and Britain’s imperial conflicts had spurred colonists into military uniforms for brief periods throughout the nineteenth century. As the memory of the war started to fade, however, so did the taste for soldiering. When this combined with the ordinary difficulties of part-time service such as giving

28 Ibid.
29 Hutton to Secretary of Defence, 22 November 1902, MP84/1, 1930/1/12, NAA.
31 Hutton to Secretary of Defence, 22 November 1902, MP84/1, 1930/1/12, NAA.
32 Bou, Light Horse, 81–3.
33 All the colonies/states had expanded their forces during the Boer War, in particular their mounted branches given the example of what was happening in South Africa: Bou, Light Horse, 63–6.
up precious time, facing the burdens of buying kit, repetitive or dull training, maintaining a horse, putting up with officers of dubious quality, or having to continually travel to parade, it soon meant that units’ strengths were often well below even the establishments. In many places it proved impossible to raise new detachments and sub-units in compensation when the hoped-for wave of local volunteers failed to materialise. On top of this was a continuing need to keep defence spending tightly in rein and for some years after Federation many units were not authorised to recruit even up to their limited peace establishments.

Hutton may have been able to correct these problems, but his time as General Officer Commanding came to end in late 1904, not surprisingly in acrimony with the government over plans, among other things, to replace him with a committee rather than another opinionated and perhaps difficult senior officer. Hutton had not been successful in his effort to create an efficient and capable Field Force, but this did not mean he was a failure either. He had carried out the essential and difficult process of amalgamating the various colonial forces (the difficulty of which should not be underestimated) and, for all its failings, created a military force that aimed to address the country’s defence needs with the limited resources at its disposal. With Hutton’s departure the government and his replacement, the Military Board of Administration, undid more than a few of his less popular reforms and undertook many of their own, but in broad terms his Field and Garrison Forces continued on as they then existed until new, even more ambitious schemes were developed towards the end of the decade.

In 1905 Australia’s defence outlook changed considerably with the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War. The possibility of a competent Asian military and naval power was one that had exercised Australian minds for a generation and the development caused much vexation. This, combined with a growing realisation

34 For more on the travails of citizen unit service during the late colonial/early federation period, see Bou, Light Horse, 87–98, 115–30; Wilcox, For Hearths and Homes, passim.
35 See for example the troubles the 17th Light Horse Regiment had in South Australia: Inspector-General’s report on his visit to 1 Squadron, 17th Light Horse Regiment, on 17 March 1906, B168, 1906/5262, NAA.
36 Lieutenant-Colonel W.T. Bridges, AQMG, to Queensland Commandant, 3 July 1903, AWM3, 03/677, pt 1; Bridges, AQMG, to Secretary of Defence, 14 September, 1904, AWM3, 03/600.
that the military forces created after Federation were unlikely to overcome the problems that beset them to become effective, led to increased thought being given to some form of universal military service obligation. In 1906 a committee formed at the behest of the second Deakin ministry, headed by the Inspector-General, Major-General J. Hoad, reported that despite the assurances about Japan and the power of the Royal Navy coming from London, Australia had to have a more capable military force. Several political and military threads were woven together over the next few years and the result was a shift towards the creation of a broadly based citizen force founded upon the idea of compulsory military service for all able-bodied males that was inspired in part by the model of the Swiss. Though the push began as early as 1906, it was 1910 before the government of Andrew Fisher passed the final legislation that would bring the Hutton-era army to an end and replace it with what was virtually a completely different force.38

Drawing on work done by Australian officers, notably Colonel J.G. Legge, Field Marshal Lord Kitchener visited Australia in 1910 at the government’s request and in his report on the military forces offered a template for the army of what is generally known as the Universal Training era. The scheme adopted called for all males to commence their military service at age 12 in the junior cadets and, after passing through the senior cadets later in their teens, continue until they were 26 years old when they would complete their service in what became known as the Citizen Force.39 Unpaid volunteer troops, which had always been the most problematic and under-trained element of the colonial and federal forces, were to be done away with, and all militiamen were to be paid (though for privates at half the rate than under the old system).

The expansion that the scheme was to bring about would make that which had been attempted under Hutton seem puny, and the goal for the Universal Training era was a peacetime strength of about 80,000 personnel, expanding to 135,000 upon war breaking out. Kitchener proposed that there be 21 brigades of infantry, which made for 84 battalions, 28 regiments of light horse and 56 field or howitzer batteries – objectives that were all increased very shortly.40 To facilitate

38 For more detail on the threat from Japan and its effects on the development of Australian defence policy in this period, see Wilcox, For Hearths and Homes, 55–61; Palazzo, The Australian Army, 39–56; Grey, A Military History of Australia, 71–6.
the plan, the country was divided up into unit and brigade areas from where the men that would fill the ranks would be drawn from. The expansion was not to be immediate and it was planned that the scheme would take eight years to reach its intended peacetime establishments. Moreover there were notable exceptions to the idea of universal service. No man who lived more than five miles from a training centre would be obligated to endure the difficulties of travel to serve, and because of the need to provide a horse, the light horse regiments would continue to rely predominantly on volunteer service.41 Still, this was an extremely ambitious plan that called for a massive change and expansion of the forces.

At a tactical and operational level the army was changing too, and had been gradually since Hutton’s departure. In 1906 the Australian military had started a process of more closely following the example and model of the British Army. This was reflected in several ways, not the least of which was the gradual acceptance at the 1907, 1909 and 1911 Imperial conferences of the idea that the British and Dominion armies be aligned as closely as possible in their organisation, training and doctrine. It was a process that had led in part to the creation of the Imperial General Staff to help such co-ordination. There were other changes too, and the primacy of the mounted soldier that Hutton had established in his Field Force, and which had been encapsulated in his own locally produced mounted service manual, had not survived much beyond his tenure. The infantry, apparently dismayed with the idea of mounted drill, seem to have devolved themselves of the mounted infantry role the moment Hutton sailed for Britain.42 A reorganisation of the Field Force brigades in 1906 had also changed the proportions of infantry and light horse available in each state, effectively calling into doubt the idea of a ‘move anywhere’ mobile federal force and suggested that the defence of each state would depend on units raised there.43 The introduction of the Kitchener scheme completely removed the last vestiges of the Hutton horse-mounted columns and relegated the mounted branch to a more conventional supporting role,44 leaving the model of the Boer War and nineteenth century cavalry theorising behind.

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The new scheme commenced for the senior cadets in 1911 and for the Citizen Force in 1912. Not surprisingly, however, the demands of establishing the Universal Training plan were manifold and difficult to overcome. There were too few permanent officers and non-commissioned officers to administer and train the men being brought into the ranks; a situation made worse by the requirements of controlling a massive increase in the cadets. The long-standing problems of militia officer quality were perhaps exacerbated by the scheme as the good ones were diluted into a larger force where they were called on to do more.\textsuperscript{45} The light horse faced a fundamental manning crisis brought on by the pay cut of the new scheme which did not come close to compensating for the costs of horse ownership. Moreover, as the new Inspector-General, the imperial officer Major-General G.M. Kirkpatrick, toured the country in 1912 and 1913, he found that the forces were, by and large, as poorly trained and inefficient as they had been since Federation.\textsuperscript{46}

When in 1914 General Sir Ian Hamilton visited to inspect the Australian forces his report did not necessarily make happy reading. Though it is often cherry picked for the encouraging and supportive comments he made, less is usually made of the grave deficiencies he highlighted in manning, logistical underpinnings, training, unit cohesion and tactical competence. Referring to the mounted branch he worried that any attempt by manoeuvre by anything larger than a squadron-sized body would quickly degenerate into ‘disarray and confusion’.\textsuperscript{47} In 1917 the Military Board, confronted by the realities of fighting a terrible war, looked back at the militia of 1914 and realistically concluded that ‘at the outbreak of war it would not have been possible to take a Militia Regiment as it stood and put it in the field at once against an efficient enemy, without disaster’.\textsuperscript{48} Clearly if the force was going to be required, a substantial period of mobilisation and training would be required to get it ready.

Regardless, the ambition had not disappeared. The Universal Training scheme had made no specific proposals for the establishment of divisions, but there was provision for divisional mounted troops and a close correlation between the number of battalions and brigades required and what would be required if divisions were

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{46} Bou, \textit{Light Horse}, 103–07.
\textsuperscript{48} Meeting of the Military Board, 24 August 1917, cited in Palazzo, \textit{The Australian Army}, 76.
to be formed.\textsuperscript{49} Establishments prepared in 1912 had hinted at such a step for the infantry, but nothing was then done about it.\textsuperscript{50} The idea clearly stayed around though and on 1 July 1914, just a few weeks before the outbreak of war, the Military Board met and recommended that a divisional organisation be adopted. At that meeting a memorandum prepared by the Director of Military Operations, Major C.B.B. White, and submitted by the Chief of the General Staff, Brigadier J.M. Gordon, stated that as the division was the ‘approved military organisation for the Empire … its adoption is therefore recommended’. Though it recognised the problems that would come with creating higher formations in a part-time citizen army in which even brigades were perhaps still more theoretical than real, the scheme went on to propose the establishment of a ‘Field Army’ of three light horse brigades and two infantry divisions to be drawn from the 2nd and 3rd Military Districts (essentially New South Wales and Victoria). District Field Forces, which in the 1st and 4th Military Districts (Queensland and South Australia) included under-strength infantry divisions, were also to be established in the smaller states. It was recommended that the commanders and their divisional staffs be appointed from the ranks of the Australian permanent forces by reorganising the already existing military district headquarters (which had replaced the older state-based commands of the immediate post-Federation era). In conclusion the submission recommended that this structure be adopted as the basis for planning until 1920.\textsuperscript{51} The plan was, apparently, cut off by the events of August 1914, but did not disappear entirely and throughout the war the military authorities issued revised national establishments that set out the organisation of a force made up of two light horse divisions and six infantry divisions.\textsuperscript{52}

Whether this scheme for a divisional army could have been attained, and the problems that Hamilton had identified could have been overcome, is impossible to know as the outbreak of war dramatically altered the situation and the chance

\textsuperscript{49} The following information regarding the plans for the establishment of divisions was first outlined, Jean Bou, ‘An aspirational army’, \textit{Sabretache} 49:1 (2008), 25–30; see also Bou, \textit{Light Horse}, 110–11.

\textsuperscript{50} War Establishments of the Australian Military Forces, 1912, A1194, 22.14/6970, NAA.

\textsuperscript{51} ‘Ultimate organisation of the Commonwealth Military Forces’, Minutes of Military Board Meeting, 1 July 1914, Military Board Proceedings, A2653, 1914, NAA.

\textsuperscript{52} Tables of Peace Organisation and Establishments 1915-16, issued with Military Order 245, 1915, A1194, 21.20/6895, NAA. The cover of the tables is in fact in error and they were actually issued with Military Order 244, 27 April 1915; Tables of Peace Organisation and Establishments, 1916-17, issued with Military Order 176, 1916, A1194, 21.20/6896; Tables of Peace Organisation and Establishments, issued with Military Order 575, 1918, A1194, 21.20/6897; Tables of Peace Organisation and Establishments, 1919-20, issued with Military Order 463, 1919, A1194, 21.20/6898, NAA.
to correct the deficiencies of what was still a very new system was taken away by the demands of the moment. The Defence Act’s ban on sending troops outside Australia without their specifically volunteering precluded a war role for the militia and a specially created expeditionary force, the Australian Imperial Force, would instead serve in Europe and around the Mediterranean. In a sense the pre-war Citizen Force gave this new force everything it had to give, from its best and most able officers, and much of its manpower, to its materiel, and eventually its financial lifeline. In other ways it also gave it very little. Though many officers of the Great War started their military career in the citizen forces, and though the militia experience gave the military and administrative and organisational framework to work with in 1914 and 1915, it is difficult to conclude that the eventually very effective Australian Imperial Force that existed by 1917 and 1918 in both France and Palestine owed much of its competence to the pre-war militia.

The militia did not disappear with the war and there was goal of continuing with what had been started, but gutted of its best soldiers and officers, and as the war went on increasingly lacking the resources it required, it was by 1918 nothing like what had been hoped for it.

Before Federation the Australian colonial forces were enthusiastic and often popular, but small in an age of mass armies, largely parochial in their outlook, established with minimal official support, and, with some possible exceptions, not very competent. In the dozen or so years that passed after Federation (a not very long period of time for a peacetime army) successive governments, ministers of defence and senior British and Australian officers sought to dramatically reform this inauspicious material first into a national army, a difficult task in itself, and then into an efficient and effective force capable of defending the nation. The obstacles were manifold and many are familiar to all armies throughout history – a lack of money, waxing and waning interest from governments and insufficient or obsolete equipment. More fundamentally, however, the great weakness was a continuing reliance on the model of the part-time military service. For men and units that practised their martial pastime eight, ten, sixteen or twenty days a year, efficiency and competency were always going to remain elusive objectives. The Universal Training scheme attempted to overcome this problem by extending training to a decade-long process where it was hoped that at each stage improvements could be based on what had already been learned. It was worth a try and a feasible idea, but it seems unlikely that it would ultimately have worked.
In debating the origins of the First World War, historians have been more or less in agreement about the international consequences of Italy’s invasion of Libya in 1911. In Sidney B. Fay’s view it gave Turkey ‘another staggering blow, and led directly to the Balkan League, which finally drove the Turks almost completely from Europe’.¹ For James Joll, it was both the first step that led to the general Balkan crisis and ‘perhaps the most direct and open act of imperialist expansion in the years immediately before the war’.² Recently, William Mulligan has adjudged it the most damaging consequence of the second Moroccan crisis, destabilising Liberal Italy and the Ottoman Empire ‘with disastrous repercussions for the international system’.³ About Italy’s military readiness for war there has been equally general agreement: with only one or two exceptions, Italian and English-speaking scholars have claimed that the Italian army went to war almost completely unprepared either politically or militarily.⁴

In taking her to war, Italy’s leaders thought that she could win a quick and easy victory that would advance her standing in the Great Power stakes. The turns of international politics created an opening for which sinuous Italian diplomacy had prepared in circumstances that Italy’s statesmen rightly calculated would permit the use of force. The army was better prepared than has been allowed, but once in the field it proved unable to defeat its opponents. In part this was due to Italy’s statesmen changing the nature of the war, and the demands it made on the

soldiers, in mid-stream. It was also the consequence of the fact that the land war was less a characteristically nineteenth century colonial campaign than it was a harbinger of twentieth century counter-insurgency conflicts. The navy could do no better: the skeins of diplomacy that hemmed Italy round meant that it had to contend with a severely restricted strategic horizon. In the event, Italy ‘won’ what was to all intents and purposes an unwinnable war, only to find that she had not won it after all.

**Diplomatic manoeuvres**

The origins of Italy’s military expedition to Libya lay in two events that both took place in 1887. Renewing the Triple Alliance that year, the parties agreed to the principle of ‘reciprocal compensation’ if either Austria-Hungary or Italy was obliged to occupy some part of the Ottoman Empire, either in the Balkans or on the Aegean coasts and islands. The desire for ‘compensation’ would be a powerful force propelling Italy to war twenty-four years later. Italy also suffered a set-back, failing to get Great Britain to agree to support her own ambitions in respect of the North African coast, and Tripoli especially, in return for supporting Great Britain in Egypt. Over the next two and half decades Italian diplomacy manoeuvred in the interstices of the Great Power relationships to reverse this set-back and secure at least disinterest in, if not support for, a move across the Mediterranean and on to ‘the Fourth Shore’.

Between 1899 and 1909 Italian diplomats secured agreements from Austria-Hungary, Germany, France, Great Britain and Russia which they believed left them free to develop an Italian sphere of influence in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica when the time came. However, as a signatory to the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, Italy was a guarantor of the Ottoman Empire, and Italian ministers got to their feet at intervals to reiterate their commitment. Tommaso Tittoni told the Italian senate in 1905 and again in 1908 that the integrity of the Ottoman Empire ‘is one of the foundations of Italian foreign policy’, and in February 1910 his successor, Francesco Guicciardini, confirmed that preserving that integrity ‘even in Africa’ was an ‘unchangeable fundamental principle’ of Italian foreign policy. In June 1911, three and a half months before starting the war, Di San Giuliano reprised Italy’s declaratory policy in almost exactly the same words.5

As the weakest of the Great Powers, and therefore unable herself to force the pace on any major international issue, Italy’s practices were perforce elastic. Her foreign policy in the decade before the Libyan war, renewing the Triple Alliance in 1902 and 1907 whilst at the same time coming to agreements with France and Russia, has generated considerable criticism from historians who have seen it as cross-cutting agreements and leaving her in a potentially impossible position if her erstwhile partners clashed.\textsuperscript{6} The North African design – as yet no more than an aspiration – was the other side of this coin. Italian diplomacy in these years was an exercise in making spaces and watching for openings through which to secure her share of colonial expansion. To turn a policy which was not exactly improvised but not exactly planned either into a reality required Italy’s statesmen to wait upon their hour – and then to seize it.

From 1908, evidence began to accumulate which suggested that the hour was near. Constantinople, now in the hands of the Young Turks, experienced two revolutions in three days in April 1909, exposing a useful degree of internal instability. Albanians revolted against their centralising policy in 1910 and again in 1911, and in January of the latter year revolt broke out in the Yemen and the Asir. The Ottoman high command sent 30,000 troops to the south, stripping their only Libyan division of four-fifths of its men; by September 1911 it was estimated to be no more than 3,400 men strong. The threat that Italy might take advantage of Turkish weakness was not lost on the Ottoman administration. Sultan Abdul Hamid II was personally well aware of the danger, and the Ottoman ambassador in Rome, Kazim Bey, warned Constantinople in February and June 1911 that Italy was contemplating an attack on Tripolitania. Other warnings came from the embassies in Vienna and Berlin. Nevertheless, the regime was caught almost unprepared when the crisis came, a fact the Ottoman military attaché in Rome, Ali Fuat Ceseboy, put down to ‘bureaucratic sluggishness in the Ottoman foreign ministry’.\textsuperscript{7}

In a restricted political society in which only three million people (nine per cent of the total population) had the vote, domestic forces played an important role in shaping and supporting Italy’s overseas policy. The Italian National Association, founded in December 1910, stirred up agitation among the literate Italian public, though historians are unable to agree on exactly how important and influential it


\textsuperscript{7} Childs, \textit{Italo-Turkish Diplomacy}, 17, 26-7.
was. Its impact was reinforced by the activities of the Italian Naval League (1897) and the Istituto Coloniale Italiano (1905), of which foreign minister Antonio Di San Giuliano was a vice-president. As spring turned into summer in 1911, passions rose. On 7 June, three days after the inauguration of the Vittoriano monument celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the kingdom of Italy, Francesco Guicciardini made a rousing speech to parliament during which he castigated Italy’s ‘dolorous tradition’ of diplomatic failure, pointed to Libya as a fertile outlet for Italy’s surplus population, and pronounced the end of Turkish rule in Tripolitania to be ‘only … a matter of time’. A special congress of the Italian Cultural Institute, attended by the king and queen, opened four days later and passed a resolution demanding energetic action by the government ‘to guarantee securely our rights and interests in Tripolitania’. 

A frenzied press campaign put domestic wind into the government’s sails. Exaggerated claims were made about Libya’s economic potential and wildly misleading descriptions of its abundant natural resources made by people who had never been there, or in the case of Giuseppe Bevione of La Stampa had cruised along the coast gazing at it through binoculars. The press campaigned for economic penetration and occupation of Libya, much of it taking the line that the Committee of Union and Progress had brought Turkey neither progress nor union. By early summer it was complaining about the weakness of Italian policy and urging that the army and the fleet be held ready to support Italian policy. The war was popular not only on the Right – the Catholic press portrayed it as a crusade, though the Pope disclaimed this and held that it was a purely political affair – but also across a broad spectrum of the Left. Revolutionary syndicalists, reformist socialists, radicals and republicans joined forces with economic interest groups to urge the administration into action. Gabriele D’Annunzio turned up the thermostat, producing his pro-war Canzoni d’oltremare, and Marinetti approvingly labelled the war ‘Futurist’.

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8 Bosworth feels that its originality and influence have been ‘greatly exaggerated’: R.J.B. Bosworth, Italy, the Least of the Great Powers: Italian foreign policy before the First World War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 39. Renzi believes that Giolitti and Di San Giuliano were ‘willing to follow the lead of the ultranationalists’: William A. Renzi, In the Shadow of the Sword: Italy’s neutrality and entrance into the Great War (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 16.

9 James Rennell Rodd, Social and Diplomatic Memories 1909-1919 (London: Edward Arnold, 1925), 147, 149.

Against a background of mounting domestic pressure, the German ambassador told Di San Giuliano on 1 July 1911 that the gunboat Panther had been sent to Agadir. ‘From that moment’, the foreign minister was reported as saying, ‘the question of Tripoli had entered an active phase.’\(^{11}\) The Agadir crisis created not just the opportunity but the necessity for an Italian forward move to get compensation for French dominance of Morocco before Rome was faced with a fait accompli and lost the international leverage she temporarily possessed. Then, on 21 September the Central Powers suggested renewing the Triple Alliance early, a move Rome believed to be driven by Austria-Hungary’s desire to improve her position in the Balkans. With Balkan ambitions of his own to safeguard, Di San Giuliano had to out-distance the Ballplatz’s diplomacy by taking Libya before he was offered it as compensation for a further reinforcement of Vienna’s position in the decaying Turkish possessions on the other side of the Adriatic.

The foreign minister laid out his perception of the diplomatic situation on 28 July 1911. Within a few months, Italy might be ‘forced to carry out the military operation to Tripolitania’. His first advice was that foreign policy should keep this in mind in order to seek to avoid it: it could hasten a Balkan crisis and ‘almost force’ Austria-Hungary to act there. There was also the military balance to keep in mind: an expeditionary force would require at least one army corps and most of the fleet, thereby weakening Italy in Europe. However, all other foreign policy considerations counselled quick action. French moves in Morocco could change the Mediterranean equilibrium; Italy would not encounter serious obstacles if she acted now, but that might not be the case if she acted later; and Turkey, facing serious military problems, was evidently in a vulnerable state. Finally there was domestic politics to think about: public opinion felt that the government’s external policy was ‘too docile’ and there was a widespread feeling that national energy needed to assert itself vigorously in some way.\(^{12}\) Far from being a balanced assessment, Di San Giuliano’s advice tilted very decidedly in one direction: towards war.

Faced with conciliatory moves by the Porte, who withdrew the vali of Tripoli, Ibrahim Pasha, Di San Giuliano’s diplomatic strategy during August was to make it appear to the European Great Powers that all conciliatory means had been exhausted before taking action. In reality, no such moves were ever made. Reports

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11 Rodd, *Social and Diplomatic Memories*, 141.
that Sultan Mehmet V Resat wanted peace were forwarded to Rome as confessions of weakness. A check around the European embassies confirmed that neither Germany nor Russia would oppose an Italian action and that Austria-Hungary, while uneasy, was not disposed to obstruct it.\(^{13}\) Then, on Saturday 2 September, Di San Giuliano met Rear-Admiral Corsi, vice-chief of naval staff, in the Grand Hotel Fiuggi and learned that if an Italian expedition arrived off Tripoli between December and April it would probably spend many days immobilised outside the port because of the weather. Corsi advised that if an operation was going to be launched it would be prudent to do so in October or November, otherwise Italy must wait until the following April at the earliest. Di San Giuliano would not countenance delaying until 1912 as the international situation would by then be ‘completely changed’.\(^{14}\) On 14 September, with the Moroccan crisis on the point of international resolution, premier and foreign minister met and decided to launch an expedition in November. Next day Di San Giuliano urged that action be in the first half of October. On 18 September Giolitti instructed the war and navy ministers to speed up secret preparations for war. At this point, the cardinal consideration in both men’s minds was the need to act before Vienna and Berlin suspected or got to know about what was happening and exerted mediating action which would prevent Italy from lifting her prize. On 19 September came news that the Turks were sending the steamer *Derna* to Tripoli with arms and ammunition, and the following day further intelligence that the Franco-German talks over Morocco were nearing conclusion.

On 23 September France and Germany signed preliminary accords, and the following day the king was asked to consent to the issue of an ultimatum to Turkey. The paper-thin ultimatum was prepared during the night of 26/27 September and delivered the next day. The Porte was prepared to give whatever guarantees Italy wanted regarding the expansion of her economic interests in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica as long as they did not infringe its ultimate sovereignty. This was not enough for Rome, and Italy declared war on 29 September under article 5 of the Statuto of 1849. The war did not need parliamentary approval, and since parliament had gone on vacation in July it did not get it. However, when parliament reassembled on 22 February 1912 the royal decree declaring Italian sovereignty over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica was passed into law with a big majority.

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\(^{13}\) Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy*, 51, 56.

\(^{14}\) Di San Giuliano to Giolitti, 2 September 1911: *Dalle carte di Giovanni Giolitti*, III: 59.
Giolitti’s subsequent explanation of why he decided on war was something of a mish-mash. Libya was behind the times, as the slave markets in Benghazi bore witness. If the Italians had not gone for Libya, some other power would have done so. And the Young Turks were working to improve the efficiency of their army and were about to give ship building orders to Great Britain. The latter at least was a calculated exaggeration: the Turkish navy, which could barely manage to operate two German pre-dreadnoughts, had a dreadnought in English yards that was due for completion in 1914, when Italy would have four dreadnoughts. About the timing of the decision he was more honest. The conclusion of the Moroccan crisis had been the spur, and the nationalist campaign in the press had provided the push.\(^{15}\) Thirty years later, the king told General Alberto Pariani that Giolitti had been against the war until he saw how strongly the senate was in favour of it.

**Military preparations**

Italy’s less than glittering military record, and the inadequate inter-connections that have been a feature of her civil-military relations, have led to the Libyan war being depicted as a spatch-cocked exercise for which neither the premier nor the chief of the general staff did anything much by way of prior planning and organisation.\(^{16}\) This is quite untrue. War planning in fact began as early as November 1884 when the foreign minister, Pasquale Mancini, instructed the war minister to prepare a force of 30,000 for a possible landing ‘to occupy Tripoli, Benghazi and a few other points, above all at the extreme margins of the coast, both towards Egypt and towards Tunisia’.\(^{17}\) A plan was duly drawn up the following year to land a force of 35,000, its objectives Tripoli, Derna, Benghazi and the Djebel Akhdar highlands. In 1897 the staff produced a 60-page study for a landing on the Argub beach east of Tripoli and a detailed logistical plan which included the loading tables for each boat.\(^{18}\) The plans were updated in 1899, and at the same time the general staff

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16 For a list of historians who have perpetuated this error, see David G. Herrrmann, ‘The Paralysis of Italian Strategy in the Italian-Turkish War, 1911-1912’, *English Historical Review* CIV: 411 (April 1989), 335 fn. 6. To it should be added Bosworth, *Italy and the Approach of the First World War*, 75; Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy*, 48.


18 Studio dal Capo Ufficio di S.M., 15 March 1897; Studio dal colonello Pittaluga, L-8 racc. 6/19, racc.7/1, Archivio dell’Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito Rome (hereafter AUSSME).
carried out a detailed study of amphibious operations from the Seven Years’ War to the Cuban War. In 1901, a detailed study of Tripoli was drawn up with maps of the defences and tables of ranges and angles for an artillery bombardment.\textsuperscript{19} From 1902 the navy began visiting Libyan territorial waters, and the general staff started to compile data on garrisons, defences and port activity based on consular reports. During the first Moroccan crisis notes were issued up-dating the landing plans for Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. Six years later, with the moment for action at hand, they were re-issued.\textsuperscript{20} In 1909 general army manoeuvres practised an opposed landing, and the following year detailed orders were drawn up for mobilisation of the special expeditionary corps and issued down to regimental level.\textsuperscript{21}

War planning was supported by a considerable intelligence effort. From the late 1880s onwards, Italian consular staff in Tripoli, Benghazi, Alexandria and Gabes in Tunisia sent reports on Turkish troop strength and movements, local political attitudes, economic resources and communications back to Rome. In 1903 Captain Vicenzo Rossi carried out a secret reconnaissance on behalf of the general staff, returning with detailed plans of the Tripoli fortifications and 230 photographs. In February 1911 a detailed report on the local garrison concluded that although the Young Turk regime had improved things, military training was still deficient: ‘the soldiers are thought to be good … but the officers, although more select than before, are generally deficient and neglected’.\textsuperscript{22} After hostilities began, intelligence reports would chart the presence of modern German artillery, the arrival of Turkish staff officers and the importation of guns and ammunition. Nor were the attitudes of the local population disregarded. In 1903 the head of Italian Military Intelligence, Colonel Garrioni, asked the consul general about its likely stance in the event of war. The consul believed that if the Italians landed the Arabs would neither take up arms against the Turks nor aid any Europeans, but their sympathy could be won by guaranteeing them their ancient rights ‘thus hoping to overcome an atavistic mistrust by a population who at the most could put up a passive resistance’.\textsuperscript{23} The need to treat with the local Arab, Bedouin and Senussi was repeatedly emphasised in the years immediately before the war. Two months

\textsuperscript{19} Studio per il bombardamento di Tripoli, November 1901, L-8 racc.7/10, AUSSME.
\textsuperscript{20} Sbarco in Tripolitania/Libia: Appunti, 1905, L-8 racc.179/17-18, AUSSME.
\textsuperscript{21} Disposizioni esecutive per la eventuale mobilitazione di un corpo speciale destinato ad operare in zone pianeggiante d’oltre mare, March 1910, L-8 racc.191/2, AUSSME.
\textsuperscript{22} Maria Gabriella Pasquilini, \textit{Carte Segrete dell’Intelligence Italiana 1861-1918} (Rome: [Ministry of Defence], 2006), 201.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 182 (original italics).
before it broke out Carlo Galli, Italian consul in Tripoli, told the Foreign Ministry in Rome that there was nothing much to fear from the local territorial troops and that the only difficulty was ‘to secure in advance the support of the Arab chiefs’. A general staff officer should be sent out under cover without delay to undertake the task, which Galli estimated would take between four and six weeks.24

On 21 September 1911 Captain Pietro Verri of the general staff landed at Tripoli in disguise. A week later he reported that existing intelligence on the port and its defences was accurate, that the Turks had landed 20,000 rifles which were being distributed to other coastal towns, and that the Turkish plan was ‘to retire inland and carry on a campaign arming the local population and basing themselves in the mountainous Djebel region’. He advised starting political work ‘which I think will have rapid results’ at once.25 Di San Giuliano had toyed with the idea of creating a local bey, as the French had done in Tunisia, using the local noble Qaramanli family, but nothing of substance was done before the guns began firing. Under-estimation of likely local resistance continued to the last: on the day that Italian sailors landed in Tripoli, military intelligence believed that the Arabs would in general be ‘if not entirely ready to receive us favourably, then at least neutral and waiting on events’.26

The army general staff was kept very well informed about both military and political developments inside the Ottoman empire. In 1905, facing the possibility that the army might have to intervene in the Balkan peninsula, the chief of the general staff, General Tancredi Saletta, asked for further information about the military and moral decline of the Turkish military machine.27 Detailed reports flowed in. In February 1909, as tension mounted between Turkey and Bulgaria, the military attaché, Lieutenant-Colonel Elia, reported that war ministry doubted whether Turkey could take on an armed conflict there.28 At the beginning of April there were protests in the Turkish officer corps at proposals to reduce their numbers. The revolutions that took place in the middle of the month nevertheless took Constantinople completely by surprise. Nor did things seem to grow any

26 Mario Montanari, Politica e strategia in cento anni di guerre italiane II/1, Le guerre d’Africa (Rome: Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito, 1999), 400.
27 N.36, Saletta to Zampolli, 11 January 1905, G-29 racc. 102, AUSSME.
28 N.18, 18 February 1909, G-29 racc. 106, AUSSME.
calmer for the Ottoman regime. At the end of the year the ambassador reported
that the general officers were almost all hostile to the Committee of Union and
Progress and a potentially dangerous minority of junior officers were hostile to the
Committee’s anti-liberalism and favouritism.29

From the beginning of 1911 a string of reports from the incoming military
attaché, Lieutenant-Colonel Marro, pointed up growing internal divisions
and weakness. The Committee of Union and Progress was split between three
competing groups to which many army officers belonged, necessitating concessions
and compromises. In May the war ministry had to issue orders to the army not
to interfere in politics; a large majority of officers were still outside politics but
if that altered – and masonic officers at Salonika, Constantinople and Monastir
were complaining at the closure of their lodges – everything could change. On 7
July Marro offered the opinion that ‘Turkey has in a short time created an army
that is strong numerically and even stronger as far as the spirit of its soldiers is
concerned, but because of the very particular political conditions it is not capable of
using it in the Balkans’.30 In early September, as Giolitti and Di San Giuliano were
closing towards their final decision, Marro reported that the Turkish government
was unable to make immediate provision for the defence of Libya: ‘the defence of
Tripolitania needs time and money, and the Government is putting its hope in time
rather than in its own powers’. A lengthy despatch, copied to the Foreign Ministry
and received in Rome on 20 September, challenged the authorities with the news
that the Ottoman people ‘DON’T KNOW US, DON’T FEAR US, DON’T
LIKE US’ [original capitals], and concluded that Turkey would accept a fight even
though lack of money, lack of reservists, a cholera epidemic and inadequate naval
preparation meant that it was one of the most unfavourable moments for her to
do so, and that she would accept it ‘with lots of noise, lots of talk, few facts and
above all with little in the way of sound proposals [to fight it]’. Two days later,
Marro assured Rome that the time had come to act but that there was nothing to
fear as the enterprise was ‘too easy’. If Italy acted energetically success was certain.
Then, at the last, Marro had second thoughts and in a personal letter next day
he corrected himself: what he had termed ‘easy’ would in truth be ‘not extremely
difficult’.31 By then the die was cast.

