ISSN 1365-7887

P R O B L E M S

(formerly Problems Of Capitalism & Socialism;
Problems Of Communism)

New Series, Number 19-20

Lord Hankey:

How we planned the Great War

by

Pat Walsh

Printed and Published by *Problems Of Communism Committee*
33 Athol St, Belfast, BT12 4GX, UK

Lord Hankey:
How we planned the Great War

"Sales Civitatis, Suprema Lex"

(The Safety of the State is the Highest Law)
- Lord Hankey.

Lord Maurice Hankey gave unparalleled service to the State he served over more than three decades. He was much more than just an Imperial Senior Civil Servant. It would be no exaggeration to say that he kept the British State together over a generation.

'The Supreme Command' (1961) by Hankey, though largely ignored today, is the most complete inside description of Britain's Great War on Germany. It contains details of the planning for that war by the person who oversaw it, coordinated it and put it into operation from August 1914.

WHO WAS MAURICE HANKEY?

Hankey's career began in the Royal Navy and it went into the Admiralty's Intelligence Department. He became Naval Assistant Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1908, before being appointed the Secretary of it in 1912. Within this body he observed much of the planning that went into the War on Germany, supervising it and doing much of it himself.

As Hankey said in *'The Supreme Command'*:

> "There were few secrets with which I was not acquainted. There were few questions of war policy which did not at some stage and in some manner pass through my hands." (p.4)

When the War that Hankey helped plan was declared in August 1914, the *Committee of Imperial Defence*, having successfully performed its function, was suspended. It was replaced by the War Council, of which Hankey was appointed Secretary.

Hankey also became Secretary to the Dardanelles Committee (June–October 1915) and the War Committee (November 1915–November 1916). These bodies were *"in turn the supreme British authority for the direction of the war under Asquith's ministries"* (Stephen Roskill, *Hankey—Man of Secrets*, Vol. 1, p.17)

When Lloyd George replaced Asquith as Prime Minister he made Hankey Secretary to his War Cabinet and then to his Imperial War Cabinet (the one that incorporated the leaders of the White Colonies). Hankey played the key role in co-ordinating the efforts of the politicians and the military chiefs directing the War. His talent lay in absorbing information and opinions from a wide variety of people within the State, synthesizing it, and then acting as a conduit to the Prime Minister. He did this until the Imperial War Cabinet was dissolved in October 1919, when Britain felt its War was won.

Hankey was also Secretary to the Imperial Conferences, and served on the British Empire delegation at Versailles and the very important Washington Conference in 1921, which was something of a watershed in the history of the Empire.

However, it was the job Hankey rejected that was of such historical significance that it deserves noting.

In early 1919 Hankey was considering taking the position of Secretary General to the emerging League of Nations. He consulted important figures within the Imperial State to gauge whether this was going to be a good move and crucially what was what with regard to Britain's real attitude to the thing it was supporting.

Lord Esher (a very important figure in the hinterland between the Crown and Executive) replied that *"the future of the League was entirely nebulous"* and, if Hankey joined it, he would be *"a wasted force for England"* (Roskill, vol. 2, p.65). Lord Curzon, the Foreign Secretary, wrote to Hankey also advising him to reject the League: *"I am very doubtful whether the League of Nations is going to be a great and potent and world-pacifying instrument that its creators' desire."*

Curzon said that, although in becoming Secretary General Hankey would "more likely to make a success of it than any living man", he would just become an *"international official"*. Instead, Curzon and Esher urged Hankey to remain in England where the real power would remain (*The Supreme Command*, p.66). In April 1919 Hankey rejected the offer of the position.

Hankey's rejection of the Secretary General's position signalled Britain's rejection of the League—or rather its desire to see the League negated as something of independ

ent substance with regard to international law and justice in the world. From then on Britain merely used the League as its instrument to justify the shirking of its responsibility to the world it had gained domination of through its Great War. And, when it decided to act, it ignored the League, as something of no consequence, getting on with things as it always had.

So, after the War, Hankey continued his career as Cabinet Secretary to the Cabinets of Lloyd George, Bonar Law, Baldwin, Ramsay McDonald, and Neville Chamberlain, and resumed his Secretaryship of the revived Committee of Imperial Defence between the Wars. During this time he established the modern Cabinet Office system on which modern British Government operates.

Hankey was a part of Chamberlain's War Cabinet in 1939 but was sacked by Churchill in March 1942. He considered Churchill too volatile for the effective running of the War and had fundamental disagreements with his war policy. Hankey was opposed to the employment of large formations of four-engined aircraft for the provocative bombing of German cities and argued that they should have been used instead to protect the Atlantic convoys from U-Boats. He also opposed the demand for unconditional surrender of Germany that Churchill adopted, which Hankey believed was only lengthening the War by making it impossible for the Germans to concede without the Soviet Union, which was doing the bulk of the fighting, absorbing half of Europe.

Another important point of difference between Hankey and Churchill was on the issue of war crimes. In a book published in 1950, *'Politics Trials and Errors'*, Hankey argued against the Nuremberg Trials and for a general amnesty for those accused of war crimes. In this book Hankey revealed that he had opposed Lloyd George's misguided attempt to *'Hang the Kaiser'* in 1919 and was explicit that Germany did not start the War of 1914 and therefore could not be justly held solely responsible for it or what happened in it.

War crimes trials were included in the manifestos of all three British parties for the General Election after the 1914 War. However, the Kaiser had already been pushed into Holland by his Generals, and the Netherlands Government made it clear that they took the principle of asylum very seriously and would not hand him over to the Allies. The Peace Conference sent a demand for his surrender but the Dutch replied that they had not remained neutral in the War to become mere accessories to the Allied Powers after it. If an international jurisdiction was established to try war crimes they would be part of it but would not be implicated in a partial and temporary tool of Allied policy dressed up as law and justice.

Hankey fully supported this position, opposing war crimes trials on a range of arguments including the proving of actual responsibility, the one-sided nature of the justice, the lack of an international court and the destabilising effects that such show trials would produce in the world.

Germany was then, under Allied pressure, encouraged to do the job itself. The Weimar Government conducted some Trials in Leipzig, in a half-hearted way during 1921—something which could only have been damaging to the Weimar State at its foundation.

This fiasco, argued Hankey, should have deterred the Allies in repeating a similar exercise after World War 2. But it didn't.

WAR STORIES

Lord Hankey's *'The Supreme Command'* was preceded by *'Government Control in War'* (1945), a collection of the Lees Knowles series of lectures given by Hankey in Trinity College, Cambridge at the end of the second war on Germany. In these lectures Hankey gave a taste of what he was going to say in far greater detail a decade and a half later.