29 N.797, 3 April 1909; N.46, 14 April 1909; N.2959/936, Imperiali to Esteri, 18 December
1909, ibid.
30 N. 107, 21 May 1911; N.117, 1 June 1911; N.146, 6 July 1911, G-29 racc.108,
AUSSME.
31 Marro to Ministero degli Esteri, 11 September 1911; N.191, 15 September 1911; N.197, 22
September 1911; Marro to ?Pollio, 23 September 1911, ibid.
Although the Italian general staff was not taken entirely by surprise when the government unveiled its intention to go to war, there were nevertheless serious deficiencies in some aspects of its planning. The local political dimension was acknowledged but then left entirely to one side. Instructions issued in August 1911 opted for ‘a few displays of force at coastal points duly selected as secondary objectives’, after which the entire country would be occupied by degrees following ‘appropriate political and administrative action on the part of the new government installed at Tripoli’. To be fair to the soldiers, in donning strategic blinkers they were doing no more than obey political directions. On 24 September Di San Giuliano told war minister General Paolo Spingardi that the army’s task was ‘to secure possession of the coast and to neutralise the resistance of the Turkish troops … Any advance into the interior must be avoided as far as possible.’ However, with the government’s decision for outright annexation of Libya, which Di San Giuliano revealed on 13 October 1911, the political face of the war changed and with it the task facing the army.

**Going to war**

The special army corps, comprising 1,105 officers and 33,303 men, that embarked at Naples was made up from individual regiments using men from the classes of 1888 and 1890. Italian intelligence expected it to face 4,000 regular Turkish troops and 10,000 local levies. Servicing and equipping the expeditionary force produced a catalogue of deficiencies very much like those that had afflicted it fifty years before and would do so again three years later. The stores contained boots without nails and haversacks of such poor quality leather as to be unusable. Recruits joined with unsharpened bayonets. There was no proper organisation of reserves for wastage, and specialist units were particularly hard hit. In some respects, however, preparations were good: mobilisation proceeded quickly and smoothly, and having learned from experience in China eleven years before, the planners were careful to provide landing stages and giant pontoons. General Carlo Caneva was slated

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33 Di San Giuliano to Spingardi, 24 September 1911; ibid., 334.
34 This was an accurate estimate: in 1911 Turkey had 12,000 troops in Libya, 60,000 in Albania, and over 110,000 in the Yemen.
36 Sergio Romano, La quarta sponda. La Guerra di Libia, 1911/1912 (Milan: Bompiani, 1977), 91.
for command, largely because of his ‘victory’ over General Luigi Cadorna, in the annual summer manoeuvres in the Po valley. Sixty-six years old, Caneva had fought the dervishes in 1897 and had taken part in Libyan war planning in 1905. Known to be cautious, he did not inspire huge confidence: when told of his appointment by the war minister he seemed less than enthusiastic, though Spingardi thought that he would ‘do well’.37 His task at this point appeared fairly straightforward. Pollio found it ‘difficult to imagine’ that the Turks could retreat and mass in the interior of the country. If they did this would constitute ‘a grave threat’ to the expeditionary force and would oblige it to undertake ‘a difficult expedition into unknown and difficult country’. He therefore expected that the Turks would fight on the spot and then retreat towards Constantinople. The undertaking would not be easy, but the main difficulties he foresaw were disembarking the troops and then maintaining them ‘in a poor and primitive country’. It was absolutely necessary that the expedition be organised perfectly. If Tripoli could be taken quickly by the first echelon of troops then that would obviate the need to land the entire expeditionary force on open beaches. Now was the time to dare, but to dare quickly.38 Warnings from consular staff in Tripoli and Benghazi that the native population could be hostile were being ignored.

Pollio needed three weeks to ready and move the expeditionary force, but the premier and foreign minister could not wait that long. On 28 September the navy was ordered to blockade Tripoli and call for its surrender as soon as hostilities were declared; if the demand was rejected, Admiral Luigi Faravelli was to bombard the port. Faravelli promptly radioed for 3,000 troops, and after shelling Tripoli he sent sailors ashore on 5 October. The Turkish garrison fled, and the town was – or seemed – securely in Italian hands when the first expeditionary troops began to land on 11 October. Caneva’s instructions identified the four objectives established in the earlier plans – Tripoli, Benghazi, Tobruk and the Djebel Akhdar – but left him to use his own judgement about moving on Derna and the oasis at Ghadames and following withdrawing Turkish troops. They also emphasised the importance of separating the Turks, ‘considered as the oppressors’, from the Arabs, ‘considered the oppressed’. Everything had to be done ‘short of weakness’ to recruit the Arabs as allies or at least to ensure their neutrality.39

37 Spingardi to Brusat, Carte Brusati 10/vi-4-36, Archivio Centrale di Stato Rome (hereafter ACS).
39 Pollio to Caneva, 6 October 1911, L-8 racc.1/28, AUSSME.
Caneva had no plans to penetrate into the interior of Libya, all too well aware of the obstacles to be overcome before any active operations inland – ‘which must be prudent and decisive’ – could be begun. As well as completing the disembarkation and establishing the base, a logistical service had to be organised across a country without resources, the intentions of the Arab population had to be clarified, and they had to be politically prepared ‘without prematurely involving them in warlike acts, which must be directed exclusively against the Turks’.  

The arrival of the provisional governor, Vice-Admiral Ricci, on 7 October was painted by the Italian press in terms which made it appear that a happy partnership was developing. For a few days it looked as though the campaign would be easy. ‘I don’t think this is a real war’, one soldier wrote home, ‘just small attacks and we shall soon win … you’ll see that it will all be over before long.’  

The drôle de guerre was brief. Italian forces took Derna on 17 October, Benghazi on 20 October and Homs next day. At Homs, where Caneva had been led to believe that the local Arab tribes would greet the Italians’ arrival favourably, the landing force was besieged until the following February. At Benghazi the Turks fought from dune to dune, inflicting 130 casualties on the invader. At Tripoli the Italians constructed lines of trenches and barbed wire to defend the west and south where they controlled the whole of the oasis; in the east, where they did not control it all, Italian troops faced a labyrinth of houses, gardens and orchards. There, at Sciara Sciat on 23 October, Turkish officers launched local tribesmen in an assault preceded by diversionary attacks elsewhere along the line. In the course of vicious fighting that cost the Italians 307 killed and wounded and 294 missing, two companies were captured and 250 men massacred in a Muslim cemetery. A second battle three days later cost the Italians a further 251 dead and wounded. Later on it was discovered that Italian captives had been mutilated, blinded, eviscerated, crucified, buried alive or torn to pieces. In the panic that followed Sciara Sciat Arabs found carrying guns or knives were summarily executed and several thousand were deported. The delusion that the war was in any way ‘civilising’ had ended.

Caneva’s men now faced two enemies working side by side: the Turks, who were fighting a national and imperial war, and the Arabs who were fighting a religious and tribal war against European infidels. The Senussi in Cyrenaica joined in readily
as the pan-Islamic notes encouraged by Constantinople grew ever stronger. Arab tribes were organised under their own leaders and supplies brought in across the eastern and western borders. The Arab mehalla, fast mobile columns whose strength was their fluidity of movement, were difficult targets. Nothing in Italy’s military experience had prepared her for a war of this character. Caneva called for – and got – another 55,000 troops and settled down to sit it out, backed by advice from his generals on no account to venture out into the desert.43

The events in Tripoli caused Giolitti to re-think the war. On 26 October he wrote to the king proposing a three-stage politico-military strategy. First, using maximum effort, Turkish forces in Tripolitania must be destroyed ‘to show the world that the conquest is definite’. Then Italy should proclaim absolute sovereignty over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. Finally, Italy should prepare to occupy unspecified islands and if necessary exert a blockade on Turkey in order to force her to make peace.44 Shortly afterwards the government in Rome changed the terms under which Canova had to fight its war. On 5 November 1911 a royal decree proclaimed absolute Italian sovereignty over Libya.

This dramatic extension of Italy’s original war aim, the establishment of an Italian protectorate under the veil of Turkish sovereignty, altered the politico-military character of the war in two crucial respects. Not only did the army now have to conquer the entire country instead of merely occupying it as the instrument of a diplomatic demonstration with limited goals, but it had to confront a Turkey now determined to fight where previously it had seemed inclined to give way. As one senior Turkish statesman explained, the Ottoman government could never agree to surrender an Arab province to a Christian power: ‘It would mean a rising en masse of all the Arab provinces against the Government.’45

Caneva’s preternatural caution now came to the fore. The day after the announcement he informed Rome that he was not willing to move out to Zuara and use it as a base for operations against the desert caravan routes as he had neither the men nor the resources needed to do so. He could see no point in pursuing Ottoman forces into the desert, where there were neither significant strategic objectives nor key points whose occupation would subdue the tribes. Nor, he warned, should Rome pin its hopes on winning a decisive encounter. The Turks wanted a long-

43 De Biase, L’Aquila d’Oro, 248.
drawn out campaign and Caneva could see no alternative to giving them exactly that. His advice was to settle down in the coastal garrisons for a long war. Back in Rome, treasury minister Sidney Sonnino was among the first to experience a feeling of alarm. Tactically the Arabs had the advantage: while they attacked from all directions, keeping two-and-a-half Italian divisions permanently on the alert, the Italians for their part did little more than bombard Turkish positions with naval guns, ‘an operation which has little effect and is very expensive’. Strategically, the Turks were calculating that a combination of war weariness on the public’s part and socialist agitation would drain Italy’s will. In these circumstances Caneva – ‘a man [who is] all used up’ – was not the general Italy needed.

Military and political pressure was now put on Caneva to act. Pollio instructed him to occupy the coastal oases east of Tripoli, to which the field commander replied that he lacked the necessary water and facilities to sustain the extra troops required. Giolitti urged him forward, considering it ‘absolutely necessary, for vital international reasons, and above all for important considerations of a military order, that without delay Your Excellency proceed, with the means of which you presently dispose, to a determined and effective counter-offensive action’. Caneva, surely aware that the situation was starting to resemble that in which an importunate prime minister, Francesco Crispi, had pushed an indecisive general towards disaster at Adowa in 1896, was reluctant to budge. Successful actions at Sidi Mesri and Henni in late November both required columns 10,000 men strong, after which their commander, General De Chaurand, advised against ‘venturing into the unknown desert [and] running risks for purely nominal results’. Sticking to the coasts, the Italians fought a nine-hour battle at Ain Zara on 4 December during which the navy bombarded oases east of Tripoli to prevent a flank attack. Casualties were light, and the action chased the enemy out of range of Tripoli, but though the Italians had gained control of the ground they had not inflicted a significant defeat on the Turks, who had withdrawn. To one experienced observer the army, with no-one of energy and capacity at its head, was now in a state of paralysis. The logistics service also left a great deal to be desired. The army was living from day to day.

46 Romano, La quarta sponda, 166-8; Montanari, Le guerre d’Africa, 423-5.
48 Giolitti to Caneva, 24 November 1911, L-8 rac.1/57, AUSSME.
49 De Biase, L’Aquila d’Oro, 248.
Rome was now in the market for strategic alternatives, and the navy and army duly came up with some. In mid-October, Pollio had suggested seizing the island of Rhodes as a gage which might be useful in securing a peace. At the start of the second week of November, military and naval chiefs met to look at the options. They produced three scenarios: occupation of one or more of the Aegean islands as a base from which to blockade Salonika or Smyrna; an attempt to force the Dardanelles; and an offensive along the Syrian and Anatolian coasts to destroy cable lines and stations, bombard Turkish fortifications and blow up tracts of railway near the coast. The politicians squashed them all. The Dardanelles was out of bounds under article VII of the Triple Alliance; blockading Salonika might bring the Austrians in, while doing the same to Smyrna could only have a limited effect; and Italy might be forced to abandon coastal operations which would damage her prestige. Although his project had been temporarily derailed, Pollio was still wholeheartedly committed to it. ‘The moment to act in the Aegean has arrived’, he told the chief of naval staff, Admiral Rocca Rey. In fact, as Rocca Rey pointed out, the political obstacles to actions of this kind were still insurmountable. At this stage in the war Italy’s strategic hands were bound by the ropes of international diplomacy. Some potential targets simply could not be touched: the Adriatic, which would set off alarm bells in Vienna; the Dardanelles, which would do likewise in London and St Petersburg; and Syria, which would bring Paris into the fray.

In Tripolitania, the army had over-reached itself. On 19 December General Pecori Giraldi, the victor of Ain Zara, sent out an exploratory column of 1,800 men under Colonel Gustavo Fara to deal with 350 Arabs at the oasis at Bir Tobra. Lacking maps and possibly the victim of duplicitous guides, the column got lost, took seven hours to cover less than 15 kilometres, and on arrival attacked the wrong positions. Attacked from the rear, it dug in and fought until nightfall, when both sides retreated. Headquarters sent two brigades out to help Fara, one of which itself got lost and met him as he was returning. Pecori Giraldi was recalled, and returned to Rome convinced that the freemasons in the army were responsible for what turned out to be only a temporary set-back in his ascent up the military ladder. Fara was promoted to general for military merit.

The army now found itself fighting a war that required it to conquer the vast hinterlands of Libya while pinned to the coast, and pitted it against mounting resistance from the Arab populations and the Turks, whose presence and backing

51 Memorandum, 8 November 1911, L-8 racc.208/1, AUSSME.
52 Pollio to Rocca Rey, 22 November 1911, L-8 racc.1/48, AUSSME.
multiplied the power of the local inhabitants. Arab raids and guerrilla-style attacks caused many casualties and patrols were frequently caught and mauled. The strength of the resistance mounted when, in January 1912, the head of the Senussi who dominated Cyrenaica, Said Ahmed el-Sherif, declared a *jihad* against the invader. Money and support flowed in from across the Ottoman Empire. Alongside the resistance Constantinople made a series of diplomatic offers involving ceding parts or all of the Libyan coastline to Italy, maintaining nominal Ottoman suzerainty or granting local autonomy. None was acceptable to Italy, and so the fighting continued.

Outwardly at least, Giolitti appeared unperturbed about how his war was going. As 1911 closed he was reported in Berlin as saying ‘We are not pressed, we have lots of soldiers, lots of money, lots of enthusiasm, [and] lots of patience’. However, the New Year brought further reason for concern. An outline plan to march a force of 12,500 men to Gharian, seventy kilometres south of Tripoli, swelled in the making – 12,500 men became 17,500, 134 trucks became 300 trucks, and 5,000 camels became 9,000 camels. Eventually Caneva shelved it as costly and impractical. Instead, his emissary told the authorities in Rome, he proposed to do ‘as everyone has always done in all colonial wars, to ally ourselves with time and consolidate our position on the coasts’.

With 100,000 men and twenty-six generals under his command, Caneva’s inactivity was arousing considerable political irritation. His recall to Rome in February 1912 spread a general atmosphere of confidence – at least among the nationalists. It did not reassure Giolitti. The premier thought his field commander lacked initiative and was insufficiently aware of the need for rapid action to avoid foreign policy complications. Pollio later complained that nothing could be done with Caneva but for the moment at least nothing could be done without him. He rarely spoke of the advantages of operations, dwelling on their difficulties and disadvantages, but ‘he does it in such a way that nothing can be said to refute them’. The other generals were no better: Giolitti thought two-thirds of them ought to be sacked for ‘intellectual inadequacy’, otherwise the military budget would be wasted. Caneva hung on to his command for another six months while a string

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53 *Lettres de la princesse Radziwill au Général de Robilant (1889-1914)* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1933), IV: 170 (27 December 1911).
55 Pollio to Brusati, 16 May 1912, Carte Brusati 10/vi-5-37, ACS.
of his subordinates were recalled until finally, on 31 August, Giolitti replaced him with the ardent and aggressive General Ragni.

Faced with a new kind of war, in which the fact that there was neither a substantial enemy force to manoeuvre into battle nor a distinct territorial objective to seize made it pointless to attempt to penetrate into the interior, Rome now revised her Libyan strategy. There would be no strategic offensive, but neither would there be a passive defence. The ‘third way’ was to be one of wearing out the enemy with fire-power and counter-attacks. As part of this strategy, Caneva agreed to take Cape Macabez west of Tripoli as a jumping off point from which to intercept enemy caravans moving through the desert to the south. When his troops finally carried out the operation in April they found themselves facing salt lakes and waterless desert which made operations into the interior impossible. In March work began on a four-and-a-half metre high masonry wall around Tripoli, for which stone had to be brought from Italy. Benghazi and Derna followed suit. Caneva’s strategy was now literally being set in stone.

Caneva seemed in Rome increasingly to be devoid of both ideas and energy. His foremost concerns were to maintain Italy’s military prestige and the image of invincibility which the coastal defences instilled in the enemy. Believing that pure force was useless as a weapon against a hostile population, he intended to move out and occupy territory only when suitable political preparation had created a friendly disposition among the local population. The problem with his strategy, as Di San Giuliano recognised, was that as long as the Ottomans were in the field there was no incentive for the Arab tribes to act as Caneva required. Turkey, for her part, would not pull out until she and the European powers were persuaded that Libya was pacified. If military operations could not create this situation, then they should at a minimum ‘produce abroad the impression that it has been created, and give the Turkish government at least a pretext for yielding’. Rome wanted complete conquest of the coast, and Caneva cautiously obliged. In a series of operations between June and mid-August he extended his control along it using artillery and naval gunfire, taking Zuara in August and cutting off the inland supply route to Tripoli.

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57 Memorandum by Pollio, 14 February 1912, L-8 racc.2/10, AUSSME.
58 Di San Giuliano to Spingardi, 9 June 1912, L-8 racc.3/56, AUSSME.
Caution was by now as much a tactical watchword as an operational and strategic one. Orders were issued that artillery and machine-gun detachments should not be exposed with insufficient infantry support; cavalry patrols were not to get involved in skirmishes while on reconnaissance; and when advancing infantry encountered the enemy they were ordered to stop and wait for a shrapnel bombardment to clear the ground ahead. Luigi Capello, then a major-general commanding the western district in Libya and subsequently in command of the II Army that collapsed at Caporetto, castigated Caneva’s defensive tactics: waiting for the enemy to break himself against Italian fortifications was ‘undoubtedly healthier than the tactical offensive, but does not fit with the concept of a strategic offensive’.59

The navy and the Aegean

The Italian declaration of sovereignty over Libya opened up a new theatre for action in the eastern Mediterranean. The navy’s target was quickly identified: on 23 October the fleet commander, Vice-Admiral Aubry, was told that the government ‘intends to prepare for resolute action in the Aegean, which could develop by blockading Smyrna and occupying Mytilene’.60 Diplomatic forces were for the moment entirely unfavourable and so the navy had to content itself with supporting the army’s operations in Libya, serving as a mobile base in the conquest of the littoral, and intervening directly only when essential, as it did at Derna on 24 November. The potential for naval action to produce serious international complications was demonstrated when, in January 1912, the navy stopped two French steamers, the *Carthage* and the *Manouba*, and claimed that they were carrying contraband and Turkish officers wearing Red Crescent uniforms. Things were smoothed over when Italy relinquished her right to board French ships on the open seas. On 24 February 1912 Admiral Paolo Thaon di Revel sank two Turkish warships in the port of Beirut, prompting the Ottoman government to protest that this was a violation of the Hague Convention and to declare itself free to take all measures for self-protection that circumstances required.

As the ground war in Libya congealed, a change in international circumstances came to the navy’s rescue. Initially resistant to any attack on the Dardanelles, Austria-Hungary was won over by German pressure, as was Russia. The government

then instructed the naval general staff to study naval operations in the Aegean. The incoming fleet commander, Admiral Viale, proposed a three-part operation: a surprise action against the Turkish squadron anchored in the Straits using torpedo boats; an attack on the forts guarding the Dardanelles; and a sortie along the coasts of Asia Minor to hit military installations and telegraph lines. To strike at the Dardanelles and at Smyrna demanded the occupation of the islands of Lemnos and Mytilene – the only ones ‘strategically and morally worthy of our occupation’.61 At this Vienna dug in its heels: only the southernmost Aegean islands were outside the shelter of article VII of the Triple Alliance. On 14 April Giolitti gave the go-ahead for an attack on the Turkish navy and Admiral the Duca degli Abruzzi launched it from the island of Stampalia on the night of 17/18 April. It turned into a minor fiasco. Forewarned of the coming incursion, which had been extensively forecast in the international press, the Turkish navy withdrew into the Sea of Marmora. A torpedo boat attack had to be abandoned when two of the boats collided in bad weather. Next day Rear-Admiral Thaon di Revel cruised off the mouth of the Straits in the vain hope of tempting the Turkish fleet out. The Turkish shore batteries opened fire, and after an indecisive two-hour exchange di Revel broke off the action. The chief of naval staff drew the only possible lesson from the action: ‘Overall it goes to show that the enemy never intended to challenge us, preferring to persevere in his passive stance’, he told the navy minister.62 The Turks then mined the Straits. They were reopened on 2 May, but the threat to repeat the action was always a card in Ottoman hands.

Forced to substitute indirect for direct action, the navy occupied Stampalia and Rhodes during April, hoping in the latter case to put stronger pressure on the Turks and interrupt arms shipments to the Libyan coast, and followed up by taking the eleven remaining Dodecanese islands during May. The action, which Giolitti afterwards admitted was carried out partly to produce a bargaining counter for use in peace negotiations, had no effect on the war, as the navy afterwards acknowledged. It did, though, increase the international complications enveloping the war since the French now feared that what was presently a temporary occupation would become permanent, thus changing the political and military balance in the region.

61 Rocca Rey to Cattolica, 16 April 1912, L-8 racc.3/36, AUSSME.
International complications prompted the navy’s last significant contribution to the Libyan war. In June, with the wind behind a French proposal to convene an international conference to end the fighting, and fearing that the Turks would use it to advance what would be to Italy unacceptable proposals, Rome looked for something that would improve her position and encourage her enemy to make an acceptable offer of terms. Pollio proposed landings on Chios and at Smyrna. The idea went down badly with Giolitti. The navy proposed a demonstration designed to inflict irreparable damage on Turkey, but neither Giolitti nor Di San Giuliano were willing to go that far. Eventually everyone settled for a compromise solution: an action directed only against the Turkish fleet. At midnight on 18-19 July, Captain Enrico Millo led a flotilla of five torpedo boats into the Straits. Picked up by Turkish searchlights and bombarded by the shore batteries, which did them no significant damage, the flotilla was forced to withdraw.

The daring action won Millo promotion to rear-admiral and the medaglia d’oro, Italy’s highest decoration, and the crews were awarded a hatful of medals and thirty-six field promotions. Thaon di Revel, by no means the only admiral to be frustrated by the control the politicians exercised over the war, praised his former chief of staff for doing what he himself should have done four months before. In reality, though, little or nothing had been achieved. Millo’s official report concluded that ‘in the prevailing conditions a torpedo attack on enemy ships anchored at Nagara [in the Sea of Marmora] has no hope of succeeding’. Rocca Rey acknowledged that it had failed in its principal objective. The best that could be said for it was that it had enabled a better assessment of the state of Turkish defences and that it had produced a moral result ‘which was certainly very great’.

Making peace

In June the news reached Giolitti that the Turks were willing to treat and conversations began in Lausanne on 12 July 1912. Giolitti and Di San Giuliano had already decided that Caneva had to go. Pollio was prepared to give him a chance to prepare operations for the autumn before considering his dismissal, but the two politicians were adamant that his direction of the war ‘did not respond to the exigencies of our national policy’. Spingardi objected that he had won every

64 Quo. Gabriele and Friz, La politica navale italiana, 196 fn. 32.
battle, but was instructed to remove him ‘not later than July’. Pollio worried that recalling him ‘might seem like a disapproval, not of the direction given by him, not of his actions, but of what the army has achieved’. The chief of the general staff kept pushing for moves against Chios and Smyrna, but by now the war had moved onto the diplomatic plane.

On 9 August 1912 Giolitti told war minister Paolo Spingardi that peace was not likely for two or three months. General Vittorio Trombi’s inaction in Cyrenaica, where he had been locked up under siege in Derna for ten months, was ‘a political disaster’ and military action must be intensified immediately. Plainly that was unlikely to happen under Caneva. Recalled to Rome on 31 August, he was formally relieved two days later. His command was split in two and his successors immediately began to achieve local successes. In Cyrenaica, General Briccola lifted the bombardment of Derna, which Enver Bey had begun two months earlier, on 17 September with the aid of a brilliant action by Tommaso Salsa that earned him a medaglia d’oro and promotion. Three days later in Tripolitania General Ragni took the oasis of Zanzur, which Caneva had dithered over since December, although holding off a counter-attack cost him 553 dead and wounded – the heaviest Italian casualties since Sciara Sciat.

Peace negotiations soon bogged down due to Turkey’s unwillingness to accept Italy’s bottom line – full and entire Italian sovereignty over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica – leading the Italians to threaten in mid-September to break them off and initiate more aggressive action. As September drew to a close things did not look all that promising for Rome. On the 24th, in a despatch marked up by Pollio for the war minister as urgent, the military attaché in Bulgaria and Montenegro, colonel Merrone, reported that Turkish officers in Libya had assured their government that the conditions of the Arab and Turkish troops there were good and that they would be able to put up even stronger resistance in the coming months. In January 1912, Pollio had learned from Merrone that there was little or no likelihood of any of the Balkan powers attacking Turkey that year. The picture changed when, on 30 September 1912, Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Greece began mobilising. Though Italy was unable to put direct pressure on the Porte for fear of upsetting either the Austrians or the Triple Entente, the Ottoman Empire was now vulnerable

65 Del Boca, Libia, 184.
66 Giolitti to Spingardi, 9 August 1912, Dalle carte di Giovanni Giolitti, III: 74. Trombi had been sacked the previous day.
67 N.1000, 24 September 1912, G-29 rac.109, AUSSME.
to interdiction of its sea communications between Anatolia and Roumelia along which a large proportion of the Turkish army would have to travel. Threats could be made, and on 1 October Italian negotiators announced that if a Balkan war broke out Italy would extend her theatre of operations beyond Libya.

On 8 October Montenegro declared war on Turkey. The Balkan war made it imperative for Turkey to agree terms with Italy, and equally imperative for Italy to avoid an international initiative to resolve both wars to her detriment. After a concentrated fortnight of pulling and hauling over both the details of the peace and the treaties that would embody its terms, Italy turned to the Powers, who put pressure on the Porte, and gave the Turks a second ultimatum. Finally the Turkish negotiators gave way, signing the secret treaty of Ouchy on 15 October and the public Treaty of Lausanne three days later. Italy got what she wanted – sovereignty over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica – while the sultan retained nominal religious authority as Caliph. Italy agreed to pay the Porte an annual indemnity of not less than 2,000,000 lire and Turkey received the promise of economic benefits of little worth.68

**Effects and consequences**

For Italy, the human costs of the war in Libya were relatively light. Of a force which numbered 100,000 men at its maximum, 3,431 died – 1,483 in combat and 1,948 of illness. Turkish and Arab losses have been estimated at 14,800. Financially, the war proved a heavy burden. In March 1914 Giolitti declared that it had cost just over half a billion lire. When the figures were recalculated, the total cost of the war between 1911 and 1914 came to 1,015,000,000 – a sum equivalent to half the total annual spend of the state. The Libyan campaign drained the army of weapons, munitions and equipment. Reassured by General Spingardi, premier Antonio Salandra told parliament in March 1914 that stocks were back to their proper levels. Over the summer it became apparent that they were not. Salandra fired the war minister at the end of September but despite herculean efforts the army was barely ready to take the field when war came on 24 May 1915.