Lord Hankey's account of the preparations Britain made for its Great War was published in 1961 in 2 volumes and is called *'The Supreme Command'*. Hankey revealed in its Introduction: *"For a long time I hesitated to publish this story…"* (p.5),

He had written to Lloyd George back in 1930 to obtain his consent for some of the inside story of the War to be told. Lloyd George apparently agreed but the book then took another three decades to appear and then only in truncated form.

Hankey's inside story of Britain's Great War on Germany is, however, backed up by another long suppressed publication.

This is Archibald Colquhoun Bell's *'A History of the Blockade of Germany'* produced by the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence—and suppressed by British Governments for nearly half a century.

The Official History of the Blockade was completed in 1921, and produced and printed in 1937. But the copy in the British Library has a stamp on it declaring it for *"official purposes only"*. A limited number of copies were produced for the Ministries of State in Whitehall. However, it was not released for general circulation until issued by Her Majesty's Stationery Office in 1961 (although the Nazis, having obtained a copy, published a shortened German version in 1943).

A.C. Bell's and Hankey's revelations, therefore, appeared in the public domain at virtually the same time.

Bell's is one of the most interesting records of the Great War, being strongly factual and minimally propagandist. In over 1000 pages it details the intricate planning of the Admiralty and Committee of Imperial Defence for economic warfare on Germany, going back a decade before the Great War, and the measures that were taken in execution of the Royal Navy's Blockade from 1914-19. It is an insider talking to other insiders with no need to dress the War up in superfluous moral humbug.

It can only be presumed that, while it was considered of vital importance to produce a detailed analysis of the naval

part of the Great War for future reference, it was not politic to draw the public interest to it and what it had done, particularly when it was to be attempted to be done to Germany again. To this day the Blockade on Europe only merits a passing mention in histories of the Great War and there are very few who know how many died (Bell's estimate is around a million) as a result of it.

Both Hankey's and Bell's are British Imperial accounts of the Great War. They are not hostile to Britain in any way and do not question the reasons for Britain fighting it. They take it that it was natural Britain fought the War because that is what Britain does, when it is deemed necessary—fight wars to maintain its position in the world. And, when it is not fighting wars, it should be preparing for them.

These accounts were written by those who planned the War. And the War started to the letter, via the War Book of Hankey, as it was planned—before going off course and going out of control. Hankey notes the reason for that: *"We over-rated the efficiency of our potential Allies, and under-rated that of Germany"* (Government Control in War, p.30).

The Great War was planned by Hankey and his associates within the British State with *"an ordered completeness in detail that has no parallel in our history"*, according to the official historian of the Royal Navy, Sir Julian Corbett (*Official History. Naval Operations*, Vol. 1, p.18) Plenty of evidence is provided in support of that statement by Hankey in 'The Supreme Command'. The great amounts of detailed information collected and analysed in order to secure an advantage in war would have to be handled by powerful computers these days.

The official version is that England launched its Naval Blockade in reprisal for German actions and ratcheted it up in response to German submarine activity. But both Hankey's and Bell's official accounts show that to be a lie.

Very little mention of the Blockade is made in histories of the Great War. The official series of British Documents issued to justify British participation make no mention of the extensive Blockade preparation. Asquith, Lloyd George and Churchill all kept silent about the plans made in their volumes of memoirs, even though Asquith, at least, had cause to make a case, in defence of his own Government, that he had made good preparations for the War.

It was, however, difficult to reconcile the fact that Britain had made such extensive plans for something and put such time and effort in it when it was only employed as a reprisal.

Hankey and Bell seem to be of little interest to historians and the present centenary commemorators, even though they were the men who knew most about it and told it as it actually was, in factual accounts of great detail. One would think such resources would be most valuable for the understanding of the War. Particularly, that is, since it has lately been reported that the British Government has adopted a policy of concealment regarding its official records, so beloved of the historians, with 1.2 million documents having not been transferred to the official Public Records at Kew (Guardian 18.10.13).

A survey of the histories that have entered the commercial market for the centenary commemorations shows that Lord Hankey and A.C. Bell have been forgotten. The most talked about recent publication, Christopher Clark's *'The Sleepwalkers—How Europe Went to War in 1914'*, for all its reputed balance and thoroughness, does not even mention Hankey in its index. And the story is the same right across the range of publications in the English language—even amongst the small minority that lay some of the responsibility for the War at Britain.

It can be guessed at why Hankey is ignored. The reason seems to be that he tells the simple truth of it. And, in doing so, he concentrates his focus on where the whole thing originated—but where one is not supposed to look these days in trying to understand it. Because, after reading *The Supreme Command*, there can be no doubt that the Great War was one that was made in England and one which, if it had not been for the participation of Britain, would never have been the World War that it was.

Ireland, which is now largely an extension of Britain in its history writing and media productions, has shown little interest in *this* forgotten war.

Those who wish to restore the *"national memory"* about the Great War do not wish, of course, to restore the *"national memory"* about events within it such as the starvation Blockade of Germany that killed a million civilians, mostly women and children; or enlighten us on why war was made on the Ottoman Empire; or tell us about the British violation of Greek neutrality that created the Greek tragedy in Asia Minor; or about how the Armenians were instigated into insurrection and destruction; or about how the Arabs were cheated and how the creation of Iraq, Palestine and the modern Middle East, came about.

The national broadcaster, RTE, has shown itself to be not interested in discussing the actual Great War. It is only interested in constructing a false narrative to illicit guilt and condemnation of previous generations who had the temerity to do something meaningful in their small part of the world instead of killing others in parts of it that were none of their business.

That sort of real history has now gone out of fashion in academia and the better parts of Dublin, in its desire to be better than and different from the mass of Irish society—a desire that is taking it back toward the embrace of England.

It is not interested in the real Great War but only in the *simulacra* in which this discontent social strata now

conducts its superficial existence, disconnected from its actual history and experience.

So they are not interested in Maurice Hankey.

THE SUPREME COMMAND

In *'The Supreme Command'* Hankey was candid about how Britain prepared for the War it knew for a decade it was going to fight against Germany. Hankey's account demonstrates that never in its history had Britain prepared for a war so thoroughly. Never had it committed such amounts of study, resources, time, effort and energy to something that was in the future and might possibly never happen. Was it really conceivable that all that effort should be wasted on mere contingencies?

I presume Hankey was candid about things for a number of reasons. First of all he was a Navy man. After the Great War had been bungled and had resulted in the mass slaughter of the war of attrition, there were feelings expressed in England that the Navy had not done enough. It had one great battle with the German fleet at Jutland which had ended in a draw. And the blockade had been slow in its effectiveness and its effects were best not spoken about in relation to the killing of hundreds of thousands of civilians. The Navy men, who had always opposed continental commitment by the Army, were of the opinion that the high number of casualties suffered was due to the Government not listening to them in their pre-War warnings about where continental commitments might lead.