Peace at Lausanne did not bring peace in Libya. While the Turks in Tripolitania surrendered and withdrew, the Berbers retreated to the Djebel to continue the fight. Turkish troops stayed behind in Cyrenaica, where the Senussi continued the

68 Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy*, 201-30.
war. At the end of 1913 there were reports of Turkish officers and men among the Senussi, and by the following spring, when there were still 66,000 Italian troops in Libya, it was clear that Enver was supplying the rebels with money, arms and ammunition. In July rebellion broke out in three districts. By November the insurrection had become general and Italian forces were besieged in Tripoli, Homs and Zuara. With a European war on his hands, the new chief of the general staff, Luigi Cadorna, categorically refused to send out any more men, and by 1 August 1915 only Tripoli and Homs remained in Italian hands. In January 1922 the Italians began the conquest of Libya all over again. This time a combination of modern technology and atavistic brutality brought a population that lacked outside support to its knees, and exactly a decade later Marshal Badoglio announced that the colony had been subdued.

Although the performance of the Italian armed forces left a lot to be desired, this was by no entirely their fault. The army’s record earned its generals Giolitti’s lasting contempt, but while most were undeniably cautious and unadventurous, they faced a war which was very different from the punitive expeditions carried out by the British or the campaigns of conquest conducted by the French during the previous fifty years, and different also from the Ethiopian war that had ended so badly fifteen years earlier. Tribal resistance blended with religious hostility to create a composite power more akin to what was to come than what had already been. The tactical virtuosity of the Arabs and Berbers was married to operational expertise provided by a Turkish army with unequalled experience of dealing with internal insurrections. Turkey’s backing of the war represented a proto-type of the sanctuaries which would be a feature of late-colonial wars of liberation: directly untouchable, it provided the Libyan insurgents with both material and moral support. Dismissing France’s successful model of colonial suppression in Algeria, which Caneva plainly misunderstood, Italian generals had neither the political nor the military tools with which to fulfil the task handed to them by their government. Faced with an enemy whose navy obdurately remained in the shelter of the sea of Marmora, and unable as a result of diplomatic constraints to do more than inflict an occasional pin-prick on its peripheries, there was not a great deal that the Italian navy could do to help. The claim made later that it had carried out ‘a series of impeccable [and] highly useful manoeuvres’ and had conducted what was ‘from the technical point of view a brilliant, almost perfect campaign’, puts

the best possible face on a performance whose main achievement was to stop or capture some 800 ships in a campaign to prevent contraband reaching Libya.\textsuperscript{70} Millo’s adventures in the Straits did, though, point the way to a more effective use of naval force, and in the final year of the world war MAS torpedo boats achieved some dramatic successes against the Austro-Hungarian navy.

The war divided a fractured political society yet more deeply. An already riven Socialist Party split into two: reformist socialists supported the war, believing that it would be advantageous for Italian emigration and that Libya was the last place left where Italy could expand, while revolutionary socialists violently opposed it. In July 1912, at the XIIth Party Congress, Mussolini and the revolutionaries won control. The war helped strengthen the conservative Catholics and the nationalists, though it left the latter with mixed feelings. Italy had wielded her sword with some success, but she had acted in response to events set in motion by other Great Powers, just as in 1870. Appetites were further whetted, particularly among the Irredentists. The electoral law of 1912, which tripled the number of voters to almost nine million, gave everyone a voice. Thus the Libyan war made its contribution to the polarisation of society which Antonio Salandra faced in taking Italy into the world war in May 1915.

The final and most enduring legacy of the Libyan war is the world war itself. Libya gave an undeniable fillip to Italy’s appetite for expansion and ‘created a climate of euphoria in certain circles’.\textsuperscript{71} However, subsequent Italian policy sought to avoid putting the future of Asiatic Turkey and the Mediterranean balance in play by maintaining the status quo and supporting Turkey. In case this failed, Di San Giuliano deemed it ‘absolutely necessary to construct a network of economic interests in Asiatic Turkey’, some of which Italy might claim permanently while the remainder could be used as goods in a future diplomatic exchange.\textsuperscript{72} Italy had designs on Anatolia and Albania, but in neither case did she challenge the international system to further them. The Libyan war was one step – albeit the first involving the overt use of military force – in a sequence of events whose immediate precursors were Austria-Hungary’s annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908-09 and France’s move to Fez in 1911. It was a limited war resolved through compromise and by treaty, like previous international conflicts and unlike the conflict that broke

\textsuperscript{70} Gabriele and Friz, \textit{La politica navale italiana}, 197, 198.

\textsuperscript{71} Marta Petricioli, \textit{L’Italia in Asia Minore. Equilibrio mediterraneo e ambizioni imperialiste alla vigilia della prima guerra mondiale} (Florence: Sansoni, 1983), 24.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 15.
out in 1914, which suggests that the norms of the international system still applied. Finally, the world war did not begin with a voracious power or powers seeking to swallow up an enfeebled Turkey; it began as a conflict between Austria-Hungary backed by Germany on the one side and Serbia backed by Russia on the other.

In July 1911 Giovanni Giolitti questioned whether it was in Italy’s interest to ‘break into fragments’ one of the cornerstones of the European balance of power, and whether a subsequent Balkan war might then provoke ‘a clash between the two power blocs and a European war?’. Almost to a man historians have adopted this ‘domino thesis’, making its author appear simultaneously both far-sighted and irresponsibly culpable for the coming catastrophe. But Giolitti’s words are perhaps better taken as those of a premier who was still uncertain about going to war than as the disinterested analysis of a neutral observer gifted with greater foresight than anyone else in the chancelleries of Europe. Change the analogy from falling dominoes to moves on a chequer-board and Italy’s responsibility for triggering a fatal sequence of events that led to August 1914, whilst it does not disappear, looks somewhat different.
In the Nick of Time: Transformation in the Ottoman Army, 1911

Edward J. Erickson

Introduction

1911 was a pivotal year for the Ottoman army because its principal ongoing lines of operations and lines of effort\(^1\) addressed many lingering military problems left over from the Hamidian period.\(^2\) These problems included revolts on the periphery of the empire, antique organisational structures, a lack of a strategic vision for how the army might configure itself as the empire entered the twentieth century, and an institutional and intellectual focus on counterinsurgency. This paper presents the idea that the efforts to resolve these military problems in 1911 put the Ottoman military in a more advantageous position to endure the approaching wars of 1912 and 1914.

The story begins with the fall of Abdul Hamid II on 23 July 1908, which marks the point at which professionally trained general staff officers were free to start the transformation of the Ottoman army into a modern military force. Between 1908 and the beginning of the First World War in 1914, the Ottoman army underwent a massive intellectual and physical reorganisation. This was accomplished while actively fighting large and difficult counterinsurgencies in Albania, Macedonia, and Yemen. Moreover, in this time frame the army fought an irregular war against Italy in Libya as well as a large-scale conventional war in the empire's core Balkan

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1 A Line of Operations defines the directional orientation of a force in time and space in relation to the enemy and links the force with its base of operations and objectives. A Line of Effort links multiple tasks and missions using the logic of purpose, cause and effect to focus efforts toward establishing operational and strategic conditions: US Army Field Manual 3-0, Operations, Hqs, Department of the Army, February 2008.

2 Sultan Abdul Hamid II reigned from 1876 through 1908. The period was characterised by increasing European domination of the Ottoman Empire’s economy and government, numerous insurrections by restive minorities, internal conspiracies by modernists, and ineffective government reforms. The sultan himself was secretive, ruthless and reactionary, a combination which made his own efforts at modernisation unproductive.
provinces in 1912 and 1913. Yet, in the end the Ottoman army that emerged from this traumatic period proved resilient and combat capable in the First World War.\(^3\) It is fair to ask whether this was an inevitable continuum or whether there was some kind of tipping point in 1911 which enabled the Ottoman army to shake off the bonds of its geopolitical situation and institutional inertia that shackled it to its past.

In the period 1908-1912, there were three active military lines of operation at the strategic level in Albania, Yemen and Libya. Moreover, during this time there were several dormant areas of insurgent activity in the eastern Armenian provinces, in Ottoman Macedonia and in the Ottoman Kurdish areas. In truth most of peripheral provinces were in a state of nearly continuous insurrection from 1877 to 1912. One result of this continuous insurgency, or persistent war to use a term currently in vogue, was to centre the both the practical and intellectual ethos of the Ottoman military on counterinsurgency.\(^4\) In 1911, Albania and Yemen had been in a nearly continuous state of rebellion and the Ottoman campaigns there absorbed large numbers of troops fighting against very well armed and determined enemies. In the end, despite committing large resources to the military effort in Albania and Yemen the Ottomans failed to achieve the desired effects and they negotiated settlements with the insurgents. In both cases the settlements resulted in near autonomy for the inhabitants. As Yemen and Albania were peripheral to the strategic core regions of the empire, these were acceptable outcomes for the Ottoman government. The campaign in Libya against Italy in 1911 was a reaction to an aggressive European invasion of an Ottoman province. There a conventional Ottoman army garrison was pushed out of the coastal cities by Italian expeditionary forces. The Ottomans then abandoned conventional operations and fought what amounted to a guerrilla campaign against the Italians. Although somewhat successful the Ottoman campaign collapsed in the late summer of 1912 when the Balkan League threatened attack in the empire's Balkan provinces. The resolution of these three military lines of operations removed them as strategic distractions and enabled the army to focus on operations in the Macedonia and Thrace in the First Balkan War of 1912-1913. Moreover, the ending of large scale military counterinsurgency campaigns enabled the Ottoman officer corps to return intellectually and practically to a focus on conventional operations.

\(^3\) See Edward J. Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I: A Comparative Study* (London: Routledge, 2007), for an explanation of this subject.

Similarly, in 1911, there were three principal military lines of effort aimed at restructuring the organisational architecture of the Ottoman army. The architect of change was Ahmet Izzet Pasha, an experienced soldier and trained general staff officer, who served as the army's chief of general staff from 1908-1914. These efforts were simultaneous and were the outcome of plans laid down in the preceding three years. The first effort involved reorganising the architecture of the cumbersome Ottoman infantry and artillery divisions into smaller streamlined triangular infantry divisions. In conjunction with this the Ottoman army was engaged in a second major effort to create modern army corps headquarters from scratch. Central to both of these efforts was a cadre of educated professional officers, who were cooperative and supportive of change. At the same time, the Ottoman high command undertook to disestablish the infamous irregular Hamidiye tribal cavalry regiments while replacing them in the force structure with a more effective cavalry arm. These efforts were partially completed by the beginning of the First Balkan War in September 1912 and while the Ottoman army's performance in that war was lackluster, it is hard to imagine how the army as organised in the Hamidian period might have survived at all.

In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars, the Ottoman army continued its transformation, under the direction of Enver Pasha, the young and ambitious minister of war. By the fall of 1914, the triangular infantry division was army's standard tactical organisation and it was combat tested and proven. Army corps were headquarters were fielded and in the hands of competent and experienced commanders. Modern training guidance and doctrines based on the Balkan Wars were in place and new reserve cavalry corps activated in eastern Anatolia. Equally importantly, if not more so, the Ottoman corps was refocused away from counterinsurgency on conventional large scale operations against modern armies. As a testament to the success of these endeavours, the Ottoman army proved durable and effective in the First World War.

**Lines of Operations: Yemen, 1908-1912**

Tribal leaders instigated insurrection in Ottoman Yemen on a frequent basis. The most recent rebellions in 1872 and 1891 lasted several years and required large Ottoman expeditionary forces to quell them. The accession of Al-Manşur's son as the Imam Yahyā led directly to renewed rebellion in 1904 when the new Imam

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5 For example, the Ottoman punitive expedition in Yemen of 1891 required 6-7,000 men.
was forced by tradition to prove that he was spiritually and physically worthy of the position. Faced by an enemy who not only controlled all of the major towns (with the exception of the coastal areas) but who possessed the initiative, well-disciplined troops as well as newly-captured artillery, the Ottomans sent Feyzi Pasha to crush the rebellion once and for all.6

The campaign lurched into December 1905, when an Ottoman force under Brigadier Rıza Pasha was caught and destroyed in the Sahahāah ravine during which Rıza was killed. Although Feyzi captured the major fortress of Shirhā soon after the rebels withdrew into the hills and continued to harass the Ottomans. The campaign turned into a quagmire for the Ottoman Empire and the Syrian units of the expeditionary force began to mutiny. Peace negotiations between Feyzi and the Imam combined with malnutrition and disease further lowered Ottoman morale. The government committed itself to reinforcing Fevzi, who seemed to the capable of actually concluding the campaign on favorable terms, and it sent him an additional force of 6,000 well-trained, well-equipped soldiers along with more artillery.7 Feyzi threw them all into the fight but the rebels could not be brought into a decisive battle. The frustrated Feyzi attempted to ally himself with the tribal enemies of the Imam but this failed as well. Finally, the Ottomans concluded that even Feyzi could not defeat the insurgents and a cease fire was negotiated that ended the fighting on terms more or less favourable to the Imam, but which restored nominal Ottoman control over Yemen.

The Imam Yahyā’s rebellion was conducted in a manner that was fundamentally different from the previous Ottoman experience. The Imam’s campaign was conducted according to a deliberate strategy based largely on the denial of logistics to the Ottomans. Moreover, the acquisition of modern weapons, primarily magazine-fed military rifles, enabled the rebels to go toe-to-toe with the regular Ottoman army. This put the Ottomans in a position of relative weakness and enabled the rebels to engage in large-scale conventional battles. Vincent S. Wilhite asserts that the ‘1904 rebellion thus signaled a major transformation in the essential character of war in Yemen’.8 Previous rebellions were brought about largely by issues such as conscription and taxation and violence was localised in pursuit of very limited objectives, Wilhite argues that the elements of transformation of the Imam Yahyā’s

7 Ibid., 229.
rebellion were fundamentally larger and involved long-term campaign planning, a ‘total-goal’ of Ottoman expulsion from Yemen, supra-tribal mobilisation (by establishing an over-arching command authority linking the previously fragmented tribes), and up-to-date weaponry.9 The effect on the Ottomans was profound in that the empire had to commit ever-increasing levels of military power toward the suppression of rebellion in Yemen. Feyzi’s 1891 campaign involved around 7-8,000 men, Rıza’s 1904 campaign mobilised about 26,000 men, while Feyzi’s 1905 campaign brought in over 110,000 Ottoman soldiers. Beyond the scale of the latest effort unverified press reports estimated total Ottoman casualties in the 1905 campaigns at 25,000-30,000 men.10

As the campaign against the Imam Yahyā began to wind down a rival claimant to tribal leadership named Muhammad ibn Idrıs arrived in Yemen. Idrıs was a follower of the more strict Wahabi faith and presented Yahyā as a weak vessel, who had sold out to the Ottomans.11 Idrıs was determined to raise the standard of rebellion again as a way to legitimising his own claims to religious and secular authority over the tribes. This led to a renewal of the revolt was re-energised when the rival imams attracted followers willing to support re-engaging the Ottomans. The Ottoman military responded in kind and dispatched a new force of 12,000 to combat Idrıs and by 1910 counterinsurgency operations were again in full swing.

In January 1911, the Ministry of War mobilised sixteen battalions for deployment to Yemen. Ahmet İzzet Pasha, the chief of the general staff, personally led an elite expeditionary force of nine battalions from the premier First Army. Fierce battles were fought against the rebels around Ta’izz and along the outpost lines outside San’a. While the Ottomans gained the upper hand in these battles a further four regular and four reserve battalions were sent to Yemen. The Ministry of War ordered Ahmet İzzet to crush the imams once and for all and ordered another thirty battalions dispatched to reinforce the newly organised XIV Army Corps.12 The proposed counterinsurgency force was set at thirty-five regular and ten reserve infantry battalions, supported by three field artillery batteries and two machine gun companies (altogether some 50,000 combat soldiers). Additional reserve units were mobilised to provide transport and logistics services.13 All of these forces

9 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 240.
12 Ibid., 242.
13 Ibid.
were detached and deployed from Ottoman armies elsewhere, primarily from the manpower-rich First Army in the capitol area and the Second Army in Macedonia; however the massive reinforcement effort also drew in substantial numbers of soldiers from Syria and even Libya. The tempo of the fighting rose in the summer of 1911 as the Ottomans sought to regain the initiative and bring Idrıs’ men to decisive battle. A pitched battle was fought at Jāzān, in which the Ottomans lost about 1,500 men altogether as well as several artillery pieces and machine guns. Once again, the Ottoman government recognised that its efforts to suppress what came to be called ‘the Idrıs insurrection’ had failed to achieve satisfactory results. In the end, the Ottomans negotiated a settlement with the imams that granted them favourable tax and customs concessions, judicial reforms, infrastructure improvements (telegraphs and railroads), and official apologies.14

Yemen was in a continuous state of rebellion from 1904 through 1911, which absorbed significant numbers of Ottoman army soldiers as well as consumed large amounts of scarce resources. The Ottoman Seventh Army, headquartered in San-ā, was disestablished in January 1911 under Ahmet İzzet’s reorganisation of the Ottoman Army.15 In its place the new independent XIV Army Corps was activated to provide operational command and control for the army’s tactical units in Yemen. The XIV Army Corps was assigned three infantry divisions, the 39th, the 40th and the 41st, which all had three of the new triangular infantry regiments as well as a non-regimental rifle battalion, for a total of thirty infantry battalions. An additional thirteen regular army infantry battalions were deployed to Yemen to reinforce the XIV Army Corps, for an overall total of forty-three infantry battalions.16 When supporting arms such as artillery, engineers and cavalry and combat support units such as baggage and ammunition trains are added in the Ottoman force committed to counterinsurgency operations in Yemen annually from 1909-1912 numbered well in excess of the Feyzi’s 1905 total of 110,000 men.

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14 Ibid., 247-70.
16 Ibid., see Appendix B, ‘Ottoman Regular Army Order of Battle, 1911’, 371-84, for complete listings of where units were garrisoned in Yemen and where the thirteen battalions came from in other army areas. See also Metin Ayışığı, *Mareşal Ahmet İzzet Paşa (Askerî ve Siyasî Hayatt)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1997), 33-46.
Lines of Operations: The Albanian Revolt, 1908-1912

It should not come as a surprise that secret revolutionary societies and committees were formed in the Ottoman provinces which now compose modern Albania. As these arose, the Ottomans responded in kind by oppressive activities that included the closing of Albania schools, the prohibition of Albanian nationalist publications and the repression of assembly and free speech. As the Albanian population was Muslim opposition to the government centred on taxes, conscription and home rule. The revolt began on 3 July 1908 when two young army officers simultaneously struck government targets and then retreated into the safety of the mountains. They were Captain Resneli Ahmed Niyazi Bey, an ethnic Albanian, and Staff Major İsmail Enver Bey, a CUP member who later rose to become the Ottoman minister of war during the First World War. Both were active Ottoman army officer but while Resneli was a nationalist, Enver was an ardent CUP moderniser. Niyazi focused on ‘mobilising the Albanian community for the revolutionary cause’ while Enver was trying to drive cracks in the Hamidian regime. The advent of the Constitutional Period in 1908 obviated Enver’s insurgency while Niyazi was acclaimed as an Albanian hero and neither went to prison as the new government took over.

In the democratic flush of the Constitutional period Albanian notables and committee members expected the new parliamentary government to accommodate political change leading to some kind of autonomy and political consolidation of the ethnic Albanian population living in the Ottoman Balkan provinces. When this did not happen, demonstrations involving from 2,500 to 6,000 men began to erupt in the Albanian areas. By the end of 1909, heavily armed Albanians began to appear in plain sight, greatly worrying the Ottoman governor, Brigadier Hasan Bedri Pasha, who had only seven infantry battalions for internal and border security tasks. Active revolt soon flared up in Kosova, which was immediately crushed by the elite Ottoman 5th Rifle Battalion. Insurrections by ethnic Greeks in the Ottoman Epirus compounded the problem adding spatial and ethnic complexity.

20 Ibid., 158-61.
21 Ibid., 160-1.
22 Ibid., 176-7.
The isolated insurrections grew into a cohesive and coordinated whole in the spring of 1910 as Albanian leaders raised large bodies of men. The most immediate threat appeared in northern Albania and Kosovo where Idris Sefer led 5,000 men in cutting railway lines and communications while Isa Boletin led another 2,000 in attacks in Firzovik and Prizre. The new Ottoman military commander, Şevket Turgut, reacted with alacrity and violence by dispatching 15,000 Ottoman soldiers to raze houses, burn villages, conduct public floggings and summary executions. The Ottomans were able to restore communications to the provincial capital of Işkodra, but even though they committed 50,000 men to the campaign, they lacked the manpower to follow the rebels into the mountains and destroy them. The rebellion continued into 1911 as Catholic tribesmen returned home to join the fight from exile in neighbouring Montenegro. The Ottomans searched for a non-military solution and decided to negotiate with the rebels. Although the Sultan himself journeyed to Pristina to offer amnesty, large numbers of men remained defiant in rebellion. An odd bit of diplomacy broke out when King Nikola, the Montenegrin monarch, encouraged tribesmen to raid into Ottoman territory and had to be restrained by the great powers. The men in the mountains turned to guerrilla warfare and armed çetes ranging in strength of 200-600 rebels began marauding into the smaller towns. One clash in the Avalonya region involved a çete of over 800 guerrillas. The guerrillas were supported by ‘virtually all segments of Albanian society’ including ‘doctors, landowners, lawyers, soldiers, and peasants’. The Ottomans neither were able to quell the rebellion nor were they able to negotiate a solution and the rebellion froze into stasis.

The final and major general insurrection, which had been planned outside of the Albanian provinces, broke out in May and ended in August 1912. The proximate cause of the insurrection was the election victory of the CUP in the parliamentary elections of April 1912, an event which sounded the death knell for the political aspirations of minorities such as the Albanians, the Armenians, the Macedonians and other groups seeking political inclusion and reasonable representation. Previous heavy-handed Ottoman counterinsurgency practices that included the burning of villages and the physical punishment of the Albanian population served to enraged
the populace and pave the way for anti-government support. Huge numbers of Albanian men were mobilised in the insurgency, some 25,000 around Pristina and another 20,000 in southwest Kosovo. Making things worse the local regular army units, which were composed mainly of locally conscripted Albanian men, began to suffer mass desertions and mutiny. Now heavily engaged in Yemen and Libya the Ottoman Empire was no longer able to contest control of the region as the Albanian insurrection had metastasised into a ‘national uprising’. The new grand vizier, Gazi Ahmed Muhtar Pasha, then began to move his government toward an actual negotiated settlement and at the beginning of August; General Ibrahim Pasha began direct negotiations with the Albanians. A settlement granting the Albanians almost all their demands, short of complete autonomy, was sent to Constantinople. The demands included bringing the two previous Ottoman cabinets to stand trial. On August 14, 14,000 Albanian rebels occupied the provincial capital of Ūsküp. With the exceptions of the two trials, the government accepted twelve demands (there were fourteen in all). Finally, on 18 August 1912, the Albanians accepted the Ottoman government’s offer and the revolt ended. Within two months, however, the attacks of the Christian Balkan League drove the Muslim Albanians temporarily back into the arms of the Ottomans, but at the end of the Balkan Wars the Great Powers established Albania as an independent country.

The Albanian insurrection was unique in that it was successful. In the sources available at the present time, it is unclear why this was so. A case can be made; however, that the Ottoman army was badly overstretched between 1910 and 1912, with the massive reorganisation effort that overlapped the ongoing rebellions in Yemen and the Italo-Ottoman War. It may also be a factor that the inhabitants of Albania were overwhelmingly Muslim and many families had been tightly integrated into the army and into the government for generations. Thus, the Ottomans might have been naturally more sympathetic to and willing to negotiate with the Albanians. But it is also true that all three of these areas were located on the Ottoman periphery and none were particularly important geopolitically to the survival of the empire itself. That said, Albania’s location inside the Ottoman

30 Pearson, Albania and King Zog, 26.
31 See Gawrych, The Crescent and the Eagle, 194-5, for a complete list of the Albanian demands as well as an engaging summary of the evolution of them.
sphere of its European possessions would seem to have attracted more substantial and serious efforts than the Ottomans employed there. And moreover, it is hard to reconcile the fact that they sent massive forces to distant Yemen, itself more of a strategic liability than anywhere in the Balkans, while allowing Albania to drift into autonomy. In truth though, what made the Albanian insurrection so different, and perhaps unwinnable, was the fact that it transitioned so rapidly into a generalised popular revolt involving most of the Albanian population. In this regard then it was strikingly different from the internecine tribal struggles that afflicted Yemeni insurgents or the inter-committee squabbles that proved so divisive to the Macedonian and the Armenian committees.

**Lines of Operations: The Italian-Ottoman War, 1911-1912**

The Italians divide this little-known war between Italy and the Ottoman Empire into three phases, the first occupation (October 1911), the establishment of bases (November 1911 through March 1912) and the intensification of the war in Libya and the Aegean (April through 18 October 1912). The presence of a powerful and modern Italian fleet guaranteed the isolation of the Ottoman province and made the Ottoman campaign unwinnable from the start. Moreover, from the Ottoman perspective the war was a distraction from its primary efforts of organisational transformation and its operational counterinsurgencies in Macedonia and Yemen.

The Ottoman province of Libya (Cyrenaica) and the Sanjack of Benghazi (Trabulusgarp Vilayeti ve Bingazi Sancağı) and the province of Arabia (Hicaz Vilayeti) were the garrison homes of independent infantry divisions, which were not assigned to either armies or corps. Moreover these were some of the largest infantry divisions in the Ottoman force pool. In Libya, the garrison consisted of the 42nd Infantry Division, which was composed of the 124th, 125th, 126th and 127th Infantry Regiments, the 38th Cavalry Regiment, the 42nd Rifle Battalion, two field artillery battalions and the Libyan Fortress Artillery Battalion.

The military commander, Colonel Neşet Bey, commanded the 42nd Division, which was very under strength with a nominal strength of approximately 12,000 men on paper under his command. However, because of the ongoing

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33 Karatamu, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi (1908-1920)*, 159.
counterinsurgency in Yemen, the Ottoman general staff stripped able-bodied and trained men from units in Libya to send to Yemen.34 While this was a generalised problem for the entire Ottoman army in 1911 it probably affected the 42nd Division (which was considered to be one of the worst divisions in the Ottoman army) more severely since it was initially in such a poor state of readiness.35 In actuality, Colonel Neşet only had about 5,000 infantrymen and 400 cavalrymen, who were inadequately equipped and poorly trained.36 He had another 2,500 recently conscripted men, who were untrained but he could, in theory, mobilise an additional 20,000 reserves, which were organised into thirty infantry battalions and sixty cavalry squadrons.37 About 3,000 of the trained men and 2,000 of the conscripts were concentrated in Tripoli with the remained located in the principal coastal cities of Benghazi, Derna, Tobruk and Solum.

War broke out on 29 September 1911, when Italy declared war on the Ottoman Empire and began a naval blockade of the Ottoman province. After a naval bombardment, the Italians landed and occupied Tripoli on 5 October, followed by a similar occupation of Tobruk on 10 October. Resistance was minimal as Ottoman opposition consisted merely of a few cannon shots from their coastal forts while Colonel Neşet withdrew his mobile forces to the high ground south of the towns.38 However, the Ottomans chose to offer determined resistance at Benghazi, where the Italians fought their way ashore on 18 October 1911. Fighting inside the town claimed the lives of a dozen Europeans and destroyed the British and Italian Consulates. The Ottomans finally evacuated the city on 29 October and withdrew to the high ground east of the town.

Surprisingly, the Ottomans’ poor conventional capacity turned out to be an enormous advantage. Instead of trying to resist the initial Italian amphibious landing, which would have been futile, Ottoman units moved out of the range of the naval guns at the cost of leaving heavy equipment. The majority of the local recruits (around 2,000), most of whom were of urban origin, deserted their units.39 The acting provincial commander Colonel Neşet had no other choice

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36 William H. Beehler, The History of the Italian-Turkish War, September 29, 1911 to October 18, 1912 (Annapolis, MD: The Advertiser-Republican, 1913), 18.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 20-5.
39 Ertuna, Osmanlı-İtalyan Harbi (1911-1912), 159-79.
under these conditions than to initiate unconventional warfare against the Italian invaders. The Italian military was completely unprepared for this type of war. Small bands of Ottoman soldiers easily infiltrated into Italian defence perimeters and inflicted small but humiliating defeats. The local population was encouraged by these easy victories and began to actively support the Ottoman troops. In turn, heavy-handed Italian tactics that targeted the civilian population more than the actual fighters were counterproductive and increased the hatred of the locals. Hundreds of volunteers and tribal warriors joined the Ottoman troops. But it was the support of the Sanusiyya religious order (or more correctly, fraternity) which dramatically changed the flow of the war. The Sanusiyya was not only a religious brotherhood, but also an economic and social alliance of the tribes. It was the only effective cement within the otherwise socially fragmented tribal society of Libya (especially the Cyrenaica region). Moreover, the Sanusis were well-known fighters and had already fought against another colonial power, France, at the southern extremes of the Sahara desert.

The Ottoman-Sanusiyya alliance achieved remarkable results in terms of a dramatic increase in manpower and logistical support for the fight. But it was the arrival of Ottoman officer-volunteers which tipped the balance. The apparent failure of the government to respond to Italian aggression created a moral crisis and outburst of patriotic and religious feelings in which many young Ottoman officers volunteered to fight. The Ottoman general staff and CUP military committee (without the authorisation and support of the government) selected its best and brightest (including the hero of the Meşrutiyet revolution Enver Bey, future president of the Turkish Republic Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk] Bey, counterinsurgency mastermind Süleyman Askeri Bey, and Halil [Kut] Bey). Most of them were veterans of the Balkan counterinsurgency campaigns. In addition to these men, Libyan and other officers from predominantly Arab provinces (including ardent Arab nationalist Aziz al Masri, Muhittin [Kurtiş] Bey, and Ali Sami [Sabit] Bey) were also assigned. The first group of officers arrived in the conflict zone via Egypt and Tunis in the middle of October 1911, but groups and individuals continued to arrive through the summer of 1912. Their arrival immediately changed the character and tempo of the war. The theatre of war was divided into four theatres

40 Ibid.
41 Yavuz Abadan, Mustafa Kemal ve Çetecilik (Istanbul: Varlık Yayınları, 1964), 30-5.
of operations in which Tripoli and Benghazi were the main ones. Regular soldiers, gendarmeries, volunteers, and tribal warriors were organised into flexible mission-oriented units under the command and control of regular officers. All operations were closely coordinated and integrated according to a de facto strategic plan, which simply sought to wage a campaign of long and attritional unconventional warfare.\(^\text{43}\) As veterans of counterinsurgency campaigns themselves, the Ottoman officers were well aware that such a war would be long and bloody and, in the end, moral factors would become paramount. They were hoping to frustrate the Italians by inflicting as many casualties as possible.

In opposition to the geographic orientation of the Italians, the Ottomans were not targeting the recapture of coastal cities but choosing instead to annihilate the enemy.\(^\text{44}\) The asymmetric nature of the conflict frustrated the Italian command and staff planners. Even though they tried several novel methods successfully, such as the use of aviation for reconnaissance and artillery forward observation, for the first time,\(^\text{45}\) they still stubbornly stuck to conventional tactics and techniques, even if the results were disastrous and costly. The Italian infantry assault columns offered excellent targets for the elusive Ottoman combat groups and bands. They would lure Italians deep into desert valleys and, after exhausting and disorganising them with repeated hit-and-run skirmishes and small ambushes, the main group would suddenly attack and destroy the isolated groups (sometimes whole assault columns). Even the heavily fortified coastal towns were not safe and immune from the Ottoman guerrillas. Night raids, infiltration into defensive perimeters, and the hunting of isolated guards and patrols became a continuous activity.\(^\text{46}\)

The Italian setbacks and blunders gave the Ottoman field commanders time to reorganise and train their mostly local troops.\(^\text{47}\) The assignment of regular officers as the superior authority for tribal forces initially created immense problems. The tribal warriors had a traditional way of war fighting, which was always anarchic and uncoordinated and which prevented performing even the simplest manoeuvres. The

\(^{47}\) Abadan, *Mustafa Kemal ve Çetecilik*, 39-44.
Ottoman officers managed to overcome this serious problem by treating combat operations more or less as step-by-step training exercises and by accommodating their military priorities with the interests of the tribesmen. Interestingly, the tribal cavalry learned to evade aerial observation and attacks while the local infantry units learned to employ successfully anti-aircraft fire techniques. The furious Italians, who were suffering casualties at an alarming rate and were unable to fix and destroy the elusive enemy, increasingly targeted the civilian population and its livelihood. The execution of real or imaginary supporters, collective punishments, and other elements of a scorched-earth policy became part of the daily routine. For understandable reasons, these heavy-handed and misguided actions helped the Ottomans greatly, not only increasing civilian support in terms of volunteers and logistics, but also providing them with a sense of moral and ethical superiority.

After several bitter experiences, the Italian expeditionary forces decided to remain within range of naval gunnery and, instead of trying to expand their occupation deep into the hinterlands, they preferred to remain on the coastline. At the same time, they tightened the naval blockade and tried to close the Egyptian and Tunisian borders. Even though this strategic shift created enormous logistics problems for the Ottoman side, it also gave them a free hand to transform blockades of the Italian occupied zones into sieges. The confident Ottoman troops and their local allies began to launch bolder and more concentrated night attacks and raids. They also tried to solve logistics problems by using captured spoils of war. Specially organised detachments plundered the Italian depots and magazines during the night raids.

At last, the Italian political leadership came to the understanding that their proud expeditionary force would not be able to defeat the Ottoman defenders and conquer the interior of Libya. Instead the leaders decided to move the war to the core regions of the empire in order to force the Ottoman political leadership to give up Libya. Understandably, they could not risk another land confrontation with the Ottoman military, so they decided to use solely their navy. In April 1912, the Italian navy tried various tactics including naval demonstrations and limited

shelling of the Red Sea and Syrian and Aegean coastlines, blockading the Straits, and even supporting the Sheikh Idris rebellion in Asir on the Arabian Peninsula.\(^{52}\) Out of frustration, the Italians occupied the weakly defended Dodecanese Islands between 24 April and 20 May 1912. The occupation of the main island of Rhodes is instrumental in understanding the aftereffects of Ottoman success and the Italians’ exaggerated sense of caution (a reinforced division was employed against the tiny Ottoman defensive force consisting of a single infantry battalion with four light artillery pieces, despite the fact that the Italians enjoyed the popular support of the predominantly Greek population).\(^{53}\)

The cost of the Libyan expeditionary forces to Italy was substantial and forced immediate military mobilisation, which began before hostilities on 25 September 1911. Many in the Italian government had believed that Libya might be taken on the cheap with as few as 15,000-20,000 men.\(^{54}\) However, the initial two-division Italian expeditionary force was composed of 34,000 men, 6,300 horses and mules and seventy-six artillery pieces.\(^{55}\) Italy committed a second wave of two infantry divisions in October bringing Italian strength in Libya to 55,000 men, 8,300 animals and 126 artillery pieces.\(^{56}\) Defying the predictions of easy victory relentless Ottoman attacks forced Italy to increase its troop strength again and again and by September 1912, Italy had 110,000 men in Africa.\(^{57}\) Because it was impossible to sustain their army in Libya from the surrounding hinterlands the Italians were forced to supply food, fodder, ammunition and all manner of supplies from Italy. The transport costs of supplying the expedition as well as the costs of maintaining the blockade and bombarding Ottoman ports in four seas, in turn, drained the Italian navy. One author asserted that Italy maintained its entire navy in constant operations for the course of the war (a total of thirty-nine battleships and cruisers, seventy-four torpedo boat destroyers of all types, thirty auxiliary ships and ninety-two transports and other vessels).\(^{58}\) In contrast the cost to the Ottoman Empire was minimal as it was able to fight the war largely with its forces in place thus avoiding actual military mobilisation.

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\(^{54}\) Timothy W. Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy and the War over Libya 1911-1912* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 59.


\(^{56}\) Ibid.

\(^{57}\) Beehler, *The History of the Italian-Turkish War*, 96.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 98.
The Ottoman administration reluctantly came to terms with Italy due to the imminent threat coming from the Balkan states. Anticipating an attack by the Balkan League, the Ottoman army began full-scale mobilisation on 30 September 1912 and activated its Balkan provinces war plan two days later. This effectively ended the Ottoman ability to continue the war with Italy. The Ouchy Peace Treaty, which was signed on 15 October 1912, ended Ottoman sovereignty in Libya. The field commanders received the order three days later. This was a serious blow to the Ottoman officers who were more than sure of their ability to win the war, and they encountered huge difficulties explaining why the empire had given up after so many successful engagements by their local soldiers and allies. However, the military members of the CUP decided to establish a sound base for keeping the insurgency alive in hopes of restarting the war after the end of Balkan crisis. Some officers and other ranks (overall 300 personnel) were selected to remain, and nearly all the heavy weapons and ammunition were left behind. Selected local NCOs and soldiers were passed through an intense military technical training in order to operate the heavy weapons and various devices during the three-month-long evacuation period. As a part of this scheme, more than a hundred young Libyan students were transferred to military schools in Constantinople for the training of the next generation of leaders and officers, who would lead the next war. Unfortunately for the empire, this bold scheme fell victim to the Balkan defeats and was only partially realised during the First World War.

**Lines of Operations – Effects by 1912**

As the resolution of the situations in Yemen, Albania, and Libya produced a number of effects for the Ottoman military. In matters of political policy, the Ottoman government moved toward reconciliation and negotiation as viable solutions to the problem of nationalism, minority rights and insurgency. Similarly, the ending of the war with Italy demonstrated a similar trend toward negotiated outcomes. In matters of strategic posture, the ending of these wars enabled the Ottoman high command to draw down strength in areas of strategic liability and to refocus the operational centre from the periphery to the empire’s core areas. In terms of the leadership of the army, young and talented officers began to emerge, who were

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59 Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 80-2.
moved into positions of increasing responsibility. And, although these officers had an unusually mature understanding of counterinsurgency and irregular warfare the army itself moved on to refocus itself on conventional operations.

**Lines of Effort: Organisational Transformation, 1908-1911**

The Ottoman army in 1908 comprised seven numbered field armies and fielded 13,880 officers and 273,997 men, of whom 1,342 officers and 35,196 men were actively engaged in operations against rebels, brigands and revolutionaries. The army was organised on an obsolete model into twenty-one infantry divisions, six cavalry divisions, five artillery divisions and a number of independent brigades and regiments. The army had neither modern combined arms divisions nor modern corps level headquarters. In essence, the empire’s armies commanded divisions organised to fight the Crimean War (the 1855 era) and which were centred on the empire’s provincial capital cities. Additionally, there was a system of reserves, but these units were similarly organised, seldom brought together for training and poorly equipped. On 15 August 1908, the Minister of War, Recep Pasha, appointed Ahmet İzzet Pasha as the chief of staff of the army, who would remain in this position until 1 January 1914. Ahmet İzzet was a general staff officer and was an ardent advocate of modernisation and he set about eliminating the conservative and uneducated alaylı, or regimental officers, who were an impediment to change. As a result, the unhappy disenfranchised regimental officers led a mutiny known as the 31 March Incident (using the old calendar and which actually occurred on 13 April 1909), demanding an end to modernisation efforts. The mutiny was crushed and two laws were passed that dramatically changed the army. The first, the Law of Age Limitation on 26 June, eliminated elderly officers, and the second, the Law for the Purge of Military Ranks on 7 August, established educational and time in grade provisions for promotion. These actions and laws ended a patronage system that had existed for centuries and enabled the army to move forward with modernisation. This also cleared the way for the school-trained officers of the army (known as mektepli), the preponderance of whom were members of the CUP, to advance into positions of importance.

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62 See Erickson, *Defeat in Detail*, 15-24, for detailed information on the Ottoman army in this period.
Concurrently with these actions Ahmet İzzet was orchestrating a massive reorganisation of the Ottoman army which he had begun to think about over the winter of 1908. Assisting the Ottomans, German General Colmar von de Goltz led an inspection team in the summer of 1909 that tested and assessed various experimental organisational architectures under tactical field conditions in large-scale exercises. The heart of Ahmet İzzet’s initial reorganisation was the restructuring of the army’s divisions into triangular combined arms formations composed of three infantry regiments supported by an artillery regiment. The Ottoman triangular division presaged the evolution of the modern combat division and it is notable that the armies of the major European powers adopted this particular architecture during the First World War. But in 1909 this idea was a major departure from the contemporary European model in which divisions were composed of two brigades of two regiments each (often called the ‘square division’). In July 1910, the army published its instructions for reorganisation, which deconstructed and then reorganised the entire army into triangular combined arms infantry divisions that mirrored Ahmet İzzet and von der Goltz’s radical ideas. The two brigade headquarters assigned to all Ottoman army infantry divisions were entirely eliminated. This was followed by further official army instructions in September, which merged the elements of the reserve, inactivated the artillery divisions as well as reorganised the irregular Hamidiye into paramilitary Tribal Light Cavalry. The new formations were subjected to large-scale field manoeuvres under field army control in the fall of 1910 around Edirne (then called Adrianople by the Europeans) in the area of western Thrace. Most of these organisational innovations were structural and tactical in nature. One major exception was the restructuring in 1909 of the Ottoman general staff into the German model, often called the ‘chief of staff system’ with staff directorates mirroring the Great Prussian general staff, one of which was explicitly tasked with managing the reorganisation.

In terms of modern command and control, however, the most significant tactical change came in January 1911, when Ahmet İzzet Pasha issued further army instructions involving the inactivation of the seven numbered field armies

64 Ibid., 130-42. See also Erickson, Defeat in Detail, 24-33, for a complete summary of the plans and tests that were conducted in 1909 and 1910.
65 Erickson, Defeat in Detail, 27-8.
66 Ibid., 29.
67 Ibid., 55.
and replacing them with only four numbered armies. He then formed and activated fourteen new army corps headquarters.\textsuperscript{68} The new architecture reflected the current practices in the major European armies and positioned the Ottoman army to conduct warfare at the operational level. Unfortunately for the army the brand new corps headquarters lacked experienced commanders and staffs and often essential equipment. At the same time a German-inspired system of army level reserve inspectorates was created as were the subordinate divisions required to bring the Ottoman army to its authorised wartime order of battle and combat strength. In this way Ahmet İzzet revitalised the army’s reserve by recasting it as a mirror image of the active army.

Why was the reorganisation done in the order in which it was accomplished? The obvious answer is that the Ottoman army in 1909 had a finite number of qualified senior officers. At the start of the Constitutional Period there were a total of 13,880 officers in the army and, of that number, 1,342 were deployed on active operations against insurgents. The purge of under-educated officers with regimental backgrounds occurred in 1909, which reduced the number of available officers further. At that time Ahmet İzzet Pasha was already planning to activate army corps level headquarters but this required quite a large number of general and field grade officers. The proposed tables of manning and organisation for the new Ottoman army corps headquarters required ninety-two officers and 359 NCOs and soldiers.\textsuperscript{69} The Ottoman general staff was considering the activation of fourteen army corps headquarters, which would require 1,288 officers, most of whom would be in the rank of field grade officers or above. The dilemma was one of where to find this number of qualified officers. The solution came in the form of the elimination of the brigade level headquarters in Ottoman divisions. If we examine the rank of brigadier general, for example, eliminating forty-two brigades from the twenty-one infantry divisions and thirty-three brigades from the eleven cavalry and artillery divisions, which each contained three brigades each, Ahmet İzzet Pasha freed up seventy-five senior officers for assignments elsewhere. Moreover the reduction of numbered field armies from seven to four created further excess capacity in the officer ranks of the Ottoman army. The total general officer field command positions in the Ottoman army in 1908 stood at seven generals.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 32-4.
\textsuperscript{69} Selahattin, Karatamu, \textit{Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, IIIncü Cilt 6nci Kısım (1908-1920)} (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1971); see ‘Table of Field Cadre Requirements for Units in the 1911 Army Organization’, Document 4 (Ek 4).
(armies), thirty-five major-generals (divisions and three fortresses) and seventy-six brigadier-generals (brigades and the Dardanelles artillery brigade) for a total of 118 command positions. In 1911, the general officer field command positions stood at four generals (armies), fourteen lieutenant-generals (army corps) and forty-six major- or brigadier-generals (divisions and fortresses) for a much smaller total of sixty-four command positions. The difference between 1908 and 1911 (fifty-four general officers) is striking.

Lines of Effort: The Hamidiye Tribal Light Cavalry

Because of more urgent reforms needed to transform the obsolete Ottoman army, chief of staff Ahmet İzzet Pasha did not begin reforming the Hamidiye tribal cavalry until 1909. Ahmet İzzet was committed to modernisation and the undisciplined irregular Hamidiye simply did not fit into the disciplined and professional models presented by contemporary European powers – even the Czar was reducing the size of his Cossack forces. The advent of the Constitutional Period enabled the reform of the Hamidiye by bringing both a reduction in anti-government activity from the Armenian revolutionary committees as well as encouraging positive hopes for genuine rapprochement between the government and the Armenians. Ahmet İzzet began by dissolving twelve of the Hamidiye regiments on 6 December 1908.70 The remaining Hamidiye were organised into seven brigades and three independent regiments with a total of strength of sixty-one tribal cavalry regiments altogether. The brigades contained from six to nine cavalry regiments and were centred on tribal areas.71 A symbolic and significant change then followed in 1909 when the government dropped the title Hamidiye and adopted a new title – the Tribal Light Cavalry (Aşiret Hafif Süvari).72 Janet Klein argues that this was an unmistakable sign that the new regime was firmly in control and ‘the change was to communicate firmly and clearly to those tribes who formed the regiments that their former patron was no longer there to oversee and protect them’.73

70 Turkish General Staff, Balkan Harbı (1912-1913), 90-1.
73 Ibid.
An inspection tour in February 1910 by Lieutenant-Colonel Mahmud Bey revealed glaring deficiencies in the regiments, including the fact that many existed only as paper cadres wherein their tribal chief reported non-existent men while collecting full pay and allowances. The authorities of the 1910 transformation of the army introduced significant internal changes to the Tribal Light Cavalry as specific new regulations for the tribal regiments were established on 17 August. Regular army officers were assigned as tribal cavalry regimental commanders and squadron commanders and while the tribal chiefs retained their rankings they were demoted to second in command status. The regulars were assigned for a period of four years. The new regulations also established a ‘Tribal Cavalry Inspectorate’ of seven officers of the regular army led by a regular army major-general. These changes were accompanied by training instructions in 1911 that laid down methods of training the regiments for more conventional cavalry missions that included screening and reconnaissance. The new regulations also fixed current regimental strength at sixty-four regiments but allowed for reductions.

These internal administrative changes were accompanied by a complete realignment of the tribal cavalry organisational structure. Four new Tribal Light Cavalry Divisions were authorised, each of which contained from five to eight light cavalry regiments (for a total of twenty-four regiments). This architecture replaced the existing seven brigades and allowed for a gradual drawdown of the number of regiments to a total of around thirty. Moreover the September 1910 reorganisation of the army further altered the organisation of the four new Tribal Light Cavalry Divisions by integrating regular cavalry regiments with tribal light cavalry regiments. By 1911, the 1st Tribal Light Cavalry Division was composed of six tribal light cavalry regiments and the regular 39th Cavalry Regiment, the 2nd Tribal Light Cavalry Division was composed of eight tribal light cavalry regiments and the regular 34th Cavalry Regiment, the 3rd Tribal Light Cavalry Division was composed of six tribal light cavalry regiments and the regular 34th Cavalry Regiment, the 3rd Tribal Light Cavalry Division was composed of six tribal light cavalry regiments and the regular 34th Cavalry Regiment.

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74 Ibid., 108.
76 Ibid., 423.
77 Karatamu, Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi (1908-1920), 132.
79 Klein, The Margins of Empire, 109. Klein states that the ‘official number of enrolled regiments would be reduced by a predicted half’.
80 Turkish General Staff, Balkan Harbi (1912-1913), 139.
Division was composed of five tribal light cavalry regiments and the regular 24th Cavalry Regiment, and the 4th Tribal Light Cavalry Division was composed of five tribal light cavalry regiments and the regular 20th Cavalry Regiment. These new divisions came directly under the operational control of the Ottoman Third Army. The remaining regiments that were not assigned to the divisions were grouped together into ‘Tribal District Inspectorates’ and to each one of which a regular army cavalry squadron was to be assigned from the Third Army. The new inspectorates came under the administrative control of the Third Army Inspector of Cavalry. At the same time tribal light cavalry reserve units (redif) were established, which mirrored the reserve structure of the Ottoman army. Over the next several years many of the district-level tribal light cavalry regiments were disestablished until the overall number of tribal cavalry regiments was just thirty.

The Constitutional period saw a complete restructuring of the Hamidiye tribal cavalry from an irregular Cossack-like force that was largely uncontrollable to one that was more tightly managed and commanded by regular officers. This was done by changing the nature of the force itself through the assignment of regular army officers as regimental and squadron commanders. Importantly at no level were tribal light cavalry units unassociated with regular army cavalry units and the integration of irregular tribal units and regular units ensured that the tribal light cavalry now had professional units on which to model their tactics and behaviour. Each of the new divisions had a regular cavalry regiment assigned and each of the newly organised tribal districts had a regular squadron assigned as well. Moreover, at higher levels the new divisional organisational architecture transferred command and control of the tribal light cavalry regiments to the staff and headquarters of the Third Army. Taken together these measures ended the Ottoman experiment with irregular tribal cavalry forces. While these regiments still existed in the Ottoman force structure, during the Constitutional Period the Ottoman military clearly forced them into a conventional and disciplined mould while, at the same time, drew down their strength by half. This was possible only because the Ottoman army’s transformation coincided with a lull in Armenian violence that created enough time for the Ottomans to consider and implement change in their irregular forces.

81 Karatamu, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarıhi (1908-1920)*, Kuruluş 9D (Organizational Chart 9D).
82 New Regulations for the Tribal Light Cavalry of August 1910, Ch. 1, Para. 5: see Klein, ‘Power in the Periphery’, Appendix 1.
Lines of Effort – Effects by 1912

Even though Ahmet Izzet Pasha personally deployed to command the counterinsurgency operations in Yemen, the Ottoman army continued its work toward the implementation of Ahmet Izzet Pasha’s initiatives. By the fall of 1912, the new triangular infantry divisions were formed and were actively training. The new corps headquarters and associated areas of responsibility were established, with commanders and staff officers taking up their new positions. The Third Army was introducing the reform package to the Hamidiye cavalry force and integrating regulars into the command structure. Mobilisation procedures and associated war plans were taken in hand and procedures introduced that were congruent with the new organisational architecture. Importantly the opportunity to select high quality commanders for the senior positions of the army presented itself and almost all of the new army level and corps command positions were filled by trained general staff officers.

The First Balkan War of 1912 caught the Ottoman military in the midst of the implementation of these reform efforts and the army was shattered by defeat. Nevertheless, although it lost the war the Ottoman army fought well enough to survive and proved combat capable. Much of its strength lay in the successful employment of its new triangular divisions, especially with regard to artillery support and the capability to cross attach regiments between divisions. Corps level commanders of note emerged, in particular, Esat Pasha and Mahmut Muhtar Pasha, who handled army corps with skill and precision. It is hard to imagine that Abdul Hamid’s antique army of 1908 would have survived the onslaught of the Balkan league in September 1912. Moreover, a successfully negotiated peace settlement in London enabled the Ottoman Empire to retain the strategic city of Edirne (Adrianople) and sell as much of western Thrace.

Transformation Part II – 1913-1914

Young, aggressive and visionary Enver Pasha became the Ottoman minister of war in January 1914. Although he relieved Ahmet Izzet pasha as the chief of general staff, Enver not only continued Ahmet Izzet’s reforms but accelerated them. Under Enver the army completed its reorganisational efforts by finalising

83 See Erickson, Defeat in Detail and Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I: A Comparative Study, for a comprehensive exposition of the reforms of 1913-14.
the composition of the triangular division and fixing the corps headquarters in the army’s permanent command architecture. Critically, Enver focused the army exclusively on conventional operations by revising operational and tactical doctrines as well as updating training and mobilisation procedures based on the lessons learned from the Balkan Wars. Of equal importance, Enver summarily retired over thirteen hundred overage and unqualified senior officers. This allowed young experienced and trained officers of promise to ascend to high command. Finally the major withdrawal of forces from Yemen was completed, although a rump garrison remained in the province. These reforms arguably put the Ottoman army on a course to withstand the rigours of a four-year multi-front world war against first class European powers.

Conclusion

1911 proved to be a pivotal year for the Ottoman military as the failing campaigns in Albania, Yemen and Libya consumed energy, men and resources. The army fought these campaigns while simultaneously attempting to reforms its organisational architecture and command structure. It may be said that the army failed in its lines of operations and that its lines of effort were, at best, incomplete. However, these failures forced the Ottoman government and its military to find resolution to strategic and organisational problems that had festered throughout the long reign of Abdul Hamid. In failing, the Ottomans produced just enough successes to withstand the onslaught of the First Balkan War while setting up their army for further reforms under Enver Pasha. The resilient and combat capable army that emerged in 1914 confounded the world by fighting through to the very end of the First World War in 1918.
The events of 1911 placed Austria-Hungary on the edge of a fateful precipice from which it could not escape. To understand Vienna's dilemma we must first examine the 1908-09 Bosnian Crisis. That incident represented the first of three major events in the Balkans that eventually exploded into the World War.

During the years leading up to the crisis, between 1905 and 1908, Habsburg military planners developed three separate war case possibilities. The first, War Case ‘B’ (Balkan), signified war with Serbia only, and then separate War Cases ‘I’ (Italy) and ‘R’ (Russia) planned for isolated wars against those countries. General Conrad von Hétzendorf, Chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, concentrated on the planning for War Cases ‘I’ and ‘B’, particularly because the worsening Balkan situation demanded a rehashing of War Case ‘B’ plans. Conrad consistently emphasised the importance of war planning against Serbia because of the large South Slav Habsburg population in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In addition, events in this area had the potential to seriously affect Austro-Hungarian prestige and Great Power status. A minimal defensive group of eight infantry divisions against Serbia could be increased by twelve divisions to invade that country and ensure the protection of the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

During the 1904-05 Russo-Japanese War, Serbia had to curtail its growing Great Serbia ambitions relative to the two provinces. The 1903 assassination of the Serbian ruling family led to a rabid anti-Habsburg stance in leading circles. However, Serbian leaders also assumed that Russian Tsar Nicholas, a Pan Slavist, would protect Serbia if required; thus its rulers now gravitated to Russia. In 1905 a Croatian-Serbian coalition and public opinion called for cooperation with Slovenes, Habsburg Serbs, etc. The decade before 1914 set the course for conflict, which would demolish the frontiers and move the Habsburg South Slavs to Serbia after the First World War.
The Russian military defeat in the Russo-Japanese War returned tsarist attention to the Balkan Peninsula, but the campaign had severely weakened its army. Austria-Hungary’s military planners therefore regarded its Italian Triple Alliance ally as its main military threat; however, Conrad still feared a seriously weakened Russia. In 1906, when he became Chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, he immediately commenced efforts to improve the unfavourable condition of the Dual Monarchy’s army. He also reputedly added flexibility to Habsburg military planning for the three most anticipated war variants: War Case ‘R’ (Russia), War Case ‘B’ (Balkan) and an increasingly likely combined War Case ‘R and B’ (Russia and Balkan).

A Minimal Group Balkan, composed of the Fifth and Sixth Armies, or eight divisions, formed a defensive force against Serbia. The flexibility of Habsburg planning reputedly would allow a partial mobilisation against Serbia, without having to mobilise against Russia. The key factor in Habsburg war planning for both the Russian and Balkan fronts remained the major weakness of the railroads. For 1908-09, General Conrad planned in both War Case ‘R’ (Russia) and ‘B’ (Balkan) to field the Minimal Group Balkan’s eight infantry divisions against Serbia.1

When Vienna announced the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908, which was promised in the 1878 Treaty of Berlin and secretly in the later Three Emperors’ League, Serbia mobilised 120,000 troops. General Conrad immediately demanded a preventive war against it, as he had during 1907, to settle accounts with the troublesome neighbour. He was convinced that a localised war could be fought against Serbia because of Russia’s military weakness resulting from the disastrous Russo-Japanese War. This 1908-09 Bosnian crisis led to the Austro-Hungarian and German General Staffs reestablishing contact after a several-decade interlude during the term of German General Alfred von Schlieffen, who refused all but the most insignificant contacts with his counterpart in the Habsburg General Staff. In contrary, his replacement, the younger Moltke, developed a mutually agreeable working relationship with Conrad.

In the initial correspondence General Conrad explained his military viewpoints: A War Case ‘R’ would result in the mobilisation of forty Habsburg divisions on a 26th mobilisation day. However, if Russia hesitated to enter the war, he would initiate a War Case ‘B’ against Serbia. If a Russian campaign ensued three months after the first mobilisation day in the Balkans, Conrad could transfer eight to ten divisions from the Balkan to the Russian front. Conrad also pressed to immediately settle accounts with Serbia, arguing that in a two to four year period, the Russians would again be militarily strong and a war against Russia, Italy and Serbia would be impossible. On 23 January 1909 Austria-Hungary announced mobilisation preparations for War Case ‘B,’ but the decision was revoked. Conrad would continue to argue the necessity of a preventive war against the Balkan foe through the 1912-13 Balkan Wars.

General Moltke replied to Conrad on 21 January 1909. Moltke agreed that the Serbian provocation must end and that if Russia intervened in an Austro-Hungarian–Serbian conflict, this would provide the casus foederis for Germany. This represented a significant and very important extension or modification of the 1879 defensive Dual Alliance. Moltke also stated that Russia would probably avoid a military conflict and reassured Conrad relative to Italy, a fellow member of the Triple Alliance.

General Moltke always wrote in generalisations but offered assistance to his counterpart Conrad to convince his ally to cooperate in a war against Russia. A Habsburg offensive against Russia was absolutely necessary for Germany and its Schlieffen Plan strategy. General Moltke refrained from revealing specific details about the German military intentions in future correspondence with Conrad. The important factor in 1909 and for these communications is that no real

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Russian military threat to either Austria-Hungary or Germany existed. Conrad considered the Conrad-Moltke correspondence binding, calling for confirmation of allied ‘agreements’ in his first letter each year. General Moltke, on the other hand, promised anything that would guarantee an Austro-Hungarian offensive against Russia, while the German Army invaded France. In this scenario, if they had already launched an invasion of Serbia the Habsburgs could deploy only 28 infantry divisions, instead of the agreed 40 infantry and eleven cavalry divisions, against Russia at the commencement of hostilities. Conrad anticipated facing 42-43 tsarist divisions. In addition, the Habsburgs would not receive much German military support while the Schlieffen Plan played out against France. In the meantime, the Austro-Hungarian military situation vis-à-vis Russia became increasingly unfavourable as the tsarist regime rebuilt its shattered military forces. Conrad then suggested to Moltke that he (Conrad) initially postpone launching an offensive against Russia if his troops had been committed to the Serbian front. The Allied correspondence had thus reached the central issue: If Germany launched an early offensive from Prussia on the Eastern front, Conrad would also initiate one regardless if the Habsburg forces had commenced a simultaneous Serbian campaign. If the Germans did not launch an immediate Eastern front offensive, Conrad threatened to establish defensive positions in the Carpathian Mountains and the San-Dniester River line to await a tsarist attack.

In a 19 March 1909 letter to Conrad, General Moltke capitulated to Conrad’s demand to launch an Eastern front offensive. He reported that he would deploy thirteen divisions in East Prussia, which would bind nineteen and one-half tsarist divisions. He stated, however, that the protection of the provinces east of the Vistula River received priority in German planning. He left the decision whether to launch an offensive to the local commander, which was an obvious abandonment of his earlier promise to immediately commence an attack in conjunction with Austro-Hungarian forces during an initial campaign against Russia. In reality, the agreed German attack across the Narev River would have been suicidal because of Russian numerical superiority; launching an offensive without sufficient troop numbers had no real purpose. As Moltke dutifully informed Conrad, the Russians would then threaten his right and left flank forces. Meanwhile a partial mobilisation for War Case ‘B’ (Balkan) was declared.4 However, Serbia capitulated to the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina on 31 March 1909, after Russia dropped its support because

of an ultimatum that Germany issued when Russia responded to the crisis with military activity. The key remained that Russia had not recovered from the Russo-Japanese War.

The Bosnian crisis had serious after-effects: The earlier Russo-Austro-Hungarian détente was destroyed, introducing increasing mutual antagonism in the Balkan Peninsula. Both Generals Moltke and Conrad expressed serious misgivings following the crisis. Conrad, in particular, felt that the moment for decisive action against Serbia had been lost and that this was the last chance for success; thus he faced the future with great anxiety. Chances for waging a successful war were considered favourable in 1908-09; this would probably not remain true in a few years. The Austro-Hungarian and German General Staffs had drawn closer and reputedly had reached general agreement on war plans.

Another effect of the Bosnian crisis was that Russia commenced a crash military reform program, while the sudden lack of Russian support temporarily curtailed Serbian ambitions relative to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbia, however, continued to prepare for a future confrontation against their enemy to the north, having improved its army’s overall military effectiveness with modern artillery weapons.

Conrad’s war plans, partially based on captured Russian 1908 documents, remained the basis for Habsburg war preparations until 1912-13. It must be noted that an already serious threat would occur if War Case ‘B’ commenced and Russia intervened. A significant power vacuum at the dangerous extreme Habsburg right flank position would open if Second Army became committed to the Balkan operation in a full War Case ‘B.’ If Russia then entered the war, eight or nine Habsburg divisions would have to be made available from the Balkan theatre, several months after victory against Serbia-Montenegro. If Russia declared war, Conrad argued that an immediate, earlier Austro-Hungarian offensive would prevent encirclement by the numerically superior tsarist forces and would retain the military initiative for the Habsburgs.