Hankey would have been determined to show the thoroughness of the preparations and planning that went into Britain's Great War on Germany, particularly from the naval point of view, and to place this on the historical record.

Perhaps the 1960s were a decade when it was acceptable to be forthright about such things, in the days before Mrs. Thatcher and Mr. Blair restored the Churchillian mythology for war-making purposes. Both Hankey's and Bell's accounts appeared in that little interlude when Britain threatened to settle down as a normal European state.

One noticeable aspect of Hankey's account is the absence of a moral dimension to the War. It is clear that Hankey and those who made contingencies for it had little time for *"the war for civilisation"*, *"the war for democracy and small nations"* which followed their preparations and which they metamorphosed into. They knew that the War originated as a Balance of Power War waged against a successful commercial competitor to maintain Britain's primacy in the world in the grand tradition of British Wars. And they knew it because they had planned it as such within such understandings of the matter.

For Hankey the moral aspect of the War, imported at its declaration to give camouflage to the Liberal Government to enable it to take the bulk of its party with it, was both a hindrance and complication to its waging and to its settlement. Hankey advocated the form of warfare he planned because of its limited liability on Britain's part. It had a narrow purpose and a distinct focus that enabled rational calculation about it to be made.

But the Liberal War made it an unlimited liability on England's part, confusing minds as to its actual purpose and inserting within it a lack of control that Hankey would have detested.

Hankey refers to what he calls *'The Traditional Peace Policy'* of Britain in his *'Government Control in War'* lectures. He says:

> "It cannot be emphasized too strongly… that the Liberal Government of the day was following the traditional policy of peace… The result was that all our policy of war preparation was of a defensive character and essentially unprovocative. Compulsory military service was considered as likely to precipitate the very catastrophe that we were striving by might and main to avert by our peace policy. That policy also accounted for the handicap to the free exercise of sea power, which was accepted in the Declaration of London and other international treaties and bore heavily on us in the early part of the war" (*The Supreme Command*, p.30).

This is one of the few passages in Hankey in which he is being disingenuous. It was quite true that England had developed a *"traditional policy of peace"* toward the Continent since the triumph over France in 1815. Why not? Britain had mastery of the world and its objective was to defend that *status quo*, expand its trade and influence, and make money within that situation.

Within the *"century of peace"*, wars waged by others temporarily inconvenienced and obstructed the system of British global trade. Other Powers were not, of course, capable of the world wars that England was, like the Seven Years War (1756-63)—the actual first World War.

Wars waged by Britain itself in this period were chosen carefully and waged in a controlled fashion, largely by the Navy or by small Imperial forces against backward peoples. And so Britain, in its *"century of peace"* only fought wars for the purposes of Imperial and colonial expansion and for economic reasons in expanding the Free Market.

But the problem that Britain faced in the first decade of the new century—the problem that began to embed itself in its collective mind—was of a new competitor whom it thought might upset this cosy situation and who had to be dealt with before the time was too late in dealing with it.

Hankey would have known that instituting Compulsory Military Service was not prevented by any fear of *upsetting the peace* in Europe. It was because the governing Liberal Party would not have it, for reasons of Liberal ideology and cost in treasure. And there was an intimate connection between this and the popularity and strength of the British Navy, which was the greatest military force in the world and the Senior Service in England.

And the negotiating of the *Declaration of London* (which, Hankey neglects to mention was never signed into law by Parliament) was much to do with protecting the Liberal Free Market on the seas, that supplied Britain with its essential provisions, against the need to unshackle the Royal Navy from legal impediment to its activities in the coming war.

That was the dilemma that faced those negotiating the Declaration of London after a century of peace and successful exploitation of the global system which the Royal Navy helped create and policed. But that is something we will return to later.

Hankey quotes Hobbes' *Leviathan*:

> "That every man, ought to endeavour Peace, as farre as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of Warre" (Government Control in War, p.31).

Hankey describes the preparations he organised for war on Germany as *"defence preparations"*. But it is nowhere suggested that Germany had any intention of (or was there ever the slightest chance of it having any success in) attacking Britain, if it had even desired to do so. That was something Hankey was keen to dispel from the popular imagination. And we have the Committee of Imperial Defence's own Inquiry, conducted under Hankey's watch, as evidence of that.

In a concluding passage to his lectures on *'Government Control in War'*, Hankey demonstrates how the maintenance of peace and the planning of war were really a seamless thing in Imperial Britain:

> "… within a narrow interpretation of a defensive policy our war preparations were successful. No invasion took place. British territory all over the world remained substantially intact. Sea communications were maintained… And under this secure shield of sea-power we were able to organise the vast resources by which, in co-operation with our Allies, we achieved victory. But without a doubt we took risks." (p.31)

There was very little difference between war and defence in the way the Imperial State looked at things. Defence involved war if it meant defending Britain's dominant position in the world. And war was the primary form of defence in maintaining global supremacy. That was a natural duty for Hankey to perform, along with those around him. And perform it they did.

If any other country emerged on the horizon that it was thought might threaten Britain's primacy—even potentially in the future—it was viewed as an aggressor both to England and the world (since really England was the world in the Imperial imagination and the world was inconceivable without Britannia ruling the waves). So making war on that threat, even though it might simply be an inevitable development of commercial rivalry within the world Britain had created, was merely a form of defence of the *status quo*. And so, preparations for war were simply the *"defence preparations"* of the Empire, on behalf of the world.

Admiral Fisher and Hankey

In the Winter of 1906-7 Admiral Fisher appointed Maurice Hankey as Secretary to a Committee he established to work out a naval strategy for a war on Germany. Fisher did not generally like the idea of setting plans down in writing. He preferred to keep them in his own head—a thing that made him indispensable to the State. But now he entrusted Hankey to do the thing he had always thought better of in the past.

Hankey had a good relationship with Fisher. He had won Admiral Fisher's essay competition on Naval improvement and it was this that secured him a place in the Naval Intelligence Department that led him to his appointment to the staff of the Committee of Imperial Defence. He initially served under Prince Louis of Battenberg, an Austrian related to the Royal Family, who later became First Sea Lord, and changed his name to Mountbatten during the Great War, because of the Anti-German fever that had been worked up in the masses to justify war in the democratic era.)

Hankey himself gives the credit to Admiral Fisher for being a man ahead of his contemporaries in planning for a war in Germany.