Conrad still assumed Russia would not be a serious military threat. Therefore he concentrated his military planning on defeating his erstwhile ally Italy to the extent that he would be willing to temporarily sacrifice the heartland of the Dual Monarchy to a tsarist attack to concentrate on a campaign against Italy.

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Following the 1908-09 Bosnian crisis, despite the post-World War I Austrian historiography, the Habsburg military was well aware that they could no longer plan on an isolated War Case ‘B,’ because Russia would not tolerate Austro-Hungarian penetration into the Balkan Peninsula. Another result of the crisis was the transfer of 29 infantry battalions to Bosnia-Herzegovina to strengthen the defensive forces there, while Conrad modified war plans against Serbia in 1908.6 The Dual Monarchy could not surrender the Dalmatian coastline, while it also had to consider the threats of internal insurrections in its South Slav territories, i.e. Bosnia-Herzegovina. A central goal of Habsburg Balkan war planning, a rapid military success against Serbia to release troops for deployment against another opponent, was similar to planning tracing back to 1882. The main question by 1909 had become not whether Russia would intervene if Austria-Hungary initiated war against Serbia, but at what point. Obviously, the central military emphasis had to be against Russia even if a war had commenced against Serbia.

As Conrad increasingly concentrated on planning an invasion of Serbia as his major military priority, he became obsessed with attacking the Balkan neighbour regardless of the consequences. His German counterpart, General Moltke, counseled that a secondary opponent such as Serbia should be treated accordingly. Moltke doubted that Russia would intervene in an Austro-Hungarian-Serbian war because he calculated that it would require ten years for the tsarist army to recover from the Russo-Japanese War. Thus he did not openly oppose Conrad’s 1909 decision to launch an offensive initially against Serbia in the event of war. In a private letter to Conrad on 19 April 1909 Moltke raised the issue of a localised war against Serbia. He emphasised that only the most necessary Habsburg troop numbers should be deployed against Serbia because the dominant Habsburg forces had to counter tsarist troops, in accordance with their earlier agreement. Moltke never specifically stated his concerns relative to Conrad’s plans to potentially launch a major military campaign against Serbia in the event of a two-front war (i.e. Russia). However, Moltke’s position certainly changed radically from 1909 (the Bosnian crisis) to the end of the 1912-13 Balkan Wars, when he then considered it very dangerous to launch an offensive campaign against Serbia, which would create a serious drain on the number of Habsburg troops destined for deployment against Russia. From the German viewpoint, the vast majority of Habsburg forces had to be launched against Russia regardless of war against Serbia. The Germans,

however, did not understand the significance of the Habsburg Serbian problem as a question of continued existence against the nationalistic threat. Their main concern remained that Austria-Hungary initiated an offensive against the tsarist enemy in case of war. This misunderstanding continued until October 1913 during the Balkan Wars.

Austro-Hungarian war planning for 1909-10 anticipated a Russian intervention if the Dual Monarchy went to war against Serbia. Nevertheless, Conrad would attempt to achieve a rapid military success against the Balkan foe, which entailed fielding significant troop numbers against it. Intelligence sources placed Serbian troop numbers at about 250,000-300,000 effectives, with Montenegro fielding about 43,000 troops to await Conrad’s initial military moves. Operation Bureau planners anticipated that the main Serbian forces would be deployed in the centre of the country. In addition, a strong military group would probably be stationed in an area at the upper Drina River close to the provinces of Bosnia-Herzegovina. One of the main questions bedeviling the Habsburg General Staff was whether to launch an offensive through the shortest route to the interior of Serbia.

The most serious alterations in Habsburg war planning against Serbia between 1910 and 1914 involved shifting the Balkan deployment further west. Habsburg Balkan territory had to be adequately protected and a potential military setback avoided at all costs because of its possibly disastrous results for the Dual Monarchy. The problem continued to worsen relative to Habsburg ability to conduct a successful two-front war against Russia and Serbia as both potential enemies began improving their military forces.

General Conrad considered that launching a preventive war against Serbia would resolve the dangerous South Slav question, while simultaneously revitalising the Dual Monarchy after decades of stagnation. If War Case ‘B’ (Balkan) erupted against Serbia and Russia declared war, the Habsburg B swing group of twelve divisions would have to be withdrawn from the Balkan theatre and immediately dispatched to the Russian front. The time factor would be crucial for victory. Also, one had to calculate the potential political effect of military events in the Balkan arena on the Dual Monarchy’s internal domestic situation, particularly relative to its South Slav population in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and consider that a military defeat against Serbia could have disastrous effects on Habsburg prestige and its Great Power and Balkan position. Thus in 1910-11 war planning, Austria-Hungary would field fourteen divisions against Serbia to ensure a rapid victory over its ten infantry divisions.
Meanwhile Serbia and Montenegro patched up a dynastic spat and both strengthened their military and political links with Russia. The steady deterioration of relations between Austria-Hungary and Russia made Vienna more dependent upon Berlin if Vienna determined to take forceful action against Serbia. While Austria-Hungary could not fight Russia without Germany, on the other hand, Serbia could not fight a war alone against Austria-Hungary. Russia had to support Belgrade and St Petersburg did issue a pledge to assist Serbia in the future.7

Habsburg military planners remained convinced that the Serbians would attempt to seize Bosnia-Herzegovina in a conflict, which steered General Staff attention to launching a major offensive across the Drina River. Therefore, initiating an offensive across the northern Sava-Danube River received less attention in 1910-11 war planning. The ‘Minimal Group Balkan’ now had to be strong enough to launch a successful offensive across the lower Drina River. At the same time, it was thought that six infantry divisions could halt any Serbian offensive thrusts into the two basically South Slav provinces. Between 1910 and 1912, however, operational planning against Serbia was less emphasised than that against Italy and Russia, an emphasis that did not immediately change during that period.

The 1908-09 Bosnian crisis, reputedly a diplomatic victory for Austria-Hungary, in many ways sealed its fate. Then during 1911, the invasion of Libya and events in Central Europe – the 1912-13 First and Second Balkan Wars – quickly involved Austria-Hungary in a crisis that it could not overcome. The Balkan Wars pushed Vienna over the precipice toward a terrible fate: just a year later, in 1914, Vienna launched a war that the Habsburgs knew they could not win.

In 1911, when the Tripoli War erupted in North Africa, the Italian military deployed a large proportion of its army there. General Blasius Schemua had meanwhile replaced Conrad briefly when the latter was unceremoniously dropped from his position as Chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff because of his demands for a preventive war against Italy. His requests led to serious conflict with Foreign Minister Alois Aehrenthal. General Schemua visited Berlin seeking reassurance from Germany that it would fulfil its promises of support and that

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allied agreements held true. For the most part, Habsburg war planning for 1911-12 did not differ much from that of 1910-11, but the Balkan Wars, soon to explode in 1912-13, would markedly change future war planning for a Habsburg Balkan and Russian-Balkan campaign.

During the 1911 Moroccan diplomatic crisis, which riveted the attention of the European Great Powers, the Italians determined to utilise their 1900 Racconigi agreement with France to seize northern African territory. In return for conceding a free hand to France in Morocco, Rome claimed a similar privilege in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, which still belonged to the Ottoman Empire. Italy further strengthened its diplomatic position before declaring war when they secured Russia’s consent for its planned aggression by accepting and supporting Russia’s claims to the Dardanelles. Although displeased with Italy’s attack on Turkey, a potential ally and the assumed counterweight to the Balkan states’ armies in any war in that region, Austria-Hungary and Germany, as Rome correctly anticipated, did not openly object to its action in order to maintain Triple Alliance cohesion.

Nevertheless on 28 September 1911 Italy dispatched a 24-hour ultimatum to Constantinople, claiming an immediate occupation of the named territories. On the next day, disregarding the conciliatory Turkish response, Italy declared war on the Ottoman Empire to forestall any attempt of the Great Powers to mediate and deprive them of their territorial prize. Rome claimed, in a familiar assertion, that it sought to restore law and order in the Turkish African territories. On 5 November Rome declared the annexation of the provinces soon to be named Libya. The Great Powers did not become overly concerned about the Italian aggression because the territories that Rome claimed encompassed comparatively barren tracts of land, but the fact that any blow to the Ottoman Empire would stir up the Near Eastern (Middle East) question was troublesome.

Germany feared any further destabilisation of the Turkish government because of their expanding economic interests there, while Austria-Hungary believed that the Italian invasion would encourage similar aggression of Russia or the Balkan states against the Ottoman Empire. The next obvious target would be the Dual Monarchy itself. Italian irredenta claims for Habsburg territory also presented a threat to the Dual Monarchy’s existence, while in military circles in Vienna

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Italy was viewed as a most unreliable ally. The Russians also feared further Italian aggression against other parts of the Ottoman Empire where tsarist interests were paramount. The Near Eastern question had indeed been suddenly and violently re-opened, encouraging the Balkan states to initiate aggressive action against the Ottoman Empire.

The Italians bombarded Constantinople on 4 August 1912 to compel the Turks to sign a peace treaty. The Turks, believing that this could be a prelude to an attack on the capital city, immediately closed the Straits to all shipping. The Straits encompassed the strategic area that connected the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. Italy, however, lacked the necessary military power to seize the Straits and realised that any attempt to do so would ignite a major European crisis. Instead, the Italians seized Turkish islands in the Eastern Mediterranean area, but the Russians became greatly concerned by the closure of the Straits because of their extreme strategic and economic importance. Ninety per cent of Russian grain exports and 50 per cent of its other exports passed through this strategic location to the Adriatic and Mediterranean Seas. Tsarist exports paid the interest on foreign debts and purchased machinery and other technological equipment needed for the rapidly expanding Russian economy. The brief closure of the Straits demonstrated Russian vulnerability there and reinforced their determination to gain control over this vital waterway. Meanwhile, a peace treaty was signed on 18 October 1912 whereby Italy promised to withdraw its troops from the area near the Straits. The Turks had to end the war because of the explosive events that erupted in the Balkan Peninsula, the most significant result of the Tripoli War.

The First Balkan War soon commenced after the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Sasonov, encouraged the Slavic countries bordering the Ottoman Empire to sign an alliance against it, the Balkanbund. Sasonov masterminded a treaty of alliance between the two Balkan antagonists, Bulgaria and Serbia, on 13 March 1912 after attempts to achieve such an agreement had failed since 1910. For Russia, the treaty would block German penetration into the Balkan Peninsula and preclude Austro-Hungarian advances there. A secret treaty annex provided provisions for dividing the territorial spoils following a victorious war against Turkey. Russia would arbitrate some of the territorial exchanges, but the treaty fatefuly did not mention the future of the Adriatic Coast. The vague provisions left much to future interpretation. On 28 May 1912 Greece joined the Serbian-Bulgarian alliance. Oral agreements followed military conventions, so that by late summer 1912 all the Balkan states bordering on Ottoman European territory had joined a coalition
to plunder that territory and to exploit the shaky situation the Tripoli War created. The 1912 Balkanbund implied the absorption of the entire Balkan area into the Russian sphere of influence, Habsburg diplomats' chief concern and nightmare.

The goals of the new Balkan alliance specifically emphasised driving the Turks out of the Balkans, but it also intended to create a barricade against Habsburg expansion into that region. Reputedly designed to preserve a Balkan status quo, the alliance represented a pact for war, which would expand Russian influence into the Balkans despite the Balkan states’ internecine rivalries. New rivalries did indeed result from the First Balkan War, but the signatory states nevertheless joined to seize adjacent Ottoman lands. However, the individual states also pursued their own objectives. The Great Powers expected a Turkish victory, even if it developed into a long drawn-out process. The unanticipated decisiveness and rapidity of the Balkan countries’ victory caused serious consternation within Austro-Hungarian-German diplomatic and military circles.

On 14 August 1912 Bulgaria issued an ultimatum to Constantinople demanding autonomy for the much-disputed province of Macedonia. Within a few days Montenegro, Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia had declared war on the Ottoman Empire. The rapidly defeated Turks hastened to make peace with Italy (Tripoli War) with the Treaty of Lausanne. The Balkan states’ unexpectedly easy triumph destroyed the pre-war Balkan status quo. Turkey had to surrender all of its European territories, particularly Albania, which Greece, Serbia and Montenegro rapidly occupied during the war. For Vienna, an independent Albanian state would serve as a counterweight to the advancing Southern Slav cause represented by Serbia. It would also deny Belgrade territorial aggrandisement while preventing Serbia from obtaining the Adriatic coast and the territory between that coast and the Albanian mountains.

Habsburg war plans during the period between 1911 and 1912 witnessed the dropping of designs to invade Serbia quickly and seize its capital, Belgrade, at the commencement of a Balkan War. Three Habsburg Corps of the Minimal Group Balkan would defend against a Serbian invasion across the Danube River. Austro-Hungarian forces had to cross that river as quickly as possible, because Second Army, which had the mission of seizing Belgrade, was quite a distance from Fifth Army, which had to launch an offensive along the southern part of the frontier. In order to improve Second Army’s situation, it was deemed necessary that that army mobilise as rapidly as it could so that as many Serbian forces as possible could be drawn away from the Danube front. Now there would be Habsburg offensives launched along two fronts (the Drina River area and Morava).
In more serious war planning against Serbia, there was now less consideration of Italy or Russia intervening in the war. For Russia this resulted from the calculations that the tsarist army was not prepared for war yet, still a result of the disastrous Russo-Japanese campaign. If Russia did intervene in a Balkan conflict, War Case Balkan forces, which included the ‘B’ group and ‘Minimal Group Balkan’, would be reduced to a ‘Minimal Group Balkan’ military effort dropping to eight divisions from almost twenty.

Commencement of the Balkan Wars in October 1912 found the Dual Monarchy diplomatically isolated as Berlin displayed complete indifference to Vienna’s perceived Balkan problems. Thus Foreign Minister Count Berchtold had no choice but to adopt a ‘wait and see’ attitude at the commencement of the First Balkan War. Berchtold, like his predecessor Aehrenthal, was a former ambassador to Russia and recognised St Petersburg’s lingering military weakness. He believed that, even if the Balkan States defeated the Turks on the battlefield, the effort would exhaust them. Berchtold became overwhelmed by the rapidly unfolding Balkan military events that severely undermined the Dual Monarchy’s position there. The resultant territorial changes posed a direct threat to both the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires.

The Vienna foreign office, however, failed to notice the first indications of Balkan Peninsula difficulties in 1912. Once aware of the Balkan states’ treaty against Turkey, Berchtold remained ignorant of the secret Serbo-Bulgarian clauses. He anticipated a long, drawn-out Balkan conflict, but that was a costly error. The ensuing Austro-Hungarian crisis coincided with a growing deterioration of Habsburg-Romanov relations.

Throughout the 1912-13 Balkan Wars, Vienna sought to preserve its Great Power and Balkan position. This eventually required being prepared to use a show of force, if necessary, to maintain its waning prestige and to counter its failed Balkan diplomatic efforts. Turkey and Bulgaria, previously considered military counterweights to Serbia for the Triple Alliance, had become militarily neutralised.

Austria-Hungary had no definitive policy during the early phases of the Balkan conflict. Vienna concentrated on preventing Serbia from attaining the Adriatic coast as well as demanding the creation of an Albanian state to preclude any other Great Power or Balkan state (Serbia-Montenegro) from moving into that area. Vienna would also support Romanian territorial demands following the Second Balkan War, but the Habsburg knee-jerk reaction over the rapidly evolving
Balkan situation produced Romanian anger when the Viennese diplomats sought a Romanian-Bulgarian alliance tie to counter Serbia’s sudden ascendency. Austro-Hungarian military and diplomatic leaders determined that without vigorous Habsburg action in the Balkans, Vienna would have to renounce its Great Power position in that region as well as in Europe.9 Further if war commenced against Serbia and it could be swiftly defeated, Russian influence in the Balkan Peninsula would be destroyed for years (an unlikely scenario).

Before the commencement of the Balkan Wars, at the time of the Tripoli conflict, St Petersburg had initiated partial mobilisation measures beginning as early as 1912. A series of provocative military actions was originally planned to coincide with the approaching Balkan confrontations. The announcement of a trial mobilisation, which extended through a large portion of Russian Poland including the Austro-Hungarian and German frontier areas, disturbed Habsburg military planners. This trial mobilisation entailed calling up second line units in preparation for a rapid assimilation into regular army formations. This allowed the tsarist army to overcome difficulties that later would have retarded an actual wartime mobilisation, such as in 1914.

The trial mobilisation’s obvious intention was to prevent a Habsburg military intervention during the forthcoming Balkan Wars. Further measures resulted from a 10 September Russian military conference, which extended military service by six months, signifying that the Russian troop strength would expand by 25 per cent.10 The Russians increased the size of their army to 1.6 million soldiers during the period of the Balkan War.

The Habsburg reaction, far less than the tsarist response, included calling up the three Galician Corps (I, X and XI) to war standing.11 In addition, nine cavalry regiments were deployed to the Galician frontier because of the perceived threat of tsarist intervention during a Habsburg mobilisation. Newly enacted railroad security measures served as a counter to the seven Russian cavalry divisions now

11 Kriegsarchiv Militär Kanzlei Franz Ferdinand (KAMKFF), fasz. 194 and 202; KAGOB, fasz. 61, Res. Gsr. Nr. 5056; GP, XXXIII, varia.
on war footing. Thus by 30 November, the three Galician corps had also attained war standing. The Habsburg General Staff became increasingly concerned that the tsarist military measures would vitally upset their deployment in case of war, threatening troop assemblies, railroad connections and Fortresses Przemyśl and Kraków. General Conrad particularly feared an early invasion of huge cavalry masses, to disturb the Austro-Hungarian deployment in Galicia. Although the Habsburgs only mobilised 21,000 troops in that province, obviously the much more extensive Russian trial mobilisation raised grave concern in military circles. The Russians continued to transfer far above normal troop numbers toward the German and Austro-Hungarian frontiers throughout the Balkan War period, creating increasing alarm.

During November 1912 Russian military activity pervaded Habsburg intelligence reports.12 Thus by the end of the month, military confrontation appeared imminent.13 The Habsburg military also increased their military preparations at the Serbian frontier, as well as reacting to tsarist military activities. However, later in the month the Russian ‘war fever’ began to subside, partly because on 12 November, when the Russians intended to expand their military activity further, the French and British did not support them.

The crisis continued into December because of the multiple reports of continuing Russian military activities, detailed in further Habsburg intelligence reports.14 These continued even after the First Balkan War armistice. Until well into the Balkan War crisis, Germany still did not comprehend the seriousness and exact nature of the Habsburg position and Vienna’s critical difficulties in the Balkans.15 This resulted in the above-mentioned dispatch of General Blasius Schemua to Berlin to confirm allied agreements.

During the critical October 1913 period Germany abruptly reversed its policy relative to Austria-Hungary’s Balkan situation. Vienna learned that if they expected German support in the Balkans, they had to notify Berlin ahead of time.16 In the

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12 HHSTA: PA, XII, fasz. 424, fasz. 440; KANC, B fasz 2; GP, XXXIII, Nr. 12489; ÖUA, V, Nrs. 5099, 5213.
13 ÖUA, V, Nrs. 5057, 5075, 5109, 5109, 5123, 5146, 5150.
14 HHSTA: PA, XII, fasz. 424, Nrs. 29550, 70B; fasz. 425, 440, Nrs. 5-7 Res.: KAGOB, fasz. F89a; KAMKFF, fasz. 194; KANC, B fasz. 2; GP, XXXIV, 1 Nr. 12571; ÖUA, IV, Nr. 4689; Conrad, Dienstzeit, II: 387-8, 415; III: 69-70; Hantsch, Berchtold, I: 341, 349, 352-3.
16 GP, XXXIII, Nr. 12151, ÖUA, V, Nrs. 3838, 3850, 3932.
major proviso, Vienna had to appear to be the provoked party, not the aggressor, if war broke out against Serbia.\textsuperscript{17} On 10 October Germany again pledged its unconditional support to Austria-Hungary; if Russia intervened in a Habsburg war against Serbia, it would provide the \textit{casus foederis} and Germany would initiate the appropriate military measures and accept the consequences.\textsuperscript{18} On 18 October 1913 Emperor Wilhelm explained to General Conrad that the Entente powers were not prepared for war and they would not take any aggressive actions; therefore, he should launch an attack against Serbia.\textsuperscript{19}

German-Austro-Hungarian disagreements, however, arose relative to the correct diplomatic policies to follow during the unfolding Balkan Crisis. Emperor Wilhelm supported the creation of a Greek-Romanian alliance associated with the Triple Alliance, suggesting that Serbia be invited to join it, something that was absolutely abhorrent to Viennese leaders. Habsburg Foreign Minister Berchtold’s counterproposal encompassed a Romanian-Bulgarian-Turkish tie, which he argued would prevent any further Russian expansion into the Balkans. These divergences in allied opinion resulted in the lack of a unified diplomatic position and crippled Habsburg diplomacy during the remainder of the Balkan crisis. Emperor Wilhelm specifically feared the loss of Romania as a Triple Alliance ally while seeking better relations with King Constantine of Greece, his brother-in-law, and the Hohenzollern King Carol of Romania.

However, once Berlin had determined to support Vienna’s position, a major influence for German involvement entailed restoring its Middle East position. The perception remained that the Austro-Hungarian-German military situation would worsen as time passed, but the possibility of English neutrality in a potential war remained an important consideration. While the Germans could be assured of Austro-Hungarian loyalty in Balkan complications, Berlin feared that if it thwarted its ally again it would become totally isolated and its Middle East position destroyed.

As the Balkan states prepared for war against Turkey during October 1912, Russia initiated the above-mentioned military measures. Preparations also commenced for the trial mobilisation period that lasted for months and significantly improved tsarist preparations for a future war against Austria-Hungary and Germany.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{GP}, XXXIII, Nr. 12397, \textit{ÖUA}, V, Nr. 4022.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{GP}, XXXIII, Nrs. 12404, 12405; Albertini, \textit{Origins of the War}, 399, 401; \textit{ÖUA}, IV, Nr. 4022, KAGOB, fasc. Nr. 161, Akten Nachlass Schemua.
The Treaty of London (30 May 1912), ending the First Balkan War, compelled Turkey to surrender all of its European territories except a narrow strip of land around Constantinople. However, even before the ink dried on the treaty a new crisis developed over the victorious Balkan states’ disputed division of spoils. Three of these states had invaded and occupied Albanian territory thus refusing to recognise the Treaty of London’s specified boundaries assigned to an independent Albanian state. Only a Habsburg threat to Montenegro in early May 1913 caused it to surrender its claim to the port city of Scutari and remove its troops. Serbia, however, continued to defy the Treaty of London terms throughout the period of the Balkan Wars.

A crisis also developed between Austria-Hungary and Serbia because of Belgrade’s intransigent position on the Albanian question, which created a new strain in Austro-Hungarian-Russian relations as well. War clouds again appeared; Russia threatened that it would not tolerate any Habsburg military action against Serbia. If Russia did intervene in a potential Habsburg-Serbian war, it could result in a world war.

Meanwhile Bulgaria resented its Serbian and Greek allies’ occupation of the greater part of Macedonia allocated to Sofia in their earlier treaty. Serbia, however, demanded additional compensation because the Treaty of London had deprived it of territory in Albania and the Adriatic coast. Greece and Serbia quickly signed an alliance to defend their extended territorial claims on 1 June 1913, one day after the Treaty of London had been ratified. Both argued that their de facto occupation of the questioned terrain settled the issue; they would retain most of Macedonia and simply ignore the Great Powers’ intentions to establish Albania as an independent state.

The 1913 Second Balkan War exploded two months after the first had ended when Bulgaria, unhappy with its seemingly meagre territorial gains after sustaining the most casualties during the war, launched an ill-advised attack against the Greek and Serbian occupation forces in Macedonia. It resulted in a rapid Bulgarian defeat. Greece and Serbia welcomed the Bulgarian onslaught, because Bulgaria bore the moral stigma as the aggressor. The former Balkan allies, quickly joined by the recently defeated Turkish army and Romania, crushed the Bulgarian army in one week. The rapid Bulgarian collapse removed any possibility of Habsburg intervention on behalf of Bulgaria, also eliminating it as a military counterweight to Serbia.
A main objective of the Balkan allies during the Second Balkan War, in addition to defeating Bulgaria, included gaining a favourable peace treaty. By the Treaty of Bucharest, 10 August 1913, Romania received the province of Dobrudza with its 300,000 occupants. Serbia’s territorial gains, by far the largest, increased its territory by 50 per cent and added 1½ million occupants. Bulgaria ceded a large block of territory between the Danube River and Black Sea to Romania and the greater part of Macedonia to Serbia and Greece. Sofia also signed the Treaty of Constantinople on 20 September 1913 with the Ottoman Turks, who thereby regained Adrianople in Europe proper. Then during late September Serbia advanced into Albania, creating an immediate crisis with Austria-Hungary.

The Treaty of Bucharest proved a severe diplomatic defeat for Habsburg Foreign Minister Berchtold and a serious loss of prestige for Vienna. The treaty, which Berchtold had immediately but unsuccessfully attempted to revise, formalised the new Balkan Peninsula balance of power and signaled the end of Great Power control in the region. By 14 August any idea of revising the treaty had been laid to rest, resulting in the Dual Monarchy’s temporary diplomatic isolation. A sombre mood descended over the Ballhausplatz. Meanwhile, the Great Powers began to evaluate their options to exploit the new Balkan environment to their advantage. It became clear that Habsburg diplomatic policy had to be reformulated to counter the very unfavourable new situation. In the process, Habsburg leaders came to the dangerous conclusion that only through Serbia’s demise could domestic and diplomatic tensions be eased and Vienna’s prestige restored. This became a key factor during the 1914 July crisis and resulted in disaster for Austria-Hungary.

The Treaty of Bucharest also reignited diverging Habsburg-Hohenzollern policies. A congratulatory telegram from Emperor Wilhelm to Romanian King Carol sealed any chance of the treaty’s revision, which Vienna sorely sought, and signaled the return of strained allied relations. Vienna desperately desired to revise the Treaty of Bucharest, but Germany refused, arguing that it was much more important to retain Romania as an ally in the Triple Alliance.20

Intensifying pressure to utilise the military option, particularly from General Conrad, encouraged Viennese leaders to increasingly contemplate a military response to the chronic and demoralising South Slav situation. At a 3 October Common Ministerial Council meeting, all the participants voiced their preference

20 ÖUA, VII, Nrs. 8280, 8325, GP, XXXV, Nrs. 17375, 13741; see Albertini, Origins of the War.
for a more forceful approach to Serbia. They determined that perhaps a military solution would succeed where diplomatic efforts had so far failed during the Balkan War crisis. At a 10 October Rump Ministerial Council meeting, the participants determined that force was acceptable if necessary to halt the unrelenting Serbian machinations against Austria-Hungary. A new militant Habsburg attitude rapidly developed. As Habsburg-Hohenzollern relations finally improved during the critical period of October 1913, Berlin again announced that it supported Vienna’s Balkan policies. Meanwhile both civilian and military leaders assumed a more militant stance.

In an attempt to create a diplomatic rapprochement between the recent enemies, Romania and Bulgaria created a major backlash against Austria-Hungary in Bucharest. Romania had allied with the Habsburg enemy, Serbia, during the Second Balkan War against Bulgaria, so there was no love lost between the two governments. The main point, the prewar Balkan status quo, could never be restored; thus the Balkan Peninsula, a microcosm of Europe, had destroyed the former European balance of power.

During October 1913 the Serbs moved into central Albania after seizing territory in Macedonia. This provocative Serbian action created a serious blow to Habsburg prestige, and resulted in Vienna demanding on 18 October 1913 that the Serbians evacuate Albanian territory or face the consequences.

Viennese diplomatic manoeuvrings eventually created potential war situations on three occasions during the Balkan War crisis. The first, in early December 1912, resulted from Serbian troops moving toward the Austro-Hungarian frontier. Habsburg generals, for once supported by the heir apparent, Franz Ferdinand, demanded that military measures be initiated against the pesky neighbour. Emperor Franz Joseph also approved, and on 7 December, the provinces of Bosnia-Herzegovina were placed on war footing. Berchtold’s renewed hesitancy, the critical unresolved question of German support, and the possibility of disrupting the ongoing London conference of ambassadors, prevented the outbreak of war. The problems associated with a winter military campaign also dampened some military ardour.

The Scutari crisis, the second threatening and eventually very dangerous situation, transpired between April and May 1913, as mentioned earlier. Montenegrin King Nikita refused to yield the port city of Scutari to Albania, critical to the construction of a viable Albanian state, and one of Berchtold’s fallback positions.
King Nikita, who remained obstinate even after the Great Powers had inaugurated an international fleet demonstration, caused Habsburg military planners to rapidly improvise a military campaign to be launched against Montenegro. The king quickly capitulated. The results of this second war-peace crisis led to a firmer stance toward Serbia and furthered the belief among Habsburg diplomatic circles that the mere threat of military action produced diplomatic successes.

The dangerous Scutari crisis thus resulted first from Montenegrin, then Serbian, failure to withdraw troops from a newly created Albanian state, and from Vienna’s success in the Treaty of London, preventing Serbian access to the Adriatic coast and possession of a port that would allow it to gain economic advantage. The crisis also revealed Great Power loss of control over Balkan events, a development hastened by the outbreak of the 1913 summer Second Balkan War. Vienna, meanwhile, continued its energetic foreign policy initiatives in an effort to counter its perceived diplomatic weakness, while the overall European situation became extremely strained when Russia threatened to intervene if the Habsburgs took action against Serbia.21

The third Balkan crisis occurred in October 1913 when Serbia refused to remove combat troops from Albanian territory on the Adriatic coast. Following numerous Great Power requests to desist, the Serbian government promised compliance, but failed to act. Vienna then dispatched an ultimatum to Belgrade on 18 October, with German support, demanding that it withdraw its troops within eight days or face the consequences (war). Serbian Premier Pasić finally capitulated and the troops were withdrawn. The failure of the European concert to control Serbian actions was not lost on Vienna.

Events during October 1913 closely resembled those that occurred during the fateful July 1914 crisis. In rapid succession, Vienna dispatched a diplomatic warning to Belgrade relative to its aggressive actions in Albania. Habsburg diplomats then appealed to Germany to assure its support for its potential actions. Upon receiving Berlin’s approval, Count Berchtold dispatched the ultimatum to Serbia on 18 October demanding that it evacuate Albania, which it ultimately accepted because Russia had backed down due to of its lingering military weakness. The Habsburg diplomatic success heightened Serbian hatred, as it became an even more dangerous mortal enemy to the Dual Monarchy. The Habsburg diplomatic victory,

21 ÖUA, VII, Nrs. 8197, 8198, 8279; Fritz Fellner, Der Dreibund: Europäische Diplomatie vor dem ersten Weltkrieg (Berlin: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1960), 80.
following the threat of force that set such a dangerous precedent, came home to roost during July 1914. Also, during October, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister did not inform Italy of Vienna's intended actions relative to Serbia until after its ultimatum had been dispatched to Belgrade. Berchtold repeated that tactic during the July 1914 crisis. General Conrad meanwhile pressured Emperor Franz Joseph to approve an invasion of Serbia, claiming once again that only a military success over the troublesome Balkan neighbour would ultimately resolve Vienna’s serious Balkan problems. Foreign Minister Berchtold’s actions in October stemmed partially from his disillusionment with the Concert of Europe’s diplomacy as a means of safeguarding the Dual Monarchy’s vital interests.

Another major threat to the Dual Monarchy’s position resulted from increased Romanian hostility, because of Vienna’s proposed Bulgarian-Romanian tie and desire to acquire Transylvania to fulfil its Great Romania nationalist program. This was encouraged by its successful participation with the victorious Balkan War coalition and considerable territorial gain. Bucharest hoped to receive future Russian support for eventually seizing Transylvania from Hungary, which garnered popularity from the supporters of the Great Romania idea.

Multiple neighbours, Serbia, Romania and Italy, sought Austro-Hungarian monarchy territory to fulfil their irredentist goals. During the July crisis and well into the war, Germany pressured Vienna to surrender territory to assure at least Italy’s neutrality, but the Habsburgs refused this most unwelcome pressure because they understood that relinquishing territory to potential allies would result in the Dual Monarchy’s disintegration and destroy its sensitive multi-national balance. Such a threat, however, would only pose mortal danger to the Dual Monarchy if one of the countries seeking Habsburg territory received the support of a Great Power that possessed equal or greater military strength than Austria-Hungary. Russia could certainly fulfil that role if it felt strong enough to challenge Austro-Hungarian policies in the future, which it did in 1914.

The Russian Foreign Minister, Sasonov, who had lost control of the Balkanbund, sought to maintain peace after the Balkan Wars. He even persuaded Serbia to drop its occupation of Albanian territory to assure peace during the serious October 1913 crisis, which would have otherwise possibly resulted in Austria-Hungary declaring war on it. Sasonov did, however, assure Serbia of future tsarist support.22

22 Albertini, Origins of the War, 486.
The results of the Balkan Wars proved disastrous for the Austro-Hungarian diplomatic and military position. Vienna appeared powerless as it even witnessed a deterioration of its inner domestic and political peace, particularly in its South Slavic territories. Russian and Serbian influence increased in Bohemia, Bosnia and Galicia as well. A most troubling factor involved the sudden and significant increase of Russian influence in the Balkan Peninsula.

Another of the negative results of the recent Balkan Wars involved the possibility that Habsburg army national units might prove unreliable in a future war, as they had demonstrated during troop call-ups. For example, some Czech soldiers had refused to comply with the Habsburg mobilisation order against Serbia. Could such events occur again? Also during 1912-13 Romania had become a questionable ally for Austria-Hungary in a future war against Russia. When Bucharest sided with Serbia, the Dual Monarchy’s mortal enemy, during the Second Balkan War, Vienna ignored the initial indications that the erstwhile ally had begun to shift its loyalty.

In revised Austro-Hungarian military calculations for a war that could develop because of the Balkan conflicts, Romania remained a crucial factor. According to General Conrad’s calculations, if Romania did not participate as an ally in a war against Russia, it would signify the loss of 400,000 troops or fifteen infantry divisions. On the other hand, if Romania allied with Russia against Austria-Hungary, it would mean the loss of 800,000 troops or 30 divisions. Conrad traveled to Bucharest in December 1912 to return with a newly ratified military treaty, but King Carol proclaimed that he could not publicise the Triple Alliance military agreements; they had to be kept secret. He did promise that as long as he lived his country would not attack the Dual Monarchy. A special Habsburg envoy, Count Ottakar Czernin, dispatched to Bucharest in 1913, reported that Romania had definitely been lost to the Triple Alliance. During December even Berlin accepted this fact.

In 1913-14, General Conrad’s war planning followed his initial concepts from 1908-09, except for three important factors. The first involved the question of whether Romania would remain as a reliable ally in a war against Russia, the second French money being utilised to construct strategic railroads to the German and Austro-Hungarian frontiers. This greatly assisted the tsarist Great Program initiated

23 Conrad, Dienstzeit, III: 419.
24 ÖUA, V, Nrs. 4989, 5006-08, 5023-5, and varia.
during the Balkan Wars to increase the size and effectiveness of the army. The final factor involved the rearward deployment of Habsburg forces because of the more advanced state of Russian war preparations. The key to Austro-Hungarian strategy against the Romanov foe remained early operational readiness and the launching of an offensive with its First and Fourth Armies in a northern and northeastern direction. The tragedy for the Habsburg military command when the war finally erupted included the fact that no plans existed to counter a major enemy deployment at their gravely exposed extreme right flank area if Romania did not protect it as agreed in earlier war planning. If somehow major Russian forces could deploy at the Habsburg right flank undetected, the Habsburg offensive to the north could be outflanked and would have been launched in the wrong direction.

General Conrad commenced planning for various deployment possibilities against the now erstwhile Romanian ally and for the construction of fortresses at their long common frontier. He also demanded that Berlin intervene to clarify the treaty situation relative to Bucharest because of its closer ties to Romania and force it to openly publicise the secret Triple Alliance treaty. Serious difficulties arose, however, when Count Istvan Tisza, Hungarian Minister President, broke off negotiations with the Romanian government concerning initiating reforms in Transylvania. The Chief of the Romanian General Staff, General Averscu, loyal to the alliance, was dismissed early in 1914 – not an encouraging sign.25

Returning to Serbia, it had also become obvious that a showdown with Austria-Hungary over the South Slav question would occur sooner or later, particularly if Serbia received Russian support. Such factors had to be considered in all Dual Monarchy relations with Belgrade but the Habsburgs would no longer accede to any aggressive Serbian diplomatic or military moves. Vienna’s troublesome neighbour obviously prepared for a future war against the Dual Monarchy. Habsburg military and civilian leaders scrambled to control the disastrous situation following the events of 1912-13.

Throughout General Conrad’s tenure as Chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, he pressed for war against Serbia because of the threat of the loss of the Habsburg Southern Slav territories, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Adriatic coastline as well as concern relative to its Great Power position in the Balkan Peninsula. Further, a War Case ‘B’ (Balkan) would be much more advantageous in 1913,

25 KAGOB, fasz. 46; fasz. 90; KANC, B fasz. 4; Conrad, Dienstzeit, III: 495-6; Kiszling, Franz Ferdinand, 193.
when Russia had not completed its recently announced Great Program military reforms. He also argued that if Russia went to war after Austria-Hungary invaded Serbia, Serbia and Bulgaria would neutralise each other. The creation of a Great Serbia would signify a large Slavic state encircling Bosnia-Herzegovina, which in turn would require significantly more military forces deployed at the southern Dual Monarchy frontier.

In a memo he forwarded to Emperor Franz Joseph on 20 January 1913 General Conrad emphasised that Serbia was evolving into a fairly significant military power because of its recent battlefield victories. Austria-Hungary had to prepare for war against it. Conrad suggested three steps to meet the new Balkan challenges. First, he requested that Germany increase its troop numbers for its eastern deployment against Russia. He also commenced planning for the rearward deployment of Habsburg forces against Russia if he initially launched an invasion in the Balkans to assure a better chance of a rapid Habsburg victory in that theatre. Another factor involved the effect of the Redl affair, a spy scandal, whereby Habsburg war plans had been sold to Russia. This espionage case naturally aroused great concern in Berlin.

The drastic changes in the Balkan Peninsula resulting from the Balkan Wars forced the Austro-Hungarian military planners to seriously alter their 1914-15 war preparations against both Russia and Serbia. Additional troops had to be deployed against Serbia, because it had greatly expanded its territory and potentially could raise five or more additional infantry divisions within a few years. If Serbia’s sixteen and one-half divisions reached 21, it could tie down half of the Austro-Hungarian army, when it would also have to counter the Russian colossus to the north. That number could easily reach the 21 mark after Serbia had absorbed its recently conquered territories and Montenegro added five or six additional units. To Conrad the military odds had obviously swung drastically against the Dual Monarchy. Russia’s much more aggressive and assertive foreign policy was supported by its Great Program for military expansion, which would add one million soldiers to its army ranks by 1916 or 1917, while increasing artillery numbers by 25 per cent. Also of significant concern, French money helped finance tsarist strategic railroads toward the German and Austro-Hungarian frontiers, which would substantially raise the number of deployment trains and speed up the transport of troops to Austro-Hungarian and German fronts.

During the Balkan Wars the two alliance systems had drawn closer together and created a new negative tenuous balance of power for Austria-Hungary and
Germany. Meanwhile, the Great Power armaments race had accelerated since the 1911 Moroccan crisis; then the 1913 army laws in France and Germany were issued. These events did not portend well for the Triple Alliance.

The German 1913 army law represented a response to the Balkan War crisis. Thus increased military tensions influenced Berlin’s decision resulting from the disastrous Turkish defeat, which removed it as a counterweight against the other Balkan states, and upset the previous Balkan balance of power. Italy announced that it would not deploy troops to support an invasion of France as previously agreed upon. This affected Germany’s elimination of their earlier German Gross Ost deployment plans in case of a war solely against Russia, leaving only the Schlieffen Plan in case of the outbreak of a European war.

The termination of the Balkan Wars, and resulting Habsburg-Romanov standoff, remained a potential source of serious conflict by the end of 1913. The assassination of the Habsburg heir apparent Archduke Franz Ferdinand on 28 June 1914 and resulting 1914 July crisis spawned directly from the Balkan Wars.

The numerous Austro-Hungarian diplomatic setbacks during 1912-13 led to a decline in Habsburg morale, which mixed with escalating political and domestic turmoil within the Dual Monarchy itself. Commencing in 1912 nationality problems became bothersome as the events tragically coincided with exploding nationalistic passions and frictions, the combination producing great frustration, pessimism and a defeatist attitude for Habsburg leaders.

In June 1914 Vienna became fixated on Russia’s obviously more active and aggressive foreign policy. War in 1914 became inevitable when leading Habsburg statesmen made the decision to invade Serbia after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. Their objective was to terminate years of Great Serbian agitation and respond to the assassination regardless of the consequences. Once assurances of German support materialised, Vienna proceeded on its own course and at its own pace. However, Habsburg military weakness, outdated tactics, lack of adequate training and obsolete weaponry, particularly its artillery, had a profound effect and resulted in its growing dependency upon German support. For decades the Austro-Hungarian military budget had remained the lowest of the Great Powers, because of Hungarian opposition to increasing the Common Army’s size and budget. This proved disastrous in 1914 when it became impossible to recoup the years of neglect of the army.

In July 1914 Vienna militarised its diplomacy, which reputedly had been so successful during the Balkan Wars, assuming that the overall military situation could
only worsen in time. In late June 1914 the Foreign Office prepared a memorandum for delivery to the German Government announcing a total reorientation of its Balkan policy. However, on 28 June, just four days after the completion of that Matscheko Memorandum, with Archduke Franz Ferdinand’s assassination, the document was rapidly revised. The updated version demanded a short-term solution to Vienna’s Balkan problems because of the drastically altered events.26

The news of the assassination stunned Habsburg leadership, many of whom were on vacation. The recent Balkan events seriously affected the monarchy’s declining Great Power status and the assassination had enormous potential consequences for the Dual Monarchy’s South Slav people. Habsburg political and military authorities accepted the vociferous demands for war against Serbia to maintain Austria-Hungary’s credibility and standing. In other words, Vienna had to settle accounts with Serbia as there could be no doubt of its responsibility for the assassination. The Dual Monarchy leaders felt themselves to be in mortal danger; therefore, if Serbia went unpunished, Austria-Hungary would forfeit its Great Power status and disintegrate from inner turmoil. Not surprisingly, General Conrad called for an immediate mobilisation and invasion of Serbia without any diplomatic overtures.

For a Habsburg Balkan mobilisation, one had to consider the serious threat that evolved when the Russians had significantly improved their strategic railroads leading to the Austro-Hungarian frontier. In addition, there was the threat of Russian cavalry masses crossing the common frontier and disrupting Habsburg railroad lines close to it. Adding further to Habsburg concern, Romania would probably not deploy troops to cover its critical extreme right flank position in a war against Russia. All these factors effected General Conrad’s decision to reestablish his deployment further rearward against Russia in case it interrupted a War Case ‘B’ by entering the conflict. This action would reputedly provide greater security and prevent unwelcome surprises on the Russian front while military operations continued against Serbia. The disadvantage, however, was that Russia could deploy superior forces with the extra time advantage it had gained during its mobilisation and deployment periods. Also, the Habsburg army would lose the initiative even if only temporarily at the onset of the conflict. There was also the serious problem of the tsarist numerical advantage versus Habsburg forces.

Austro-Hungarian war planning for 1914-15 reflected the dangerous results of the 1911 Tripoli War and 1912-13 Balkan War crisis. During a mobilisation for War Case ‘B’ (Serbia), it would be disastrous if the Habsburg B swing group of twelve infantry divisions had commenced railroad transport to the Balkan theatre and Russia then intervened.

General Conrad originally planned to deploy 40 infantry and eleven cavalry divisions, plus 27 reserve and *Ersatz* (replacement) brigades against Russia, which still placed it at a numerical disadvantage. By deploying 40 per cent of his army against Serbia in 1914, Russian numerical advantage increased substantially. Only 28 Habsburg divisions would then be available to halt 42 to 43 Russian divisions during the opening phases of the war.

The obvious threat also existed that St Petersburg would utilise a period of diplomatic tension in the Balkans to initiate a secret partial mobilisation, which is exactly what transpired in 1914. The key question became when would Russia actually intervene and what counter-action would become necessary?

On 5 July the first major step toward war commenced when a Habsburg envoy was dispatched to Berlin to gain Germany’s support for a war against Serbia. Viennese leaders felt that they now had to settle accounts with Serbia because the military pendulum would swing against Austria-Hungary and Germany in just a few years; thus, action had to be taken now! Emperor Wilhelm pledged Germany’s support, but requested prompt Habsburg action, realising and accepting the risk of Russian intervention. He therefore advised Vienna to exploit the present favourable moment. This resulted in the infamous ‘blank cheque’ for the Viennese government to resolve the Serbian problem. Once Vienna received German assurances, Berlin had surrendered the timing and manner of future action and thus Habsburg statesman ignored any unwanted opinions. However, to its extreme detriment, Vienna hesitated for weeks to initiate any diplomatic or military action, while seeking not to alert Europe to its intentions. This ran counter to Berlin’s 5 July advice to initiate rapid action, regardless of the consequences.

On 7 July a Common Ministerial meeting determined that action had to be taken to end the years of Great Serbia agitation, but because of pressure from Hungarian Minister President Count Istvan Tisza, a diplomatic approach had to be initiated first. Otherwise, it was determined that the South Slav problem could only be resolved by force. This meeting proved critical, because all future Habsburg diplomatic measures stemmed from the momentous decisions taken then.
On 14 July General Conrad went on leave with great fanfare to camouflage the seriousness of the situation, while on the same day, Count Tisza finally agreed that war would be launched against Serbia. Germany, meanwhile, complained about the lack of Habsburg activity, because it had anticipated prompt action.

After several days of the ‘calm before the storm’, on 18 July Serbia called its army reservists to active duty. On the same day Russian Foreign Minister Sasonov warned that Russia would not allow any attempt against Serbia’s independence. A pivotal Council of Ministers meeting convened secretly at Count Berchtold’s home on 19 July 1914, where the decision was made that an ultimatum would be delivered to Belgrade but its terms were such that they would not be accepted. However, the delivery of the ultimatum was delayed to avoid Franco-Russian collusion while the French President and Foreign Minister visited St Petersburg. The text, when completed, had a 48 hour time limit.

Then, on 22 July, the Serbian government commenced full mobilisation measures. When the Russian Foreign Minister learned of the Habsburg ultimatum to Serbia, he made the infamous remark, ‘this means European war’. On 24 July the Tsar ordered a ‘Period Preparatory to War’, which signified a partial mobilisation of the four military districts that bordered the Dual Monarchy. The measures were reputedly intended to defend against Habsburg military activity if necessary. The order was reconfirmed on 25 July. Diplomatic relations were severed and a few hours later, Franz Joseph signed the order for a partial Habsburg mobilisation against Serbia. Thus, the July crisis moved into a second more dangerous and decisive stage. Then during 25 and 26 July, reports proliferated of Russian military measures at the German and Austro-Hungarian borders. Russia became the first Great Power to mobilise, which greatly inflamed the already tense situation. The various European military establishments began to assume a greater role in the crisis. An Austro-Hungarian partial mobilisation was announced against Serbia at 9:23 pm; the first mobilisation day, however, would not occur until 28 July. On that day the tsarist ambassador warned that Russia would not remain idle if the Dual Monarchy invaded Serbia. Despite this, the war declaration against Serbia occurred on the same day, which precluded any chance for further negotiations. The Habsburg bombardment of Belgrade on 29 July sealed the Russian decision to order full mobilisation.

The Austro-Hungarian army entered its last war unprepared for modern warfare and with a serious numerical inferiority. General Conrad committed numerous tactical and strategic errors that almost destroyed the Habsburg army during the
deployment period and opening campaign, with the result that before even one Habsburg soldier boarded his deployment train, the initial campaign against Serbia and Russia had been lost! Now, to examine those events.

The Austro-Hungarian army had to launch an offensive immediately at the outset of war. This was partially due to geography: the East Galician frontier was bow shaped and with no natural hindrances to a Russian invasion; therefore, the tsarist armies could simply march forward and encircle Habsburg forces. General Conrad’s military planning emphasised seizing the initiative and utilising the advantage of a more rapid mobilisation to strike the separately assembling tsarist military units. By defeating these various groups separately, it would neutralise the Russian advantage of numerical superiority. Habsburg military planners assumed that they would have a two week ‘window of opportunity’ whereby Russia required extra time to mobilise.

The Balkan Wars changed all this to the disadvantage of the Habsburg military. First, on 1 July a rearward deployment of the Austro-Hungarian army was ordered because of the Russian army’s recent military achievements and the planned launching of a full War Case ‘B’ against Serbia. The rearward deployment signified that the troops would not assemble at the Eastern Galician frontiers as planned in earlier Operations Bureau planning, but back to the San-Dniester River line. Once the troops arrived at that river line, they marched through the August heat for several days to the frontier. Thus, when they prepared to launch their offensive, the troops were exhausted and valuable time had been lost.

The basis of allied war planning was the Schlieffen Plan, by which Austria-Hungary had to hold off the Russian armies, while Germany crushed the French. Timing was a critical factor because of the assumption that both Austria-Hungary and Germany would have a much more rapid mobilisation than the tsarist regime. However, Russia had commenced mobilisation measures already on 24 July, presenting it at least a one-week advantage in military terms. Then, the Habsburg late 6 August declaration of war and rearward deployment provided the Russians additional time and allowed them to seize the initiative during the opening campaign. As a further disadvantage for the Habsburg forces, the B Group (swing force of twelve infantry divisions) had already been mobilised and had commenced railroad transport to the Balkan front as the Russian military measures became increasingly threatening. This signified, as mentioned earlier, that only 28 divisions would initially counter 42-43 Russian units. The key event occurred on the evening of 31 July, when General Conrad met with the Chief of
his Railroad Bureau, who informed him that the War Case ‘B’ mobilisation could not be interrupted, otherwise there would be total chaos on the railroad lines even though Russia was obviously mobilising.

On the Balkan front, the declaration of a full War Case ‘B’ resulted in the B swing group and Minimal Balkan Group being mobilised. Twenty of the Dual Monarchy’s 48 divisions began transport to the Serbian frontier where the only railroad line to the Serbian frontier ensured that the troops could not launch an offensive until 12 August. Conrad’s desire to defeat Serbia blinded him to the Russian threat.

The Austro-Hungarian deployment against Russia had two armies attacking to the north reputedly to join German forces attacking south from Prussia into the Polish sack by prewar agreement. The Germans, however, never intended to launch such a manoeuvre, but rather won the greatest defensive battle of the war at Tannenberg in late August and then defeated a second Russian army at the Masurian Lakes a few weeks later. General Moltke had also promised to deploy thirteen German divisions, with four additional reserve units against Russia; however, when Italy declared its neutrality in July, there would be no reserve divisions, only nine for the Prussian campaign.

The two armies that launched offensives to the north included First Army, its objective Lublin, and Fourth Army, Cholm. Third Army would protect their right flank, while Second Army, or the B group, had been mobilised to deploy at the northern flank of the Balkan forces at the Danube River. Therefore, it would not be available to protect the extreme right flank area against Russia. This resulted in catastrophe. It had to be recalled to meet the Russian challenge, but in doing so it exposed the flank of the Habsburg Fifth and Sixth Armies leading to a resounding defeat on the Balkan front during the opening campaign of the war. It arrived after numerous railroad delays to be hurled into battle immediately after unloading from their trains.

Meanwhile, the Habsburg Third Army launched an offensive with its seven divisions against reputedly three or four enemy units. However, 21 Russian divisions initiated their own offensive simultaneously causing a disastrous Habsburg defeat and rapid retreat. Following the two battles of Lemberg, the retreat continued for 150 kilometres. This first Galician campaign cost the Austro-Hungarian army 40 per cent of its mobilised strength, many of its officers, non-commissioned officers, and professional soldiers among those lost. The key to understanding the battle of
Lemberg, in Galicia, was that when the First, Fourth and Third Armies launched their concentric offensives, gaps quickly opened between them, which the Russians rapidly filled. The disastrous one occurred between the First and Fourth Armies and ultimately led to the defeat.

In summary, Austria-Hungary stood on the precipice during 1911, but the 1912-13 Balkan Wars completely changed the Balkan Peninsula balance of power against Germany and Austria-Hungary. The results of these wars and the improvements to be made in the Russian army would lead to the two allied powers utilising the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand as an excuse to launch a preventive war before the military odds turned against them in the future. For Austria-Hungary the opening campaigns proved a complete disaster – the Habsburg army would literally be destroyed and would require immediate German assistance. The 1911 Tripoli War brought the Dual Monarchy to the edge of a precipice; the events of 1914 tipped it over, to its ultimate destruction.
1911: France’s Year of Living Dangerously?

Michael S. Neiberg

There is an alluring and straightforward explanation of France’s road to war in 1914 that begins in 1911. According to this version of events, France, now recovered from the seismic shocks of the Dreyfus Affair, has entered a new nationalist revival. The second Morocco crisis (also called the Agadir crisis) has awakened this newly unified nation to the dangers that it faces from its aggressive and inveterate enemy to the east, Germany. At the same time, the events of 1911 have brought France into strategic harmony with its new ally, Great Britain, which shared the French sense of impending crisis and came to France’s aid during the diplomatic dealings over Morocco. Now fully alert to the dangers it faces, France is at long last ready to rebuild, rearm, and prepare for a war based on revanche, or the spirit of revenge for the loss of 1870-71.

Douglas Porch helped to popularise this approach in his 1981 book, The March to the Marne. Porch saw the limits of the revival, especially the failures of the French state to parlay it into a demonstrable increase in military power, but he nonetheless argued that ‘1911 marked a turning point’ that ‘introduced a new note of urgency into military debates’. French leadership, he argued, saw Agadir as motivation to ‘rehabilitate a war machine which had grown rusty from over a decade of neglect’. The Army, he noted, once again became ‘the focal point of French patriotism and national pride’ as mainstream politicians were once more willing to associate themselves with it. Those politicians were now more passionate in making the case for ‘the restoration of military strength’.¹ The threat from

¹ Douglas Porch, The March to the Marne: The French Army, 1871-1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 169. These quotations come from chapter notably titled ‘The Army and the Nationalist Revival’. The idea of a renewal of nationalism also appears in numerous textbooks and general histories. To cite just one example, Robert Gilda, Children of the Revolution: The French, 1799-1914 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), calls his final chapter ‘Rebuilding the Nation’. It is perhaps worth noting that more specialised scholars like Eugen Weber, who believed that the phenomenon was limited strictly to Paris, and Jean-Jacques Becker generally avoid the term and the idea behind it.
Germany, evidenced at Morocco, had wiped away the last vestiges of disgrace from the sordid and unpleasant Dreyfus Affair. A new national mood had supposedly begun and 1911 marked the great turning point.

How accurate is this picture? On the surface, it seems to offer an explanation for how France, a state that had no vital interests in the July crisis of 1914, could commit to a total war that, although nominally victorious, broke the nation in both body and spirit. It also would seem to explain France’s willingness to commit to that total war for four long and bloody years rather than seek an end by negotiation. Finally, it seems to explain the close strategic partnership between France and Britain, as well as France and Russia, during the war years themselves.

Still, this explanation can only take us so far. While 1911 represents, at least in retrospect, a watershed year, we should be careful not to assume inevitability, teleology, or even probability. Just as the events of Fashoda in 1898 led not to war between France and Britain but a diplomatic agreement, so might Morocco have led to a similar agreement between France and Germany. Indeed, such was the manifest desire of the powerful and growing socialist parties on either side of the Rhine. In their eyes, as well as the eyes of most people in the rural areas of both nations, nothing that happened in Morocco threatened either their vital or important interests. The national revival of that year, such as it was, did not have war with Germany as its goal nor did it make war in 1914 (or any other year) inevitable. Most Frenchmen in 1911 were stunned and saddened when war did break out just three short and relatively uneventful years later. The general satisfaction of most Frenchmen with the compromise that ended the Morocco crisis of that year also indicates that we ought to be careful in placing too much importance on the crisis itself. The great success of Morocco had not been France’s willingness to stand up to German aggression (the aggression was, in fact, French) but that the two states had managed to avoid the escalation of a minor crisis into a major war.

With the benefit of hindsight we can see four important events and processes of 1911 that do suggest major shifts for France and its foreign affairs in that year. The first half of this paper will analyse these changes at the tactical, operational, strategic, and political levels. While they may seem to show an inexorable French path from humiliation in 1871 to revival in 1911 to vengeance in 1919, the second half of this paper will put these changes into context and suggest the limitations of seeing 1911 as the first intentional step toward the war that began in 1914.
Although the national revival thesis seems logical in retrospect, its advocates have surprisingly little upon which to base their arguments. Even Porch is unable to quantify or qualify the change in popular moods, stating only that ‘a significant number of people were prepared for a show-down with the Kaiser’. Among these people, he argues without substantiation, were ‘the young, the intelligent, and the Parisian’. Why those groups and not others felt the threat from Germany he leaves unclear, and even these limited assertions do not stand up to scrutiny. Had war not broken out in 1914, the events of 1911 would, of course, not be seen today as a step on the road to war, but what they actually were – a small, insignificant diplomatic disagreement that ended peacefully. To a large extent, then, scholars of the nationalist revival are reading backward too aggressively from 1914 in order to interpret the events of 1911.

Porch’s rather odd assertion about the ‘intelligent and the Parisian’ being most concerned with the growing German threat notwithstanding, he is correct to emphasise 1911 as a turning point of some importance. The French system was undergoing change, although not all of it was motivated by the spirit of revanche or nationalist revival. Perhaps the most important change in France in that year came at the political level with the rise to power of Raymond Poincaré, a centre-Right politician with broad Catholic and middle-class support. A noted economist and minister in many French governments, Poincaré led the Parliamentary inquiry into the performance of French diplomats in the Morocco crisis. Critical of the Quai d’Orsay as home to what he called a ‘pitiful [and] unbelievable administrative disorder’, he emerged as a new voice in French foreign affairs. That he came from the ‘lost province’ of Lorraine only made him more attractive to those on the Right. By January 1912 he was prime minister and by February 1913, he was president. His rise supposedly ushered in a new, more muscular era of French foreign policy that was more willing to confront and challenge Germany. Indeed, such was the

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3 Porch may well have been thinking of the nationalist writings of some young French intellectuals, notably Charles Péguy, who spoke in 1911 of the ‘menace of a German invasion’. Péguy, who was tragically killed in the opening days of World War I, broke with Jean Jaurès largely over the issue of reconciliation with Germany. It is clear, however, that Péguy did not speak for a nation or a generation. Quotation from Jeremy Popkin, *History of Modern France*, 2nd edn (New York: Prentice-Hall, 2001), 185. Popkin’s is another textbook that facilely takes up the theme of national revival after 1911.
5 Journalists favourable to Poincaré repeated a story about him as a ten-year-old boy supposedly looking back with a tear in his eye as he saw his native Lorraine under French control for the last time.
image that Poincaré liked to project in order to play to his political base; he told voters that his very name came from a variation on ‘poingcarré’, loosely translated as ‘clenched fist’. Public statements like ‘France does not want war, but she does not fear it’ made Poincaré a darling of the French Right, which had grown tired of the pro-conciliation stance of political leaders like Joseph Caillaux.\(^6\)

Also in 1911, the French named a new chief of staff for the Army, General Joseph Joffre. The third choice (out of three finalists) for the job, Joffre was neither brilliant nor a creative thinker at the strategic or operational levels. He had, however, made a name for himself as an efficient imperial administrator and, perhaps more importantly, he knew how to play the political game so well that his fellow officers nicknamed him ‘the crab’, because he moved left or right only with great difficulty.\(^7\) Upon taking the job, Joffre set himself upon the tasks of strengthening the overall quality of an aging and moribund officer corps, and of giving the French army ‘a firm doctrine for war, known and accepted by all’.\(^8\) He then masterminded the revisions of the French Plan XVI, which had assumed a defensive posture, and implemented the more aggressive Plan XVII, designed to concentrate French forces along the Franco-German frontier and provide the commander-in-chief (who would become Joffre if war broke out; see below) with maximum flexibility to defend, attack the German flanks in Belgium, or liberate Alsace-Lorraine, as circumstances dictated and allowed. A more aggressive French political leadership had now met a more aggressive French general staff.

Political issues inside France also resulted, somewhat unintentionally, in Joffre attaining far greater powers than his predecessors had enjoyed. In June 1911 (amid the backdrop of tensions at Agadir) the freshly appointed Minister of War François Goiran had difficulty satisfactorily explaining to the government the exact legal relationship between his ministry, the Parliament, and the generals. He was soon ushered out of office and a new Minister of War, Adolphe Messimy, came in determined to reorganise the French high command. Among his reforms was the unifying of the roles of the vice-president of the Conseil Supérieur de Guerre and the chief of staff of the French Army. The vice-president had the responsibility under French law to assume command of the forces in the field if and when war began, but he had no staff of his own and no formal links to the various corps


commanders who would execute strategy. The reasons for this illogical arrangement had to do with ‘political prudence’ and preventing French soldiers from acquiring too much power, but dissociating the planning of war from the execution of war risked placing France in an untenable position once a war began. Agadir may have helped to prompt a move for reform, but even those French politicians mortally afraid of generals being too powerful had seen for some time that the arrangement could be fatal to the national interest.