England's governing class, saturated in the Classical World as a result of the character of the education provided by its Public Schools, began, in the 19th Century, to conceive itself as the new Rome. But Rome had ultimately fallen and perhaps Britain faced the same fate. So the problem came to mind about how to avert this by preventative action. This process is evident in the vast volume of writing that occurs across the Imperial publications from around 1871 to 1914. 1871 is a significant year because it marks the emergence of Germany as a state.

Germany began to be singled out as the Carthage to Britain's Rome largely for reasons of commercial rivalry. German goods were outselling British goods in the world's markets and it was capturing a greater and greater share of world commerce. Its goods had a competitive edge over British products both in price and quality and it was felt that Britain ultimately could not compete in its own Free Market with the Germans. In some publications it was said that the Germans were ungrateful upstarts who should know their place in the thing that England created for the benefit of all. But being Anglo-Saxons, and therefore alike to England in character, they surely and inevitably could not. They would aspire to be top-dog and that was just not on.

The Royal Navy was the creator of the world-market and its arbiter in the sense that, in having the command of the seas, it had the ultimate say in the market it maintained. Hankey understood from the beginning that any war with Germany would be built *"round our sea-power; it is only the instruments of that power that vary"* ((The Supreme Command, pp. 9-10).

Hankey makes it clear that the preparations for the War began even before the establishment of the Committee of Imperial Defence, with Admiral Fisher and the Navy and his *"great reorganisation, amounting to a renaissance of the fleet…"* (p.11)

Fisher decided when he was Second Sea Lord, in 1903, that, given his understanding of the way Germany was going and the nature and history of the British State there would be a war. From the following year he instituted his policy of preparing the Royal Navy for it when he became Naval Commander in Chief at Portsmouth and then First Sea Lord (in October 1904).

Hankey says this about Fisher in *The Supreme Command*:

> "Fisher, that far-seeing administrator, reorganised the fleet and the whole chain of naval bases and coaling stations on which the Navy and the Mercantile Marine depend for their mobility in time of war. This reorganization, bitterly criticized at the time, was necessitated by the reorientation of our foreign policy resulting from the Entente with France and Russia and the rise of the German menace, the full significance of which Fisher was among the first to discern" (p.21).

Fisher was a self-made man. He completely over-shadowed, through his great charisma, the Ministers who were in theory his superiors. No Admiral approached his power and influence after him. He later left his position but was reappointed Admiral when War came.

Fisher wanted to destroy the German fleet if that was the threat to the British peace and, if that was unacceptable, he wanted unambiguous signals sent to Germany to prevent war.

From 1904 to 1907 there was a revolution in British Foreign policy in which England made a strategic readjustment to direct its Balance of Power strategy away from its former enemies, France and Russia, toward a new enemy, Germany.

Fisher began his naval re-orientation against Germany around the time of the *Entente Cordiale* in 1904 but he would have been aware that the next stage of the revolution in British Foreign Policy involved an agreement with Russia. This and many of the details of it had been signalled in Leopold Maxse's *National Review* during 1901-2, in a series of articles supervised by Edward Grey and his future Foreign Office staff.

In response to the increase of its commerce and its joining the world market, as a result of which it became necessary to import food to supply its industrial workforce, Germany began to construct a navy. It was a much smaller navy than Britain's but England saw this as a potential long-term threat to its command of the seas.

There seems to be an acceptance these days in Ireland that Germany was mistaken to build a navy to protect its sea-borne commerce and food supply, and this belief is held by the same people who consider that it was quite natural for Britannia to have done the same and attained the ruling of the waves. That kind of presumption can only be the result of a collapse into the moral ambit of Britain: what England does in the world is considered natural and unquestionable and what the foreigner does is always malevolent.

Admiral Fisher did not see it like that. He saw that it was natural and inevitable that Germany should build a fleet to protect her food supply and commerce and that it was natural and inevitable that England should destroy it before it could do so.

In response to Germany's building of a navy Admiral Fisher, threatened to *"Copenhagen"* the German naval development—i.e. destroy it in port before a formal declaration of war was made (as Admiral Nelson did to the Danish fleet a century before). He communicated this thought to the King and it was widely reported across Europe. And Fisher did not give a fig, believing himself to be speaking in the spirit of Nelson and firmly in the tradition of the Royal Navy.

But Fisher also believed that it was a good thing to warn the Germans of their foolishness, so that they might desist, or at least if they persisted, as inevitably they would they would know the rules of the game and be it on themselves if they broke them. And he could see no reason in encouraging them otherwise.

During the decade up to 1905, when Fisher took over as First Sea Lord, Britain had doubled its spending on naval construction until it reached a quarter of all state spending and represented three times what Germany was spending.

Fisher was able to accomplish his reorganisation because he actually saved the Government money through his reorganisation. The re-orientation from treating France as the Balance of Power enemy to treating Germany as it saved the Admiralty money because, despite what was being said by politicians and press in England, Germany was less of a threat to the Royal Navy command of the seas than France—the traditional focus of its animosity. As Hankey explains:

> "France had ports on the Atlantic, which could not be continuously masked by our fleets, as well as naval bases all over the world. Such was not the case with Germany. The German coasts in time of war would be hemmed in by Britain, stretching like a giant mole across the North Sea with a sufficiently powerful fleet to watch both exits. With few good naval bases abroad Germany was far less formidable in the outer seas than France had been with her long coastline and numerous ports on the Atlantic and Mediterranean, and her widespread colonial empire with a system of bases and coaling stations inferior only to our own. Moreover, we should probably have the assistance of the French Fleet and coaling stations if ever we went to war with Germany. All this… facilitated a saving in personnel" (p.35).

This estimation of Germany's weakness is confirmed in relation to the Hague Conference. The Hague Conference of 1907 was empowered to alter and enlarge the Law of nations, and the most important of the prospective alterations in the Law was a proposal, that all private property should be immune from maritime capture.

Prior to the second Hague Conference the British Admiralty gave assurances to the Government that German commerce could be driven from the sea, and that the German fleet would not seriously interrupt the movement of British commercial cargoes:

> "In a war with Great Britain, the numerical inferiority of Germany at sea, and her disadvantageous geographical position, render it extremely improbable that she could wage effective war upon British commerce. The British Islands lie like a breakwater, 600 miles long, athwart the German trade stream, and nothing should elude our vigilance when once war on German trade is established" (A.C. Bell, *A History of the Blockade on Germany*, p.10).

Fisher revealed after the War in a newspaper how he had begun organizing the Navy for war without reference to the British democracy which, he felt, could not be trusted to do such a thing itself:

> "Admiral Mahan… suddenly discovered that 88% of the guns of the British Navy were trained on Germany. Does anyone in his senses believe that the weak-kneed people and opportunists who, as a rule, have governed the British nation without the courage of a louse or the backbone of a slug, had they known the plan, would have permitted its execution? To train 88% of the guns of the Royal Navy on Germany and make the North Sea into its regular cruising ground? 'Your battle ground should be your drill ground', said Nelson" (Lord Fisher, *Northern Advocate*, 27.11.19).