In 1911, Messimy sensibly merged the functions of the vice-president with the chief of staff. Thereafter, the chief of staff who designed war plans and formulated strategy would also be the man to command armies in the field if and when war broke out. The change gave Joffre greatly increased power and, even before the war began, made him the most powerful soldier in the history of a Third Republic that had been tormented by poor civil-military relations. David Ralston goes as far as to argue that Joffre had ‘virtually unlimited power with regard to the army’, although it should be noted that his extensive powers were due in large part to the ignorance and indifference of politicians who preferred not to think seriously about military matters if they did not need to do so.

A third chapter in this story involves a military agreement with Russia concluded in August 1911. French statesmen had been reluctant to support Russia in the 1908-09 Bosnia crisis, both because the situation did not affect French strategic interests and because French diplomats understood their alliance with Russia to be defensive in nature. Rather than requiring France to support Russian power plays in the Balkans, the alliance was intended to deter a third party from attacking either state. French power, moreover, could not be tied to Russian expansionism because of opposition to the reactionary Russians at home, especially in the wake of the Tsar’s brutal repression of the rebellion of 1905. The Russian alliance had always pitted French values against French interests, and for that reason the terms of the alliance were carefully worded and a closely guarded secret.

By 1911, the Franco-Russian alliance was, if not at risk of falling apart, at least in need of some care and attention. Many French socialists had been arguing for years that France should abandon its relationship with the reactionary Russians and work to build a better understanding with the Germans, who were both more central to

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vital French interests and home to the largest and fastest-growing socialist party in the world. As a symbol of the decline of the alliance, Russia repaid France's lack of support in Bosnia by staying silent during the Agadir crisis instead of offering the diplomatic support that might normally be expected of an ally. What conservatives saw as France's most important strategic pillar, the Franco-Russian alliance, had weakened with potentially deadly consequences for French security.

In 1911, so the story goes, the crisis in Morocco had awakened France to the need for firmer commitments from its largest and most important ally. Thus in August, while the crisis was still ongoing, France agreed in principle to attack in the west in the event of a future continental war in exchange for a Russian promise to put as many as 800,000 men in the field within 16 days of mobilisation. To many people sympathetic to the German cause (then and now), this agreement proves both the offensive intentions of the Franco-Russian alliance and the reality of the 'encirclement' that the Germans feared. To the French, it was proof that the needs of security would always supersede the fundamental differences between autocratic, reactionary Russia and republican France. But the renewal of the alliance was mainly symbolic. French diplomats doubted whether the Russians would honour their commitments if core Russian interests were not threatened and French soldiers seriously doubted the ability of the Russian Army, then still shaken from its massive defeat at the hands of the Japanese, to play a serious role in a modern war. The French government hurriedly arranged loans and lines of credit to modernise the Russian Army and improve its infrastructure, but these changes would take years to complete. If successful, however, they would theoretically alter the entire European strategic picture by enabling Russia to put 100 infantry divisions into the field in just 18 days.

12 Sean McMeekin cites a December 1911 French Army memorandum doubting that the Russians would be able to undertake 'serious' action within 30 days of mobilisation. The officer who wrote the memorandum assumed that 30 days was far too late to be of any material help for France. It was certainly much longer than the 18 days the original plans set as their goal. See Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 251, n. 26.
13 The Germans, famously, concluded that the changes would be in place by 1917 and would fundamentally alter the balance of power in Europe, as, of course, they were intended to do. This calculation made the Germans more willing to run risks in 1914. See, especially, Bruce W. Menning, *Bayonets Before Bullets: The Imperial Russian Army, 1861-1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 233ff.
The alliance with Russia was not the only one France solidified. Also in 1911, French military leaders tried to firm up commitments from their British counterparts, building upon the diplomatic support Great Britain had provided in Morocco. In the midst of the Agadir crisis, indeed just one day before David Lloyd George’s Mansion House speech that seemingly placed Britain at France’s side, General Sir Henry Wilson argued in favour of the ‘eventual participation of an English Army with operations of French armies … in a war against Germany’. Franco-British discussions, with the friendship between Wilson and Ferdinand Foch at their centre, resulted in the so-called Wilson-Dubail memorandum that bound Britain closer to France, although it did not commit either side to any specific course of action. Wilson continued to advocate closer ties while unsuccessfully pressing British politicians to embrace a full alliance with France. Wilson and Foch also shaped the terms of military agreements in ways likely to limit the choice of the politicians and pull the two nations ever closer in the event of war.

Fourth, and finally, 1911 marks a high point in the French doctrine of the offensive à outrance (offensive to the utmost), which pledged that the moral superiority of French soldiers would overcome any material limitations or numerical superiority they might face. Two of its leading exponents were then in influential positions in the French Army high command. Ferdinand Foch, who had attended (but been quite disappointed in) Russian military manoeuvres the year before, was serving as commander of the École Supérieure de Guerre and Louis de Grandmaison was then the general staff’s director of military operations. Both men inculcated the superiority of the French character to the German as well as the superiority of the offensive to the defensive as a method of warfare. Scholars have been quick to see their teachings as evidence of a revival of French spirit rather than an admission of French material and numerical inferiority to their German neighbours.

Thus one way of seeing France in the crucial year of 1911 is to identify fundamental changes at all levels of the French military and diplomatic establishment. At the tactical level, military theory was dominated by the high priests of the offensive, most notably Foch, Grandmaison, and their legions of acolytes. At the operational level, Joffre had abandoned the largely defensive concepts of his predecessor in favour of a more forward-looking and offensive

15 See Goya, La Chair et L‘Acier, 19-20, for a few examples of the rhetoric of the ‘young Turks’ who were influenced by Grandmaison and Foch.
approach. At the strategic level, France had reaffirmed in no uncertain terms its commitments to the British and Russian alliances. France had even redefined its commitments to Russia to the extent of making its own military planning more aggressive and offensive. Finally, at the political level, France found a more stridently nationalist and even confrontational leadership in the person of Poincaré.

Such a shorthand for the French drift to war three years later does have some explanatory and predictive power. It helps to explain why some French leaders came, albeit quite belatedly, to see the Balkan crisis of July 1914 (that is to say, the one created not by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand but by the delivery of the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia) as involving France despite none of the state’s vital interests being located there. Simply put, they argued that France could ill afford to ignore any direct threat to Russian interests that emanated from Germany or Austria-Hungary for fear of weakening the alliance once again. It also helps to explain the fierce debates in France over the extension of mandatory military service to three years that occurred from 1911 to 1913. At least a portion of the French polity saw such service as necessary not only to prepare France for a future war but also to make credible French promises to be a reliable ally to Russia. More tragically, it explains why so many young Frenchmen died in futile charges in the first few weeks of the war.

It is clear that 1911 does mark a change in French attitudes. Nevertheless, it is a gross exaggeration to argue that these changes made war in 1914 inevitable. It is equally illogical to assume that any of these changes made France more willing or more eager for war. French leaders, including Poincaré, sought all ways to avoid a war they knew would be incredibly costly, up until the day that German forces entered sovereign French soil. Depicting the changes of 1911 as the first step of an intentional French plan to provoke a war with Germany runs counter to the evidence, just as post-war German attempts to place the blame for the outbreak of the war on Poincaré did not stick even among Poincaré’s most determined domestic political enemies.

But if 1911 did not make war inevitable, it is clear that it still serves as an important moment. The point of this paper, then, is not so much to refute the accepted wisdom of 1911 but to add nuance and context to it. Above all, we must be careful not to assume that patterns and events we see clearly today were seen as

such by people at the time. We must also take care not to assume intentionality of purpose in hindsight. Not all of these changes in French approaches to strategy and security were linked and not all of them meant then what we assume that they mean today.

Rather than being part of a clear design, these changes in French security policy in 1911 had little direct causal relationship to one another, nor were they all products of a nationalist revival *zeitgeist*. The diplomats who negotiated the terms of the agreements with Britain and Russia had little sustained contact with Joffre or any of the other French generals. Few French politicians, including most of the pre-war prime ministers, had a clear idea of what Plan XVII entailed and even fewer understood the tactical and operational implications of what men like Grandmaison and Foch were teaching in the classrooms of the *École Militaire* on the Champ de Mars. The *École Militaire* may have been physically close to the centres of French power in Paris, but in all other respects it might well have been on another planet, especially given the dysfunction of civil-military tensions in France in the pre-war era. The existence of the *Conseil Supérieur de Guerre* was intended to serve as forum for debating strategic issues, but it largely failed in that role, mostly because of the indifference of French political leaders to military planning and mobilisation, a circumstance that the fusing of roles under Joffre likely exacerbated. As a result, when war did break out in 1914, French political leaders, much like their counterparts elsewhere, were dangerously ignorant of their own state's war plans. Thus does Robert Doughty refer to French strategy as 'Joffre's Own', partly because of the minimal level of interference (or, put another way, cooperation) he received from French politicians.17

Few French political leaders were experts in military matters. Given that Europe had not had a major war in a century and most colonial matters were resolved, there was perhaps no reason for them to dedicate much effort to international security. Nor did this pattern change much after Agadir. French politics in the years before the war were consumed not with foreign affairs, but domestic ones, most notably the economy and a series of scandals that plagued a badly divided French political structure. Germany was – at best – a secondary concern.

The most important discussions inside France involving the army dealt only tangentially with Germany. The biggest of these great debates involved the proposed extension of the mandatory term of military service from two years to three. Set at

17 Doughty, ‘French Strategy in 1914’.
two years in 1905 partly as a response to the Dreyfus Affair, republicans had seen the lesser term of service as a ‘one of the few tangible consequences of the victory over the Army’ that followed that great scandal. Poincaré and others argued that recent German military expansions had forced France to reconsider. They urged a return to three years of service and Poincaré made the extension a major focus of his presidential campaign. Joffre, like any good general, supported the extension, as did most Catholic and conservative groups, although they often did so on social, not military grounds.

Although Poincaré tried to keep French attention focused on the need to grow France’s active-duty military manpower pool to rough parity with that of Germany, the debate over the proposed Three-Year Law revolved mostly around domestic issues. The majority of the French population saw the issue less in terms of international security than the encroachment of the army into the lives of Frenchmen in whose eyes two years was already an unreasonable burden. Given the peaceful resolution of the Agadir crisis, many on the French centre and Left saw no need for the law. Most farmers objected to the proposed law because it would remove a key labour source for twelve more months and socialists objected to putting workers under the reactionary regimentation of right-wing officers and the cruelty of sadistic sergeants. The Radical Party, too, led by Poincaré’s friend and sometime rival Joseph Caillaux, opposed the law, mainly on economic grounds. The debates also showed that the wounds of the Dreyfus Affair had not yet healed. Raoul Villain, the man who assassinated Jean Jaurès in 1914, later claimed that Jaurès’s opposition to the Three-Year Law justified the killing of a man he saw as a traitor to France.

Although the law eventually passed by a slim majority, it is noteworthy that the debate had less to do with Germany than with issues internal to France. Poincaré’s opponents did not accept his arguments that the one-year extension was necessary on the grounds of national security. Not seeing a clear and present danger from Germany, a broad coalition developed that saw the law as a way to indoctrinate French youth or, at the very least, to deny their labour to those who most needed it.

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18 Keiger, *Poincaré*, 152.
The debate over the Three-Year Law occurred alongside another scandal over the proper role of the French Army. From 1909 to 1912 the Aernoult-Rousset Affair placed French military justice under a microscope and led opponents of the army to advocate major reforms. At the heart of the scandal, which its chief historian labels a ‘proletarian Dreyfus Affair’, was the wisdom of allowing the army to maintain a separate system of justice. The army’s defenders argued that the centrality of the army to national defence, and the centrality of honour to the army’s norms, necessitated a different brand of justice, one that civilians had no right to question. Opponents, mainly socialists and left-leaning Radical Republicans, argued that the justice system was merely another way that the ruling classes oppressed and demeaned the working class.

Thus to the extent that Frenchmen were talking about the Army in 1911 they were likely less interested in how its artillery measured up to that of Germany or how many men France would have under arms than they were about how the army fitted into Republican society as a whole. The astonishing brutality of the army’s Algerian labour battalions, which the Aernoult-Rousset Affair revealed, suggested to many Frenchmen that the real threat might be from within. The army’s ability to withstand criticism and thwart all attempts at reforming the military justice system further convinced many on the French centre and Left that the army was part of the problem in France, not its solution.

Socialist leader Jean Jaurès was one of those who suspected the motivations of the senior leaders of the army and the politicians who might use it for their own gains. While most socialists were content to criticise the army from the sidelines, Jaurès had determined that he needed to study it if he were to change it. In 1910, Jaurès published his conclusions first in a series of articles, then in the form of a book, *L’Armée Nouvelle [The New Army]* in which he contended that France could be best served not by a professional conscript army, but by a militia. In Jaurès’s formulation, a mass citizen army in which virtually all able-bodied men served would protect, not threaten, French interests. Such an army would also require a broadening of the officer corps, thus diluting the influence of the types of reactionary officers that produced scandals like the Dreyfus Affair and the Aernoult-Rousset Affair.

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More importantly, the socialist army Jaurès envisioned would, in theory, suffice
to defend France’s frontiers without threatening its neighbours. Jaurès saw no
irresolvable conflicts between France and Germany. To the contrary, he believed
that extending mandatory military service to three years might provoke quarrels
where none needed to exist. A militia army would also, he hoped, prevent France
from deploying soldiers to areas of peripheral interest to the people of France, most
notably in Africa and Asia. A militia, a citizen army, would thus serve not only the
interests of France, but of humanity as a whole. Professional army officers derided
Jaurès for his naiveté and his lack of military acumen. Those on the Right went
so far as to accuse him of intentionally trying to weaken France in order to open
the door to Germany. That his ideas received the attention they did is, however,
testimony to the strength of the debate inside France.

Not everyone saw war between France and Germany as inevitable. Jaurès was a
leading voice calling for the Agadir crisis to lead to an entente across the Rhine as
the Fashoda crisis had recently led to one across the English Channel. More radical
French syndicalists even argued that French and German workers needed to band
together and jointly call for a general strike to prevent their governments from
engaging in dangerous behaviour likely to lead to war. Gustave Hervé, a leading
French syndicalist, praised the German working class as ‘the principal bastion of
peace’, because it refused to go along with the expansionist schemes of the Prussian
elite. He also responded to the Kaiser’s call to ‘keep your powder dry’ for a future
war by saying ‘Your Excellency! Can’t you see that four million German workers
have already pissed in it?’22 The class-based interpretations of Hervé and the call
for cross-border class action scared French conservatives far more than did a rising
Germany. Jaurès received numerous death threats, one of which became more than
a threat on the eve of the war.

This background is critical to understanding what really happened in France
in the aftermath of the second Morocco crisis in 1911. The settlement of the first
Morocco crisis in 1905, also resolved peacefully after a long and tedious series of
diplomatic dealings, had maintained the independence of the Sultan of Morocco
in order to limit France’s direct influence there. Morocco thereby became a French
protectorate, not a colony. As such, the Sultan theoretically and legally maintained
his sovereignty as well as the right to handle purely internal affairs without the
direct interference of the great powers. Because it had no imperial relationship with Morocco, France had no right to interfere with any other power that might seek to make trade deals or exploit Morocco’s natural resources. In exchange for this concession from France, Germany abandoned its plan (fully endorsed by the Sultan) to build a military port on the Moroccan coastline.

The big loser in 1905 was not France or Germany but Morocco, which became a pawn in a low-intensity game for control of North Africa’s resources. Morocco nevertheless remained a diplomatic backwater until a series of riots unconnected to European power politics rocked Fez in May 1911. Hoping to restore order before the situation got out of control, the French sent troops into the city. Doing so violated the 1905 Algeciras agreement because it ignored the sovereignty of the Sultan. The German government objected to the move, not on legal grounds, and certainly not out of concern for the Moroccans themselves, but because it placed most of central Morocco firmly under French hands. Thus after six weeks of deliberation did the Germans dispatch the inauspicious gunboat *Panther*, ostensibly to protect German interests during a period of unrest. As there were no real German interests to protect, the French objected to the German move as being unnecessarily provocative, and Morocco returned to centre stage once again.

But it was not only in Germany that people objected to the French dispatch of troops. As far as we can recover public opinion on the matter, the French government’s decision was unpopular almost everywhere. It was roundly criticised in England for being unnecessarily harsh and a violation of the unwritten rules of international diplomacy. Thus was Lloyd George’s Mansion House speech doubly important to the French Government, despite the fact that it never mentioned France by name. Although it spoke mostly about British interests, French diplomats read into it a statement of support from an important British politician at a time when French actions were unpopular in Britain and the Entente Cordiale still young and fragile.

French socialists led the opposition to their own government’s policy, believing it to be unwise and likely to do little more than undermine the peace everyone in Europe was then enjoying. The riots in Fez, the socialists alleged, were being used by an unpopular ministry as the thinnest of pretexts for an imperial power grab. As so often happens when we reduce people exclusively to their nationalities, we define ‘the Germans’ as being opposed to ‘the French’, but the differences were as political and class-based as they were national. We must be careful not to oversimplify. The Agadir crisis existed within both international and domestic contexts.
Few Frenchmen paid close attention to secret dealings happening far away from their daily cares. Diplomacy, of course, belonged to a secret and privileged world of professional elites who certainly did not deign to subject their decisions to public opinion. As such, most were happy with the trade of African swamps that ended a situation that everyone realised had unnecessarily gotten out of hand. Virtually all Frenchmen saw the compromise that ended the Agadir crisis as sufficient to meet the needs of the nation with honour. The agreement passed by a margin of 393 to 36 in the Chamber of Deputies and even Poincaré, one of its most vocal critics, voted for it in the end. At the time, French public opinion did not see the crisis as a step on the road to war. Rather, Frenchmen understood it for what it was: another long, drawn-out diplomatic negotiation that produced moments of tension, but ended peacefully when cooler and wiser heads had at last prevailed once again. Throughout the crisis, French politicians and citizens alike were consistently opposed to any actions, including the dispatch of French warships to Morocco, that were likely to elevate a minor diplomatic quarrel into a direct engagement with Germany. Agadir was clearly a case for both sides of hedging bets. Neither side committed resources to the crisis it could not afford to lose and both sides were careful not to let the crisis go too far.

The Agadir crisis lasted four months, with its most intensive period occurring in late July when German Foreign Minister Alfred von Kiderlen had demanded that France compensate Germany for its dispatch of troops by ceding all of the Congo. Knowledgeable Europeans understood that he had made a critical mistake by asking for far too much compensation than the unwritten rules of diplomacy allowed; Kaiser Wilhelm berated him in private for his overreach and Agadir largely ended his once-promising career. Nevertheless extravagant German demands were on the table and all sides had to adjust to the new significance of the crisis. Kiderlen’s move was the event that prompted Lloyd George’s Mansion House speech a week later which, although it has been read a statement of British support for France, was really about ensuring that Germany not treat Britain as, in Lloyd George’s words, ‘if she were of no account in the cabinet of nations’.

Although tensions temporarily rose, what was important about Agadir was less what had happened than what had not happened. Both sides saw clearly that

23 Keiger, Poincaré, 125.
more missteps by European diplomats or the involvement of nationalist hotheads could escalate a meaningless crisis into something far more serious. Perhaps more worryingly to the leaders of Europe, socialist parties, then growing in electoral power all across the continent, were holding international meetings to devise ways that they could prevent either government from seeking military solutions to the crisis. Less than a week after Lloyd George’s Mansion House speech, French and German socialists held a joint rally to denounce militarism. Other rallies attracted crowds in the tens of thousands, and *L’Humanité* (the French socialist newspaper) and *Vorwärts* (its German counterpart) began to publish editorials jointly written by socialist leaders on both sides of the Rhine. For the conservative governments then in power, no potential gain in Morocco was worth the price of bringing socialist groups together across borders.

Thus ensued a pattern of diplomacy already familiar to Europeans. The crisis, such as it was, dragged on for four months, long enough for emotions to cool and for solutions to be found. Four months was also long enough for most people, including many in government, to lose interest over the affair. Like the Fashoda crisis of 1898 (which had lasted seven months) and the first Morocco crisis of 1905 (which had lasted thirteen months), this one finally ended with a peaceful settlement all sides could accept as a means of resolving an incident that never should have taken on such international importance in the first place.

Thus we should be very careful not to see Agadir as a major confrontation on the road to war in 1914. If anything, as we have seen, the incident led many Europeans, especially most socialists, to argue that Agadir could well lead to an entente between Germany and France that would patch over minor disputes and usher in a new era of European peace. The fact that by 1911 all but the most determined French chauvinists had given up the idea of a war for Alsace-Lorraine convinced many that the time might be right for such a deal. If France would renounce its claims to Alsace-Lorraine (a province it could not retake by force of arms in any case because its allies would not assist in an offensive war), then Germany might make a concession of similar magnitude, such as a permanent non-aggression pact. Thus did contemporaries hope that Alsace-Lorraine could provide a bridge between France and Germany just as Strasbourg symbolically does today as the seat of the European Parliament.

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27 Such was the conclusion of Stanford University President David Starr Jordan during his 1913 tour of Alsace. See his *Alsace-Lorraine: A Study in Conquest, 1913* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1916).
The big rallies in Paris in this era were anti-military and anti-militarist. The large crowds that assembled in the capital in 1911 were not gathering to demand war over Morocco or even for a firmer stand against Germany. More than 60,000 people attended a rally in Paris (supposedly the heart of the nationalist revival) against an escalation of tensions over Morocco and other rallies attracted large crowds as well. In February 1912 more than 120,000 Parisians rallied in the symbolically important Père Lachaise cemetery to mark the cremation of the ashes of Albert Aernoult, the soldier who had died three years earlier in a military prison in one of the French Army labour camps in Algeria. Demonstrations sympathetic to Rousset also occurred in Toulon, Nancy, Châlons, Lyons, and Bordeaux. While not all of the demonstrators were necessarily opposed to the French military in general or to French foreign policy in Morocco, the demonstrations clearly indicate two critical points: that not all Frenchmen participated equally in the so-called ‘nationalist revival’ and that issues other than Morocco occupied the attention of Frenchmen interested in military affairs. The War Ministry was concerned enough to order more military spectacles and parades in order, hopefully, to instil in the French populace more patriotic and pro-military sentiments.28

Nor does it appear that Morocco was the most important topic of conversation even inside the French Army. From March, 1911, officers were carefully following the growth of a syndicalist movement inside the army, solidarité militaire, that threatened mass strikes in the event of a foreign or imperialist war. The group had almost 5,000 members. The government was also tracking a right-wing movement called the ligue militaire which had as its ostensible goal the removal of discriminatory practices against soldiers such as their lack of the vote and the requirement that enlisted men seek their officers’ approval before marrying. The French government was concerned enough about its ties to monarchist groups and its rapid growth to ban officers from joining it, although other similar groups soon appeared in every garrison town. Although most French politicians, including Jaurès, supported giving the vote to officers, there remained enough suspicion of coups and political intrigue to pit the French state’s soldiers against its government. These issues, far more than Agadir, agitated French officers in the summer of 1911.

28 Porch, March to the Marne, 180. Although it is about Britain rather than France, an excellent analysis of military parades and spectacles can be found in Scott Hughes Myerly, *British Military Spectacle from the Napoleonic Wars through the Crimea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). Much of his analysis can easily be applied to France in the fin de siècle period.
Morocco disappeared from importance as quickly as it had appeared. No one cried ‘remember Agadir’ in July 1914 nor were most people thinking of Morocco in that fateful summer. Perhaps the most important outcome of the Agadir incident was its reinforcement of the views of Europeans that minor diplomatic crises (caused, say, by the assassination of an obscure Balkan archduke), lead not to war but to lengthy periods of negotiation that ultimately end in peaceful solutions. Thus was the psychological shock of August 1914, when war actually did break out, all the greater.

Poincaré, as we have seen, criticised the treaty, but voted for it anyway. His core disagreement with the diplomats had been their negotiation of terms with Germany without reference to the cabinet, that is, without connecting their negotiations to a larger French geopolitical strategy. Too many of those diplomats, he feared, had a tendency to privilege their loyalty to the international community of statesmen over the core interests of France. In his mind, diplomacy had to address the needs of the government first and foremost. Most importantly, he saw the diplomatic position of conciliation and détente with Germany as having failed. Germany had not shown itself to be bellicose over Agadir, but neither did Germany appear to Poincaré as a viable strategic partner for France in the near or long term. These conclusions, of course, were also consistent with those of his domestic base of nationalists, to whom any growth of German power was a source of concern.

Thus Poincaré disagreed with the Left’s position that France should use Agadir to try to attain rapprochement with Germany. Any such treaty, of course, would likely codify France’s abandonment of its claim to Alsace-Lorraine, a position anathema to Poincaré’s supporters. It may not, however, have been anathema to Poincaré himself, despite his birth in the grimy Lorraine town of Bar le Duc. Poincaré, referring to Alsace-Lorraine, noted that ‘I never thought that loyalty to our memories dictated, in relation to our neighbours, a kind of chronic animosity … on all points of the globe from the hope of specific arrangements’.

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29 Nor were they even crying ‘Remember Alsace’. Jean-Jacques Becker’s analysis of the reports of teachers to the French government about conditions in their regions in July, 1914 found that less than one in twenty such reports even mentioned Alsace-Lorraine. See Becker, ‘That’s the Death Knell for Our Boys’, in Patrick Fridenson (ed.), *The French Home Front, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Berg, 1992), and Becker, *1914: Comment les Français Sont Entrés Dans la Guerre* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1977), where he develops this analysis further.

As this quotation suggests, Poincaré took a pragmatic view of foreign policy. In his eyes, economic agreements with Germany were more valuable for French security than a rehashing of a spirit of *revanche* that had largely faded as memories and options for the recovery of the lost provinces faded. France’s security, he argued, lay in a balance of power that required close French cooperation with Russia and Great Britain. France might still trade with Germany and work toward a more functional relationship more generally, but only within the framework of a bipolar diplomatic system that emphasised collective security. A relationship with Germany that put the Franco-Russian alliance at risk was therefore unacceptable. Equally unacceptable, however, was the use of the Russian alliance to upset the delicate balance of power. The lesson of Agadir for Poincaré, then, was that as long as the two military blocs were relatively equal, no side would dare risk a war that it could not guarantee it would win.

The change in logic between 1911 and 1914 is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth noting that, for Poincaré, the Russian alliance still seemed to be the best guarantor of French security – and continental peace. Exactly what Poincaré promised the Russians during the famous state visit of July 1914 remains a bit of a mystery. Even many of Poincaré’s closest advisers did not know. Sean McMeekin proposes in his recent work that Poincaré was willing to back the Russian hard line against Austria-Hungary for the sake of the alliance, although he is also careful, and correct, to note that ‘to say that French and Russian leaders conspired together in Petersburg (unsuccessfully) to preempt the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia is not the same thing as saying they had resolved to go to war’.31 Indeed, French leaders, the evidence suggests, had not yet abandoned their faith in the 1911 arrangements to balance power and keep peace. Germany’s leaders, however, had.

In conclusion, the system France put in place in 1911 had as its goal not a war of revenge with the reacquisition of Alsace-Lorraine at its heart but peace through a bipolar system of co-equal blocs capable of deterring one another. Although the fissures and weaknesses of this system would soon show, it was strong enough to survive the Italian invasion of Libya (prompted in large part by Italian anger at not being cut in on the Agadir deal) and two wars in the Balkans. In all of those cases, minor to moderate diplomatic crises were resolved far short of war because no vital interests of the European great powers were threatened and no great power sought to upset the balance of power by exploiting the crisis. So it might

well have remained had Franz Ferdinand’s driver not taken the most fateful wrong turn in history and provoked yet another ‘crisis’. Europeans faced that one with the same confidence in peaceful resolution with which they had faced all of the others, but this one was to be different. Europe, and the world, is still feeling the aftershocks.
The British Army and its approach to Continental warfare 1905–1914

J.P. Harris

British defence policy in the Edwardian period (as the 1901-14 era is still generally referred to in the United Kingdom) has certainly not lacked its historians. Even putting to one side for a moment the exceptionally rich seam of historical writing concerning the Admiralty and the Royal Navy, such luminaries of the more terrestrial side of British defence policy and military history as Ian Beckett, David French, John Gooch, Keith Jeffery, Edward Spiers, and Hew Strachan have all done substantial work on the era. An up-to-date single volume scholarly overview of the Edwardian army (something which has hitherto been conspicuously missing) by Mark Connelly and Tim Bowman is now in the pipeline and is likely to be in print ahead of the present volume. This author must confess in all humility


7 Hew Strachan, ‘The British Army, its General Staff and the Continental Commitment 1904-14’, in French and Reid (eds), *The British General Staff*, is just one example of this scholar’s contributions to the field.

that, while he has done previous work on the Edwardian age in passing, while approaching the First World War,\(^9\) he does not regard himself as an expert on it in the same sense as the scholars named above. Nor can he pretend to the expertise in the international politics and the great arms races of the era demonstrated in the writings of David Stevenson\(^10\) and others. The Edwardian age has not been, for him as it has for them, the focus of years (or even decades) of intense study, deep research and fine scholarly writing. Hanging a piece of writing on the British army on the peg of 1911 (the focus of the 2011 Chief of the Army’s History Conference and thus of this book) might seem, moreover, a somewhat odd thing for any scholar, however expert in the field, to attempt to do: the year is not normally associated with any major landmark in British military history.

Certainly the Moroccan crisis of that year has significance in the history of British foreign policy. It was an intense and rather prolonged crisis. The tension was serious enough at one point for key bridges, tunnels and railway junctions to be placed under armed military guard to prevent sabotage and to facilitate the despatch of an expeditionary force if that were to be decided upon. Undoubtedly the crisis, perhaps most remembered in the United Kingdom for Lloyd George’s Mansion House speech, helped to fix and reinforce foreign policy alignments. It confirmed what many army officers already believed: that Germany was a potential enemy of the United Kingdom with which the country might one day find itself at war.\(^11\) Had the crisis led to war, it would, of course, have meant major drama for the army. In the event, of course, it did not and it is difficult to discern any major change of direction in terms of military policy, organisation or doctrine because of it.

For the Royal Navy 1911 might be seen as the crisis point (or very nearly so) of its arms race with the Germans. It was a competition that, the following year, the Germans seem to have tacitly admitted to themselves that they could not (at least in the short run) win and concerning which they were showing a greater willingness to negotiate.\(^12\) But there is not really even that sort of drama as far as

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12 Stevenson, *Armaments and the Coming of War*, 171-5.
the army is concerned. Most, though not quite all, of what historians generally see as the crucial developments affecting the army between the end of the Victorian era and the outbreak of the First World War had already happened by 1911. The Committee of Imperial Defence, an organisation that seemed to promise much, even if it ultimately delivered little, was established in 1902. The Army Council and the position of Chief of the General Staff (even if there was not yet a General Staff to go with it) were set up in 1904. The Franco-British Entente was concluded the same year. The creation of the General Staff in the War Office and its gradual extension into the rest of the army followed the appointment of the Chief. The General Staff became, at least in theory, an Imperial General Staff in 1909. Staff talks with the French army started in 1905-06 as result of the first of the Moroccan crises of this period. Haldane had become Secretary of State for War in December 1905 and the army reforms associated with his name, including the creation of the Territorial Force and the organisation of an expeditionary force from the army at home, were well under way, but not actually completed, by 1911.

A meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence on 23 August 1911 has sometimes been seen as a crucial episode in the reorientation of British defence policy away from a primarily naval ‘blue water’ strategy and towards the acceptance of a Continental commitment for the army, but this interpretation has also been challenged and reasonably so. Staff talks about the deployment of a British expeditionary force to the Continent antedate that meeting by several years and the evidence that any definite decision was taken on 23 August 1911 seems slight. Certainly the British government in August 1914 did not behave as if it believed that any firm decisions on a British expeditionary force for the Continent had been taken in advance. There was, it seems, only one development of 1911 that may (with the benefit of hindsight) may be seen as really significant, if not for its

14 Gooch, The Plans of War, 47-52.
15 Ibid., 137-9; Spiers, Haldane, 116-34.
17 Spiers, Haldane, 47 and passim.
immediate impact then as a harbinger of things to come: the establishment, within
the Royal Engineers, of an Air Battalion. The army had (officially and unofficially)
been considering and experimenting with aircraft for some time. But if we read
history backwards a little (as everyone inevitably does) the formal incorporation
of an aviation unit into the army’s establishment in 1911 may be regarded as
another important step away from the Victorian era and towards dealing with
the warfare of the twentieth century as we now know it to have been.19 Instead of
regarding 1911’s relative lack of prominence (except in the respect just mentioned)
as a landmark in the army’s history as constraints, the present author considers
that the only sensible thing to do is to seize on it as an opportunity. It gives him,
perhaps, a bit of licence to freewheel, or, to put in rather more formal and military
language, to remain flexible and to select the ground on which to fight very much
at his own discretion. Two closely related issues in British defence policy and the
British army’s history in and around 1911 seem particularly interesting and worth
exploring. These are, first, whether it was right for senior British army officers, and
especially the War Office staffs, increasingly to think in terms of a Continental role
for the British army in which it would fight the German army alongside either the
Belgians or the French, and secondly whether the army’s leadership prepared it for
such a role, materially, intellectually and organisationally, in the most appropriate
manner, given certain largely unavoidable constraints. The writer’s concept of
operations in this chapter is to reconnoitre, probe and, on occasion, attack those
issues as seems appropriate. It is hoped that in so doing the chapter will more or less
conform to editors’ intent and help, in its own small way, to bring this academic
campaign to a victorious conclusion.

It was Michael Howard who did most to popularise amongst military historians
of twentieth century Britain, the expression ‘The Continental Commitment’. He
rightly emphasised how crucial to much of British military history in the first
half of the twentieth century was the question of whether or not the British army
should be ready to fight on the Continent in time of war and especially at the
start of such a war. He did so in a book of 1972, which, like the great majority
of those he has written, has amply stood the test of time.20 By the middle of
the century, when NATO was established, it might have seemed that this question

146-9.
20 Michael Howard, The Continental Commitment: The dilemma of British defence policy in the
had been settled. Britain would retain military forces on the Continent, as an integral part of a complex military alliance, indefinitely. The great majority of British army officers of the Cold War epoch, whether or not they were particularly enthusiastic about it, accepted a Continental commitment as an inevitable part of the politico-strategic landscape. But the 1945-1990 landscape was, of course, utterly different from that of the Edwardian period. How far was the readiness to fight on the Continent of Europe either desirable or necessary for Edwardian Britain? It seems more appropriate to use the expression ‘readiness’ rather than ‘commitment’ because, in reality, no British military staff could commit a British government to do anything without its consent and no British government actually committed itself to intervene with military forces on the Continent in any set of circumstances whatever before August 1914.

There was, of course, nothing new about Britain being involved in the international politics of Continental Europe and being prepared to despatch military forces there. Britain (and before 1707, England) had never been entirely isolationist and had put military forces onto the Continent in every previous century of the army’s existence as a standing force: in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. An unwillingness to see any single power achieving dominance on the Continent does seem to have been a constant operating factor in British policy since at least the seventeenth century, though there were always voices of dissent from the notion that a balance of power was necessary both amongst Radicals and Liberals and also amongst Imperialists: some of the latter believing that with its empire and its navy Britain could make itself strong enough to ignore Continental developments. In the Edwardian period, a British perception of the need to maintain a balance on the Continent had last been expressed in terms the despatch of troops to take part in a major European war in 1854-56; it is worth remembering that the Crimea, though a peninsula and a long way from Flanders or France, is, indeed, ‘a piece of the Continent, a part of the main’. That Britain had not found it necessary to send an expeditionary force to the Continent between 1856 and the end of the nineteenth century was primarily because no power had, during that period, looked like establishing hegemony in Europe or seriously threatening vital British interests there.

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22 Howard, *The Continental Commitment*, 34.
23 A well-written recent study is Orlando Figes, *Crimea: The Last Crusade* (London: Allen Lane, 2010).
The so-called ‘Splendid Isolation’ of the late nineteenth century can be seen as an expression of satisfaction with the Continental powers’ ability to keep each other nicely in check, so that no such power could present any prospect of an invasion of Britain or interfere with Britain’s profitable economic activity in the extra-European world. Increased degrees of German unification after the Austro-Prussian and Franco-German Wars spelled the end of any likelihood of French hegemony on the Continent, but did not (at least to most observers) seem to create an immediate danger of German hegemony. The spectacular German economic growth following the formation of the German Empire in 1871 made Teutonic domination somewhat more likely in the long run, but under Bismarck Germany was rarely seen as a major threat to British and was even contemplated as a potential ally. 24 Even in the 1880s, at the height of Splendid Isolation, the famous Stanhope Memorandum did not, however, rule out a Continental intervention by the British army. It merely declared such a role improbable in the foreseeable future. 25 It was not, of course, army officers who took the lead in bringing Britain out of ‘Splendid Isolation’ and there is no need here to review in any detail the factors that caused British governments to seek to end that isolation in the early twentieth century: the heightened sense of anxiety about relative economic decline, the unexpected difficulty, duration and expense of the South African War and the almost universal hostility of Continental Europe to Great Britain during the course of that war being the most obvious. 26 The increasingly difficult Anglo-German relationship was certainly not the only and probably not the most important factor in causing the British government to settle its outstanding disputes with France in 1904; the Entente was certainly not immediately seen as the prelude to a military alliance. It took a certain degree of diplomatic ineptitude on the part of Germany at the time of the first Moroccan crisis to bring about a situation in which wartime military co-operation between France and Britain was actually being discussed between the military staffs of the two powers. 27 By 1907, however, when seeking and achieving an Entente with Russia, Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary in the Liberal government, was not merely trying to avoid conflict with that country. He saw the agreement as part of an overall British effort to keep German power in check. 28 That is, of course, not to say that the British sought war with Germany

or regarded it as in any way inevitable, still less as desirable. Indeed from 1912 Grey seems to have had some hope of Anglo-German détente and of a working partnership to maintain European peace. In the climate of tension produced by the Kaiser’s sometimes bizarre behaviour on the international stage, the naval race and the successive Moroccan crises, it was surely not unreasonable for senior army officers as temperamentally and intellectually different as Johnny French, Jimmy Grierson, Douglas Haig, William Robertson and Henry Wilson to see Germany as a potential enemy that the British army might eventually have to fight. Certainly in the cases of Grierson and Haig (the two British corps commanders in August 1914), there seems to have been no deep-seated, underlying anti-German prejudice. Both officers appear initially to have been admirers of Germany and the German army. Grierson, of course, died in August 1914, but, even at the height of the First World War, Haig never gave way to the anti-German hysteria that became all too common on the British home front. Nor, to the present writer, does it seem necessary to explain these officers’ belief in the possibility of war with Germany as a matter of searching for an enemy to justify military expenditure and the equipment and training of the army on modern European lines. In the cases of Grierson and Robertson, two particularly significant General Staff officers, knowledge of the violently anti-British feeling often expressed in Germany was combined with interpretation of German behaviour on the international stage. Particularly in the aftermath of Russia’s crushing defeat by Japan, the notion that France, Britain’s one moderately reliable friend on the Continent, might require and request British help on land if faced with a German onslaught required no unnatural stretching of the British military imagination. This was the reasoning that led some ministers to authorise talks between the British and French General Staffs at the time of the first Moroccan crisis. In the period between the two world wars far too much was made of these talks, it being sometimes suggested that the General Staff had, by engaging in them, deprived the British Government of freedom of manoeuvre, committed it in advance to come to France’s support in the event of war and to offer that support in the form of a British army to fight

29 Strachan, ‘The British Army, its General Staff and the Continental Commitment 1904-14’, 82-5; Harris, Haig, 14, 15, 532.
30 Lowe and Dockrill, Mirage, I: 21-2. William Philpott affirms that ‘Although Anglo-French military contacts remained for the most part informal and unofficial, it is clear that the General Staff’s activity before 1914 had political sanction at the highest level. Grey and Haldane had initially sanctioned the talks’; William Philpott, ‘The General Staff and the Paradoxes of Continental War’, in French and Reid (eds), British General Staff: Reform and Innovation, c. 1890-1939, 101.
on the Continent alongside France’s. That was largely nonsense. No talks held as far back as 1906, unless they had resulted in a treaty (which they manifestly did not) could have committed a British government to anything at all in 1914. And while ministers authorised further staff conversations as the result of the Moroccan crisis of 1911, they did so only on the quite explicit understanding that such conversation could not commit it or any future British government to any particular course of action in a subsequent crisis.\textsuperscript{31} In the continuing and conspicuous absence of a treaty of alliance between the two powers, no contacts between General Staffs could legally (or in honour) bind a British government to a future course of action. Talks were a way of increasing understanding between the General Staffs of the two armies and facilitating arrangements to meet future contingencies but it was repeatedly emphasised on the British side that they could not bind a British government in advance. Henry Wilson’s exposition at a CID meeting on 23 August 1911 in favour of sending an expeditionary force to assist the French army in the event of a German attack on France resulting from the Moroccan crisis was certainly more convincing to most of his listeners than anything the Admiralty had to offer at that time. But it did not bind any future British government to commit any British troops to any particular part of the Continent in any particular set of circumstances whatever.\textsuperscript{32} There was absolutely no certainty, into the early days of August 1914, as to whether, in the event of German attack on France, the British Government would intervene at all, whether if it did intervene it would send an expeditionary force to the Continent and if it decided to send an expeditionary force at all how big it would be and whether it would go to Belgium directly (as some British officers preferred) or to France in the first instance.\textsuperscript{33} There is evidence is that the French ambassador actually understood this during the 1914 crisis, however irritating and frustrating it was from his viewpoint.\textsuperscript{34} There is, therefore, no question of the British Government’s having being dragged into war against its collective will by plans laid in advance by military staff. It is true that the intensely Francophile Henry Wilson would have liked to have tied the British government to a particular scheme for the support of France in the event of war and made efforts to do this which could be regarded as constitutionally improper. But there was on the part of Herbert Asquith, the Prime Minister of the day, an

\textsuperscript{31} Lowe and Dockrill, \textit{Mirage}, I: 22.

\textsuperscript{32} Strachan, ‘The British Army, its General Staff and the Continental Commitment 1904-14’, 77-8.

\textsuperscript{33} Harris, \textit{Haig}, 59-62.

\textsuperscript{34} Wilson, ‘Britain’, 190, 196.
absolute refusal to be compelled to conform to an army officer’s agenda in this way. It could indeed be argued that it was the British Government’s refusal to commit itself in advance to any particular course of action in any set of circumstances whatever (at least before the Germans actually invaded Belgium) that prevented Britain from deterring the German actions that led to a general European war and made Britain’s own involvement in such a war likely. If one regards the British involvement in the great European war of 1914 as an unnecessary, self-inflicted disaster (as some historians do), then one must regard responsibility for that disaster as belonging in a practical sense exactly where it belonged legally: with the government of the day.

In contemplating and preparing for the possibility of operations against the German army on the Continent of Europe senior British army officers were not actually exceeding their proper powers (though Wilson may to some degree have aspired to exceed them). The extent to which they were doing anything historically abnormal may also be queried. Throughout the nineteenth century the British army had always tended to measure itself against European opponents, believing that war against a first-class power was the ultimate test and that if it could cope with that it could cope with all other contingencies. For decades one of the standard texts at the Staff College was Hamley’s *Operations of War*, an essentially Jominian tract focusing primarily on the warfare between first-class powers, especially European powers, rather than on colonial small wars. Even though war against less sophisticated enemies on other Continents was the norm for much of the Victorian period, the army’s leaders had always taken the view that war against a first-class European power could not be ruled out and that its equipment and training should prepare it for that contingency, even if seemed unlikely at any given moment. Even during the period of so-called ‘Splendid Isolation’ and, indeed, down to 1907 and beyond, the army had thought in terms of having to fight a large-scale Russian attempt to invade India through Afghanistan. Russia was, of course, considered a first-class European power. By the time Britain concluded an Entente with Russia, relations

36 Niall Fergusson takes the view that the British entry into the war in August 1914 was unnecessary and disastrous, but blames the government not the General Staff: Niall Fergusson, ‘The Kaiser’s European Union’, in Niall Fergusson (ed.), *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (London: Picador, 1997), 228-80.
with Germany were very fraught. Part of Edward Grey’s motive for concluding an Entente with Russia was to help keep Germany in check and the British General Staff had, as we have noted, already been explicitly authorised to talk to its French opposite number about the co-ordination of war planning.

Thus when the senior British officers of the Edwardian period began seriously thinking in terms of fighting the German army as they were doing collectively from at least 1905 and individually a good deal earlier than that, they were not really breaking with tradition. Nor were they actually doing (leaving aside what Henry Wilson might have had the aspiration to do) anything to which a liberal politician could legitimately take exception. In the 1905-1911 period German-British tension was manifest and was openly discussed in the British press, even though not all of the press was anti-German. The government’s professional advisers in the Foreign Office thought Germany very aggressive in its policies and very hostile to the United Kingdom: a view largely shared by the Foreign Secretary.39 Thus it would, indeed, have been very odd if the General Staff in the War Office had not been thinking in these terms. Indeed General Staff officers might even have been considered derelict in their duties had they ignored the possibility of an Anglo-German war. Not to have made some arrangements by which an expeditionary force could be fairly rapidly mobilised and despatched to the assistance of France would have been to neglect to provide for a fairly obvious contingency and thus to be guilty of another dereliction of the very duties that the military staffs in the War Office existed to perform.

Was the government’s decision to despatch an expeditionary force to fight alongside the French army within days of the outbreak of war the right one? It was not in fact a step advocated by all of the government’s military advisers. Douglas Haig, commanding the Aldershot-based I Corps, the better-trained and more powerful of the two army corps available at the start of the war, had been one of the senior officers who had for a long time seen a German-British war as very much on the cards. Yet, though he later tried to deny this it is pretty clear that he advised the government against the commitment of an expeditionary force to the Continent in the opening weeks. He was apparently motivated both by fear that the expeditionary force was a rather fragile instrument that might not, in its existing state, stand the white heat of Continental warfare, and also by concern that with it gone to the Continent there would be no adequate basis for the build

up of the much larger army likely to be needed late in the fairly long war he correctly foresaw. Haig seems to have believed that the French could probably cope without direct British military support on land for the first few months. Sir John French, on the other hand, while wanting to despatch an expeditionary force fairly quickly, appears to have advocated sending it to Antwerp rather than to France.40 Other senior officers, most obviously Henry Wilson, realised that sending the expeditionary force to Antwerp would be very risky and that leaving France to fight entirely alone on land in the early stages of a war would be regarded by the French themselves as an intensely selfish act. Wilson's Francophilia came to be thought of as excessive by many officers. But his views on this matter of military aid to France in August 1914 seems to have been rather more representative of opinion amongst senior officers than those of French or Haig and largely carried the day. Wilson, however, was forced to accept the despatch of an expeditionary force a good deal smaller than he had intended and to a slightly different point of concentration.41 Once Britain had committed itself to war, following through with immediate military assistance to France was, it can be argued, logical. Even if the French army had managed to cope with the opening moves of the war without British help, and that seems by no means certain, the chances of forging an effective Franco-British military alliance after the mistrust engendered by such a beginning might have been seriously impaired. As we know with the benefit of hindsight, the outcome of the 1914 campaign was pretty much balanced on a knife-edge at a number of stages, and it easy to imagine a situation in which France either sustained decisive defeat or lost control of the Channel ports, without which getting a British expeditionary force to France and sustaining it there would have been far more difficult. Had France fallen or been compelled to make a separate peace with Germany, it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which the Germans would not also have been able also to defeat Russia in fairly short order and thus to bring the war in Continental Europe to a victorious conclusion.

This need not have had any catastrophic consequences for the United Kingdom or the British Empire in the short run. Indeed it is possible that Germany would have been prepared to conclude peace with England without making any particular demands, but the long-term consequences for Britain of German hegemony in Continental (and it is difficult to imagine the Germans concluding a peace that would not have entailed a high degree of hegemony) might well have been very

40 Lowe and Dockrill, Mirage, I: 19-20.
41 Harris, Haig, 59-62.
serious. Continental trade was very important to Britain. Germany competed with Britain in a great many areas of economic endeavour and, in contrast with Britain, no important body of opinion there had an ideological commitment to free trade. It seems entirely possible, therefore, that Britain would have found itself increasingly excluded from continental markets protected and controlled in Germany’s interests. By 1912 Germany had, as we have noted, begun to slacken her efforts in her naval race with Britain but this was because even the German economy could not provide simultaneous victories in a naval race with Great Britain and a land arms race with France and Russia. With France and Russia put firmly in their place by crushing defeats in 1914, Germany would have been free to pursue naval and overseas imperial ambitions. Though it is not impossible that Continental victory (and the Continental hegemony that would surely have followed) would have taken the edge of Germany’s naval and overseas imperial ambitions and caused the country to behave, at least for the time being, as a satiated power, it is just as likely that these things would merely have whetted the appetite of the Kaiser and others who shared his desire for Weltmacht.

Whether Britain could have won a naval arms race with a Germany greatly strengthened economically by a hegemonic position on the Continent and no longer distracted by land arms races with by France and Russia being a counter-factual question must remain open, but it seems rather doubtful to the present writer. It is certainly possible that a German bid for world, as opposed to mere European dominance, would have precipitated some sort of close Anglo-American understanding and combined Anglo-American resistance to German moves. On the other hand the Americans had no particular interest in the preservation of the British Empire or Britain’s dominant position in much of what we would today call the developing world. So with regard to the protection of British interests in terms of Continental trade and in the wider world it did seem to make sense to try to preserve a balance of power on the Continent: to keep Germany in check. Doing that meant propping up France and that in turn meant an increasingly vast military commitment to the Continent in the course of the war. Whether keeping out of the war and letting Germany win European hegemony relatively easily (with all the consequences that would have entailed) would have been any worse for Britain that the colossal damage to the economy caused by the war itself (leaving aside the vast suffering and loss of life involved) is another counter-factual question.
to which it is impossible to give any definite answer. Given that the military staffs in the War Office did indeed contemplate fighting the German army on the Continent of Europe (alongside the French or alongside the Belgians or perhaps both) as a possible mission for the British army, how well did they prepare the army for such a mission within constraints that were not within their power to remove? We must first consider what those constraints were. Though there was in fact a good deal of pro-‘national service’ sentiment on the General Staff,43 with a Liberal government in power most officers seem to have accepted that there was little chance of getting peacetime conscription. Similarly there was very little of a really major increase in the Army Estimates. Indeed Haldane gained the approval of Liberal MPs for the reforms he was undertaking mainly because he so effectively trimmed the estimates.44 The need to garrison a vast Empire: something that was bound to keep much of the British army occupied with activities other than preparation for a Continental war, was yet another constraint (if one chooses to look at it that way) from which no government whatever its political complexion was likely to relieve the army in the foreseeable future. The Empire was central to the experience, thought and feeling of the officers of that period and the present writer knows of none who would have wished to have its burdens removed. But the need to provide drafts to keep the army in the Empire up to strength meant that the army at home was always under strength and this made collective training (even at sub-unit level) rather difficult.

Finally the combination of financial stringency and jealously guarded property rights of Englishmen (placed on top of perpetual financial stringency and the manpower shortage of the home army) made the organisation of collective training and particularly large-scale manoeuvres very difficult indeed. Under Haldane the army carried more of this sort of activity than it had done in the Victorian era, but it remained seriously under-trained compared with the German army in the conduct of large-scale manoeuvre.45 It has even been argued that German conscripts had, in general, superior tactical training at unit level to that of British professionals and this may well be the case.46 Also of great importance is that much of the British Expeditionary Force despatched to the Continent in 1914 did not

44  Spiers, Haldane, 48-73.
actually consist of regular soldiers but rather of ‘regular reserves’: soldiers who had retired from the regular army in some cases years previously. Given these very serious constraints, it is possible to argue that the War Office staffs did as well as could reasonably be expected to prepare the army for the most severe test it was likely to face: war against a first-class European power, though this is not deny that there were serious weaknesses in the expeditionary force.

In terms of weaponry, the British infantry in 1914 lacked the hand and rifle grenades available to the German army, but it did have the shorter version of the Lee-Enfield rifle introduced in 1904. Initially there was what now seems like a curious degree of dissatisfaction with the short Lee-Enfield and there was, for a number of years, an intention to replace it with another weapon with a somewhat smaller bore. But with the introduction of the Mark III version of this rifle in 1907, which was designed to use the new, more powerful Mark VII version of the .303 round, the British Army actually had the best military rifle in Europe. Admittedly, it had a slightly lower muzzle velocity than the German Mauser, but at most ranges it was no less accurate and it had a much smoother action and thus a considerable higher rate of fire. Even more importantly (and in contrast with, for example, the Canadian Ross rifle) it was extraordinarily robust and relatively easy to maintain under active service conditions. Later, only slightly modified, versions of the weapon remained in service in the British army into the early 1960s.

In its other most important infantry weapon, the Vickers machine gun, the British army was equally fortunate. Uncertainty over whether to keep the Short Magazine Lee Enfield led to delays in ordering a new standard machine gun to replace the Maxim gun that the army had been using since the 1890s. It was, sensibly enough, considered important to use ammunition of the same type for rifle and machine gun and if the army were to adopt a rifle with a smaller bore it seemed sensible to have machine gun to match. But once it was generally realised that the Mark III Lee Enfield with Mark VII ammunition was a pretty good weapon, it was possible to go ahead with ordering the Vickers gun: a highly efficient improvement of the Maxim with the same .303 bore. These started to be issued in 1912. There were not enough of them to equip the whole BEF in 1914, however, and the army went to war with a mixture of Vickers and the older, heavier,

47 Ibid., 63.
clumsier Maxims. In the Vickers, however, the army had, however, a weapon that was at least the equal of its equivalents in other European armies and so rugged and reliable that it remained in service with the British army till the 1950s and in some parts of the world well beyond that.49

This is not the place to try to make detailed technical comparisons between the British artillery weapons of 1914 and those of the other European power, but the point has been well made elsewhere that the equipments available to the Royal Field and Royal Garrison Artillery at the outbreak of war included a very well considered, well-balanced mix of types, each of which was pretty well designed for its purpose. Most of these types were still in use and still doing sterling service when the war ended. The British never made the mistake of massive over-reliance on a single type of artillery piece that the French were tempted into by the admitted excellence of the Soixante-Quinze. British divisional artillery in 1914 included, 18-inch field guns, 4.5-inch field howitzers and the 60-pdr high velocity long gun for counter-battery and long-range harassing fire. A 9.2-inch siege howitzer was in the design stage. As is well known the British, in August 1914, left behind in the UK behind their 'siege train' of six-inch and 9.45-inch howitzers. But these weapons, in addition to being obsolescent, would have been incapable of keeping up with the high tempo of operations anticipated and, indeed, actually experienced in the opening weeks of the war. It is indeed, likely that if they had somehow managed to follow the army as far as Mons they would have been lost in the retreat.50

As far as British cavalry in 1914 is concerned, the majority had the short Lee Enfield rifle (as opposed to the ineffective carbines that many Continental cavalry carried) were fairly well trained in its use and, like the infantry, also had a couple of belt-fed medium machine guns per unit. Indeed, because lightness was a major consideration from the cavalry point of view the lighter Vickers guns were issued to them ahead of most of the infantry. Of course there was, during the Edwardian period, a new contender for the long-range reconnaissance function traditionally associated with cavalry. Though the British may have been slightly slow on the uptake compared to the French and the Germans with regard to military aviation this must be partly explained in terms of the army’s tiny size and very slender budget compared with the Continental great powers. The British were in fact using aircraft in some manoeuvres from 1910, they formed (as already noted) an

air battalion in the RE in 1911, a Royal Flying Corps in 1912 and by 1914 had quite a respectable air service in relation to the general size of their army.  

Just as important as equipment are doctrine and training. As far as training is concerned, the British army was making considerable strides in the late Edwardian period with the holding of fairly ambitious exercises in 1910, 1912 and 1913 even though it was still, inevitably a long way behind the Germans in this respect. With regard to doctrine the British General Staff had made a considerable effort to come to terms with the lessons of the South African and Russo-Japanese Wars. But, as is usually the case, the lessons were far from clear and unambiguous. From the South African War one could read the lesson that it was vital to keep up a large mounted arm and some people did read that lesson. The cavalry survived the Liberal government’s financial stringency remarkably well. A lesson many read from South Africa was that while mounted troops could be vitally important, the day of the *arme blanche* – of the cavalry charge with sword and lance – was over. Yet there were instances in South Africa of the successful use of cold steel and evidence that the Boers did not like it. Similarly there was a lot of evidence from the Russo-Japanese War that taking the offensive under modern conditions, and particularly mounting frontal attacks, was very expensive in terms of human life. Yet the Japanese had taken the offensive, had taken heavy casualties and with discipline and dedication had kept going and achieved strategically decisive results in fairly short order. What was one to make of that? Both the South African and the Russo-Japanese War, however, suggested that indirect fire was generally the way to go for field artillery and without being absolutely dogmatic about it British artillery doctrine accepted that.

In his highly influential book *The Killing Ground* the eminent Canadian historian of the First World War, Professor Tim Travers, castigates the British Army for gradually abandoning, during the period between the South African and the First World War the realistic view that in modern battles ‘the decision is by fire’ and moving back to the view that both fire and manoeuvre were important: final victory

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52 Badsey, *Doctrine and Reform in the British Cavalry*, 81-130.
normally being impossible without the willingness to manoeuvre offensively and
to mount attacks.\footnote{Travers, \textit{The Killing Ground}, 67-8.} But there is little in the history of warfare in general or of the
First World War in particular, to indicate that this latter view was wrong. Certainly
there were some officers, including Haig and his close associate Launcelot Kiggell,
who seemed to be excessively influenced by French military ideas of the day and
to place excessive confidence in the spirit of the bayonet. But it can scarcely be
said that the Field Service Regulations of 1909, for the production of which Haig
had an overall responsibility, sought to imbue the British army with the spirit of
\textit{attaque à l’outrance} as advocated by French theorists such as Colonel Grandmaison.
Indeed the main criticism of these regulations by well-informed commentators
such as the military correspondent of the \textit{The Times}, Charles à Court Repington,
was their studious vagueness: a vagueness so pronounced that the regulations gave
officers relatively little guidance as to practical action in most contingencies. Haig
said that he had refused to be too proscriptive because the British army could not
predict when, where or against whom it was likely to fight next.\footnote{Ibid.; Spiers, \textit{Reforming the Infantry}, 92-3; Harris, \textit{Haig}, 46-7.} This was not
altogether a convincing response. It was unreasonable to predict in 1909 that
the British army might fight its next major war alongside the French against the
Germans on the continent of Europe and Haig himself seems to have foreseen that.
It seems, however, unconvincing to try to explain the actual conduct of operations
in 1916 and later (as Travers tends to do) in terms of pre-war military thinking.
A lot of water had flowed under the bridge between 1909 and 1916. If Haig did
not always seem to grasp this, it was a problem of a certain personal inflexibility of
mind rather than an issue with pre-war doctrine \textit{per se}: many other senior British
officers did grasp it. Robertson, for example wrote that in 1916 that field service
regulations would have to be re-written when this war was over.\footnote{Robertson to Henry Rawlinson, 26 July 1916, Robertson Mss I/35/100, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives King’s College London, printed in David Woodward, \textit{The Military Correspondence of Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, Chief Imperial General Staff December 1915-February 1918} (London: Bodley Head, 1989), 72-3.}

If one seeks to know how pre-war doctrine influenced the British army in the
First World War, the 1914 fighting would seem to be the obvious place to look.
With regard to that campaign there seems to be little or no evidence of any obsessive
spirit of the bayonet or, of any crazy recklessness on the part of British commanders:
particularly not Sir Douglas Haig himself who was battle-shy to a fault, particularly
in the initial, mobile phase of 1914 fighting. There was no obvious tendency
on the part of the British cavalry to do reckless Light Brigade-at-Balaclava-style charges. Certainly modern scholarship has cast much doubt on the tendency of Edmonds and the British official history to attribute to the Expeditionary Force on 1914 a high level of excellence that the subsequent volunteers, Territorials and conscripts could not replicate. The 1914 BEF, much of which actually consisted of very rusty reservists, was of patchy quality and very slow moving much of the time. It suffered from serious problems of command and control under officers who just were not used to handling even forces as modest as those Britain was able to field. The BEF was indeed, as Haig had supposed, a fairly fragile instrument. Haig’s extreme hesitancy as a corps commander in the opening weeks of the war can be partly explained by this. Yet he was so hesitant and battle-shy with his own relatively strong I Corps as to place II Corps, in the 23-26 August period, in terrible danger and his continuing hesitancy made it difficult for the BEF to exploit opportunities during the counter-offensive on the Marne.58

Some of the strictures on the BEF by recent historians such as Nikolas Gardner and Terence Zuber have a good deal of validity.59 The ‘Old Contemptibles’ were not the super soldiers that Edmonds tried to make out. British command and control was weak and British generalship in 1914 was generally far from brilliant. Far from being the band of brothers that one might hope for in a small army senior British officers had rivalries, jealousies and even personal hatreds that greatly inhibited collective performance.60 Yet the BEF did hold together under extreme pressure and played a role at First Ypres that was arguably vital to keeping France in the war.61 Despite all the indecision until the very last minute the mobilisation (though not as perfect as is sometimes made out) was the slickest in British military history up to that time. The army had generally pretty good weaponry and a level of training that, while far from perfect, allowed it to survive the opening rounds. Given the constraints on the Edwardian army, the pre-war Secretaries of State, particularly Haldane, and the War Office staffs had not done such a bad job.

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58 Harris, Haig, 66-87.
61 Jeffery, Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, 131.
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