Fisher called in the outlying parts of his Navy and concentrated the vast bulk of the Royal Navy's resources at Germany and made the North Sea its main drilling ground in preparation for war. Hankey comments:

> "This concentration was not effected in a day, and the fleet passed through many changes of name and form, before it emerged as the Grand Fleet which fought the war in 1914. But it was in 1904 that this great scheme really took its birth" (*The Supreme Command*, p.27).

Fisher's reorganisation of the Navy was maturing by the end of 1906. The outlying naval squadrons had been recalled from other parts of the Empire and the fleet was by that time concentrating in the positions to wage war on Germany. Naval bases had been rearmed and overhauled; dreadnoughts had been commissioned; gunnery had been improved and new training instituted; new battle-cruisers were commissioned; submarine mining was in hand; a War College was established at Portsmouth and the Admiralty had begun to produce detailed plans for the war on Germany.

Developing the Strategy

From 1901, during the Boer War, a Trade Division of the Naval Intelligence Department had been established to collect data on British shipping and cargoes to plan for defence of these in time of war. But from August 1906 when the Trade Division was taken over by Captain Henry Campbell it began to painstakingly collect statistics and draw up graphs on increasing German market penetration.

Captain Campbell decided that German commercial expansion, whilst being a cause for concern, also meant that Germany presented itself as a bigger target for British sea power. Campbell produced diagrams on German dependence on imports of raw materials and foods over a two year period to calculate the vulnerability of it to Blockade.

The growing German working class was a specific target of the calculations being made. This came from the British realisation that the unrest of its own working class could make England itself vulnerable on the food supply.

From 1906 to 1908 Captain Campbell worked on this thought. In July 1908 Campbell submitted a report that suggested a British Blockade would—

> "reduce the German workman to a state which he feels to be intolerable; want of employment, high costs of living are the first steps towards financial embarrassment, once the latter is achieved it is believed that no nation can continue to struggle for long." (ADM 137/2872)

Hankey's predecessor as Secretary to the Committee Imperial Defence was Rear Admiral Sir Charles Otley. He had replaced Sir George Clarke (Lord Sydenham) in 1907 and served until 1912, when he handed over to Hankey.

Writing to the First Lord of the Admiralty, Reginald McKenna, in December 1908, Sir Charles Otley, assured him that the policy of blockading Germany had been—

> "constantly under investigation during the whole 3 years I was D.N.I. [Director of Naval Intelligence], and Admiral Slade tells me he has given particular attention to it since he succeeded me. Throughout the whole period that I was D.N.I. the Admiralty claimed that the geographical position of this country and her preponderant sea power combines to give us a certain and simple means of strangling Germany at sea. They held that (in a protracted war) the mills of our sea power (though they would grind the German industrial population slowly perhaps) would grind them 'exceedingly small'—grass would sooner or later grow in the streets of Hamburg and widespread death and ruin would be inflicted" (A.J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, p. 379).

After the Great War of 1815 the British Parliament had passed the Corn Laws as a barrier to foreign imports of grain. In wartime the masses had to be fed by the domestic supply and many of the aristocratic Parliament were big landowners. However, the Royal Navy's dominance of the seas now meant that the large commerce captured by it could be defended by the Navy very cheaply and cheap grain could be got from abroad to feed the proletarianised workers of England. The 1832 Reform brought the new industrial bourgeoisie to power and influence and the Corn Laws were repealed.

After the Corn Laws had been repealed in the 1840s Britain began to establish a global system of free trade to supply the industrial masses of British capitalism with cheap food. It made the country dependent on foreign food to supply its masses and therefore on the maintenance of the supply of food, and therefore on the Royal Navy. And this, in time, forced the other industrializing powers to follow the British example.

Major Stewart Murray had raised an agitation around

the vulnerability of the British food supply in a number of pamphlets around 1900. This culminated in a great campaign in 1903 involving MPs, Lords, Admirals and Senior Army Officers leading to Balfour conceding a Royal Commission on the subject.

Major Murray was a Social Imperialist who believed that the working class could only be kept happy by social reform brought about by Imperialist expansion and Colonialism. Murray set out to convince the Royal Commission on Food Supply of the social consequences brought about by a short-fall in the food supply to the masses. However, the Commission found that there was little to worry about. The Royal Navy was more than capable of protecting the food supply against all-comers.

However, the other question that emerged was: could the navies of England's competitors do the same when their working classes expanded through the same process of industrialisation? It was therefore seen that the working class could be Germany's weak link.

The thing required was an overall strategic plan to exploit this perceived weakness of the commercial competitor. Admiral Fisher formed another committee to construct this. The committee got down to work under Hankey, beneath Fisher's inspection, in the new Naval War College in December 1906. Those involved included Captain G.A. Ballard and Captain Slade. Hankey revived his knowledge of German to read original sources about the country and understand what made it tick—and what it would require to make the ticking stop.

A 60 page plan was drawn up in 5 or 6 months of intensive effort. Hankey recalls:

> "We were greatly impressed as a result of our studies with the importance of the susceptibility of Germany to economic pressure, though we could not judge whether it would be possible to squeeze her into submission, or how long it would take, particularly in view of the assistance she could obtain from her continental neighbours… The strategy which we recommended… for adoption on the outbreak of war closely resembled the plan actually adopted by the Admiralty in 1914…. To me this proved an invaluable experience. There was hardly a problem that arose in connection with the naval side of the war… which we had not probed and investigated on this Committee" (*The Supreme Command*, p.40).

It should be noted that this was a deliberate innovation in British Naval policy. In the past Britain's great rivals had been continental powers who could not have equalled the Royal Navy at sea, unless their fleets combined. The preoccupation of the Royal Navy was, therefore, usually, to prevent a union of the fleets of France and Spain, or to break up any combination that might be thought dangerous to England's command of the sea. The British Navy this time was directed toward destroying a sole enemy and taking away its commerce and markets.

The Report contained a historical essay called *'Some Principles of Naval Warfare'* written by Julian Corbett, the writer on naval affairs. Then there is a paper called *'War Plans—General Remarks on War with Germany—a Preamble for Reflection and Criticism'* which was a revised version of an essay written by Captain Slade in 1906 which was called *'War on Germany'*. This essay was couched in Social-Darwinist terms, seeing Germany's commercial expansion as having *"followed a natural law"* that *"was inevitable"* and could not be stopped even if that were desired. Captain Slade suggested that Germany's expansion—

> "must go on until it meets a force stronger than itself, or until the policy directing the state ceases to be of a sufficiently virile nature to stimulate growth and encourage prosperity" (Peter Kemp, *The Fisher Papers*, Vol. 2).

A third part of the Report contained plans for a close naval blockade of the North Sea and Baltic ports of Germany and a summary of some war games conducted by the Navy.

In Hankey's *'Notes on Attached War Plans'* at the end of the Report Slade's view is emphasised:

> "That the continued development of the power and resources of the German empire will render further expansion inevitable, that subsequently the balance of power will be upset and Germany will become predominant on the Continent unless we are prepared to check her progress."

A reading of the Report reveals that what concerned Hankey was the *"master problem"* of whether Germany could hold out against a close British Naval Blockade that would ultimately enter the Baltic to press down on Germany. If it could, then large land armies would also be required to destroy the German progress.

Hankey found that the question be posed was difficult to answer through historical analysis because there was no precedent of a Blockade being mounted against the *"modern industrial situation"* which Germany represented. So Hankey advised that this question needed thorough investigation not just by the usual naval officers and the Trade Division of Naval Intelligence but also by *"the highest financial and commercial experts"* present in England and which should be held *"in secret council"* ('Notes', ADM 116/1043D).

The Admiralty War Plans file from 1907 contains another paper by Hankey describing the logic of British Blockade of Germany in 7 concise points:

> "1. German trade is growing rapidly.
> 2. The consumption of wheat per head is rising
> 3. Germany is becoming more and more dependent on overseas carriage for food and raw materials.
> 4. There are not sufficient neutral ships to replace British and German ships (trading to Germany) laid up by a war.
> 5. German trading ports are so placed geographically as to be readily closed by an enemy strong to the sea.
> 6. A great deal of the money lost to Germany by stoppage of trade would necessarily find its way into England…
> 7. Even supposing Germany obtained wheat etc. by land the prices would be very high."

> "In view of the above, and postulating as we must, a very large fighting superiority for the British Fleet... it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, in such a war the strangulation of her

commerce would be a deadly blow to her" (ADM 116/1043B).

The logic was that although, Britain was dependent on the sea for its supplies in the same way as Germany was, the island State had the advantage of its geographical position and the vastly superior navy. It was noted that *"Germany would suffer much more loss from a war than we should"*.

Economic Warfare

Up until 1905 it had been the duty of commanders in the Royal Navy to watch the fleets of Britain's enemies, and to bring them to action if they left harbour, and to take whatever measures they thought most proper for that purpose. The culmination of such work would be a big and decisive sea battle in which the superior Royal Navy would, of course, triumph.

That objective was not abandoned in 1914 but there had been, before 1906 and the war planning for Germany, no suggestion in Admiralty orders that the fleet would be now used largely as an instrument of economic warfare.

That departure is one of the strongest pieces of evidence of the substantial and thorough effort that went into the innovatory type of war that Britain put its mind to in waging against Germany.

In the *'Official History of the Blockade'* A.C. Bell notes that in 1906,

> "… the Admiralty formally assured the Committee of Imperial Defence, that they intended to blockade the German coasts if they could. They added, however, that they could not undertake to do so as soon as war began. The blockade of Germany was, therefore, contemplated as a subsidiary object of naval warfare, to be pursued when the strategical chess board was clear. It does not appear as though the Admiralty had, at this date, estimated what the consequences of this blockade would be.
>
> "Shortly after these orders were issued, two important changes were made in the naval service, and these changes very much altered both the form and substance of all war orders issued subsequently. First, the Admiralty founded a war college for promoting the scientific study of war and strategy; secondly, a committee for war plans was assembled at Whitehall, and the president of the war college was made a member of it. These two additions to the naval administration were made in recognition of a growing conviction in the navy, that the traditional practice of giving the commander-in-chief a free hand was insufficient, and that the old-fashioned instructions, then in force, would have to be supplemented by detailed plans, prepared after all an enemy's weak points had been scientifically considered. It was during the years 1905 to 1907, at all events, that war plans on an entirely new model were prepared."
>
> "In July, 1908, the first of these plans was completed. The great alteration was that, henceforward, the Admiralty, and not the commander-in-chief, were responsible for the strategic conduct of war, and the distribution of the fleet. Secondly, provision was made only for war against Germany, and the Admiralty stated, that the essence of their plan was to keep a preponderant force in the neighbourhood of the North Sea. Very detailed provisions were, therefore, made for concentrating the squadrons allotted to the North sea and the Channel; more than this, two groups of destroyers were to be stationed permanently off the German coast, so that something resembling a blockade of the German bight would have been imposed, if the plan had ever been successfully executed. The commander-in-chief was, moreover, specifically ordered to stop all enemy trade in the North sea; an economic objective was thus inserted into the war orders for the first time, and added to the old military duties" (*The Blockade of Germany*, p.28).

The object of decimating German commerce was made the subject of further detailed study and calculation during the five years from 1908. In May of that year Admiral Slade asked that a scientific enquiry be instituted. His minute to the Admiralty said:

> "The vulnerability of Germany through her overseas supplies being nowadays an accepted fact, it is considered desirable to obtain answers to the enclosed questions in order to gauge her actual dependence on these overseas supplies. The answers to these questions may indicate in a useful manner how far Germany does depend on overseas supplies, and to what extent these overseas supplies can be deviated from their normal to new channels in time of war...
>
> "Assuming Germany's import and export trade by her national ports to be at a standstill in time of war, how far could she draw supplies:
>
> (a) of food-stuffs
>
> (b) of raw material
>
> "from neighbouring countries and from oversea through neutral ports by means of rail and inland water communication? Also to what extent she could export goods oversea through neutral ports?
>
> "Assuming Germany could draw in sufficient raw material to give employment to her manufacturing centres in war time by such means as mentioned above, would the additional transport charges increase the cost of her manufactures to such an extent as to handicap her in competing in foreign markets?
>
> "Russia at present producing sufficient surplus wheat to supply Germany with all her import need, could such be transported by inland waterways and railways into Germany? To what degree would such transport increase the cost of the wheat so carried?
>
> "Antwerp and Rotterdam, being the two great neutral ports nearest to the manufacturing districts of Germany, how far could these two ports in war time accommodate neutral shipping carrying for Germany, i.e. how far could they accommodate the normal tonnage displaced from German national ports?
>
> "Assuming that in war time the German North sea ports are closed to trade except Emden, are there sufficient rolling stock and lighters to serve German needs through the Ems and Rhine, supposing that the trade could be dealt with on the quays?
>
> "Does any large amount of German foreign trade pass through neutral ports other than those of Belgium and Holland?
>
> "Assuming the Baltic in war time to be closed to a great extent to the British trade, how far would Germany benefit by taking over the trade which Great Britain would lose?" (*The Blockade of Germany*, p.25).

The Foreign Office transmitted this enquiry to Sir William Ward, the Consul-General at Hamburg, to Sir Cecil Hertslet, the Consul-General at Antwerp, to Mr. Churchill, the Consul at Amsterdam, and to Sir Francis Oppenheimer, the Consul-General at Frankfort-on-Main, in Germany. These diplomats answered after they had made their own exhaustive studies of German statistics over a period of a year.

Oppenheimer was a curious case. He came from a wealthy German Jewish family and went to Balliol. He sent meticulously compiled and voluminous reports on the German economy and its food supply to Eyre Crowe at the

British Foreign Office. These reports helped to convince Crowe and his superior, Edward Grey that the Germans could overcome a naval blockade and it would work too slowly to defeat them on its own. This helped reinforce the thinking that large military forces would be required (largely French and Russian) to see off Germany.

For his sterling espionage work Oppenheimer became the only Jew to be awarded diplomatic rank in the Foreign Service (It was generally thought in Britain that Jews were German agents and a dangerous ungrounded element in international affairs).

While the British Consuls were studying the matter, the Admiralty instituted an independent enquiry of their own. This enquiry was made at the insistence of the Committee of Imperial Defence.

A.C. Bell notes:

> "In November, 1908, the Foreign Office urged that the time had come to consider, what military obligations were imposed upon the country by the treaties of guarantee to which Great Britain was a party. The most formidable and pressing of these obligations was the obligation to give armed assistance to Belgium, if she were attacked by Germany. The committee convened felt, however, that they could not confine themselves to so narrow an enquiry, and their report was mainly upon the help that could be given to France if Germany attacked her. To assist this enquiry, the Admiralty prepared a paper, in which they estimated the economic consequences of a purely naval war between Great Britain and Germany" (*The Blockade of Germany*, p. 26).

What is noticeable here is that the British war on Germany was not dependant upon a German transgression of Belgium. That would be useful for political purposes in relation to the Liberal Imperialists taking a united Government and Cabinet into the War in 1914 instead of waging it in coalition with the Unionists. But the War was actually planned for without that eventuality being necessary, as a British intervention in a European war that would make it into a World War.

Bell continued:

> "The starting point of the Admiralty's enquiry was, that the German North sea harbours would be blockaded in war, and the report was substantially a report on the consequences, in so far as they could be foreseen. The Admiralty were guarded; but they were confident that this blockade, however imperfect, would be much felt in Germany. First, they did not believe that the neutral ports of Holland, and the small Baltic harbours of Germany, would deal with the great volume of additional trade that would be diverted to them; secondly, they considered that the British authorities could seriously diminish the diverted, indirect, trade of Germany, by using their control of the marine insurance market as an engine of coercion. The Admiralty's principal contention was, in fact, that this partial blockade would be formidable by its indirect, secondary consequences. They nowhere suggested that these consequences would be decisive, but they were convinced that they would be serious" (The Blockade of Germany, p.26).

The committee's report produced the following conclusion:

> "Financially great pressure would be brought to bear against Germany by means of blockading her ports. The trade of these ports could not entirely, or even, perhaps, largely be diverted to the neutral ports of Belgium and Holland, since the latter would not be able suddenly to increase their ability to handle a large addition to the normal traffic. The income of Germany being largely derived from import duties would be seriously diminished by the blockade of her ports. Her capital also sunk as it is, to a great extent in home industries and would shrink owing to those industries being deprived of the raw materials upon which they are dependent. The closing of many of these factories would coincide with a rise in prices, and great distress would result owing to the non-fighting population being thrown out of work..... From the evidence that we have had, we are of the opinion that a serious situation would be created in Germany owing to the blockade of her ports, and that, the longer the duration of the war, the more serious the situation would become..." (*The Blockade of Germany*, p.26).

This represented a much more developed form of naval warfare than mere Blockade. It was a strategy for extensive economic warfare to be waged on Germany that required meticulous collection of statistics, their working out, and a thorough analysis of economic data and involving planning of a new kind.

The Committee of Imperial Defence

In the series of lectures delivered by Hankey in 1945 to Trinity College Cambridge he said that—

> "the Committee of Imperial Defence has been the main instrument of Government Control both for preparation for war in time of peace, and of Higher Command in time of war, although in the latter case under a different title and with suitable adjustments" (*Government Control in War*, p.23)

The Committee of Imperial Defence was established by Arthur Balfour, the Unionist Prime Minister, after pressure was whipped up by the Liberal Imperialists over Imperial inefficiency in the wake of the Boer War. The CID was advocated by a Liberal Imperialist manifestation, the *National Efficiency Movement*, which campaigned for *"specialists"* directing policy and being invested in government, instead of democratically elected politicians who knew little about the things they were put in charge of by the vagaries of the electorate. The argument was that Admirals should be First Lords, Field Marshals should be War Ministers, and Imperial Proconsuls should be Colonial Secretaries in order to give expertise to the State and more continuity to policy.

Balfour made the Committee of Imperial Defence into a regular Department of State with a permanent secretariat composed of Army and Navy representatives, who could enforce conformity to a single policy. The initial idea behind this was to protect it against future Liberal Ministers who might wish to divert it from its work or run it down.

But Balfour need not have worried on this score because the Liberal Imperialists, Haldane and Grey, were given the key Ministries of War and Foreign Affairs in the new Cabinet in 1906 by the new Liberal Prime Minister, Campbell-Bannerman, as the price for Party unity.

While it was Balfour who facilitated England's strategic re-orientation; it was the Liberal Imperialists who carried

it forward and the Liberal administration that gave substance to the ending of the traditional English alliance with Prussia and the establishment of one with the old enemies, France and Russia.

The CID ultimately became the organiser of the future war on Germany. But at the time it was established it took it that Britain's main rival in Europe was France and it had to be redirected to view Germany as the enemy.

Hankey says this about the role of Balfour in establishing the Committee:

> "No one has ever seriously contested that Balfour was the founder of the Committee of Imperial Defence. Others made valuable contributions and suggestions, but it was Balfour, then Prime Minister, who in 1904 took the initiative and the responsibility, in the teeth of much opposition, of bringing the Committee into existence, and who, in office and out of office, in peace and in war, watched over its destinies for some thirty years… But for Balfour's far-seeing initiative in 1904 our defensive preparations could not conceivably have been brought to the pitch that was attained in 1914, and it is probable that the governmental machinery for the difficult task of controlling our war effort would never have reached a reasonably efficient standard. That is why Balfour is mentioned first among the three Supreme Commanders to whom this work is dedicated" (The Supreme Command, p.45).

The first report of the CID in January 1904, written in light of the experiences of the war on the Boers, demanded that in future *"a definite war policy, based upon solid data, can be formulated"* (p.46).

The CID was to have the Prime Minister as President with *"absolute discretion in the selection and variations in its members"*; there was to be a Permanent Secretariat. The main Ministers of State attended including the Chancellor, Foreign Minister, War Minister, First Sea Lord, Naval Intelligence, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, etc. Despite existing in embryo for a year and a half it was brought into formal existence on May 4th 1904. Hankey immediately aspired to be its Secretary when he read about it in the morning papers.

Influential supporters later helped Hankey to become Secretary of the CID and he recreated the position into something never imagined by his predecessors. Hankey utilised the fact that knowledge is power and made it his business to produce the knowledge needed to wage the War, so that he was indispensable in the situation he knew would come about. And he formed an important axis with Admiral Fisher and Lord Esher to advance both his ideas and career.

The CID met 60 times in its first 2 years of operation. It was an advisory and consultative body and was supposed to be subordinate to the Cabinet. What that meant was that it was, in theory, subordinate to the Cabinet and Parliament. However, it got on with its work mostly without reference to the Cabinet for many years and to Parliament right up to the vital hour in August 1914.

The CID had no executive powers within itself but its members possessed plenty of executive power themselves in the State. It was the assembly of such high profile figures from the most important branches of the British State that gave it its great significance. When Britain went to war in August 1914 it was the CID's plans, combining and co-ordinating all the military branches' efforts that were put into operation to the letter.

The Secret Conversations

Hankey recounts that in December 1905—

> "a small group of naval and military officers began to meet informally at 2 Whitehall Gardens, to study the proper utilization of the forces of the United Kingdom in the event of our becoming involved, alongside of France, in a war with Germany" (*The Supreme Command*, p.62).

This was just after the Entente Cordiale, something that was publicly declared to be in the nature of a simple understanding reached with a former enemy.

In December 1905, as the Liberal Government was in the process of formation, Colonel Repington, who had already began conversations with Major Huguet, the French Military attaché, reported to the new Foreign Minister, Sir Edward Grey, that what France required from England was not words but deeds to show commitment to the alliance against Germany that dare not speak its name. On 18th November Major Huguet communicated to Paris the size, composition and speed of mobilisation of a possible British Expeditionary Force (David Owen, *The Hidden Perspective, The Military Conversations 1906-1914*, p.30).

One of the first decisions made by Grey was to put the military conversations that had begun informally through Lord Lansdowne in the Unionist Ministry onto a formal basis. It was made clear to the French, however, that the British Cabinet would not be informed of these and no pledge given to go to war due to the possibility of it being discovered by Parliament, which would result in the fall of the Government.

Grey used the scattering of his colleagues in the course of the General Election to give the go ahead for this on his own initiative, without any consent from the wider Goverment-in-formation.

Hankey notes that a bit of a crisis in the war planning arose when Campbell-Bannerman, the Gladstonian Liberal, became Prime Minister at the beginning of 1906. Campbell-Bannerman was suspicious of the CID and was inclined to close it down but Haldane, who he appointed as his War Minister, persuaded him to tolerate it and give it a stay of execution. The Prime Minister grew increasingly troubled about the course of the military conversations but he allowed them to proceed—presumably because he feared the breakup of his administration through a Liberal Imperialist walk-out if he pushed the matter in Cabinet.

The Committee of Imperial Defence discussed the military conversations in three meetings during January

1906. However, between 1906 and April 1908 (when Campbell-Bannerman died), the CID was at a low ebb and war planning took place elsewhere—within Admiral Fisher's Naval Intelligence Department and Haldane's War Ministry. Here, at the same time as the Naval preparations, there was a parallel reorganisation of the Army. and the creation of a British Expeditionary Force for continental purposes, along with the military conversations with France, conducted by Colonel Repington and General Henry Wilson.

Haldane reformed the British Army and created a British Expeditionary Force of 160,000 that could be transported in two days to the left of the French line for engaging in a war with Germany. This was a revolutionary change in British military affairs.

As Hankey notes, the British Army had traditionally been a small force, projected to various parts of the globe by the Navy. England had been impregnable in its island behind its Navy and had no necessity for a large standing army, as the countries on the Continent had with their extensive land frontiers. At the outset of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1701 (the first Balance of Power war England launched), Parliament voted for an army at a level of 40,000 soldiers with only 18,000 being British and the rest to be foreigners in English pay. At that time the English standing army numbered only 7,000 men.

The biggest army Britain put on the continent was in the Peninsular Wars and at Waterloo in 1815—one of 30,000 men. The British Army, half a century later, at the time of the Crimean War, numbered 28,000. It had been a thing of long-standing not to commit large numbers of soldiers to the continent, but to leave most of the fighting there to be done by allies.

Haldane changed this situation through an increase in the size of the army and a commitment to employ it on the Continent. And he also militarised British society through the promotion of gun clubs, the development of territorials, and popular military lectures.

The Expeditionary Force seems to have been initially conceived of as an expeditionary force for India, rather than Europe, according to Hankey. However, at the same time as Haldane was building this force of 160,000, military conversations were going on in France involving Colonel Repington and General Wilson with the French General Staff which involved landing this new army there for a future land war with Germany. So it is most probable that the Indian story was a ruse to throw any interested Liberal backbenchers off the scent of what was happening.

Admiral Fisher withdrew his naval representative from the CID when he found out it was planning a continental commitment. Fisher was deeply opposed to war on the Continent and was keen to maintain the primary role of the Senior Service in British warfare.

Edward Grey, Foreign Minister and Haldane, War Minister, did not seek Cabinet approval for these military conversations between British staff officers and the French, justifying this secrecy by suggesting that these conversations did not involve an actual solid commitment to fighting in any war that might occur, and therefore others did not need to know.

And so, as Hankey notes, they *"took place in the utmost secrecy"* (p.62). As he explains:

> "No reports were made to either Cabinet or Committee of Imperial Defence about them. Plans drawn up by the General Staff as a result of these secret conversations were communicated to the Committee of Imperial Defence but the conversations themselves were never alluded to. It was not until six years later and after two general elections had taken place, that Grey in 1912 took the Cabinet into his confidence in the matter" (p.63).

Hankey notes that:

> "Grey and Haldane in their memoirs make a strong technical case for these conversations, without which military co-operation on the Continent could only have taken place in an improvised form and with disastrous loss of time. But the better the case the easier it should have been to carry the Cabinet in the decision. As it was, a considerable amount of suspicion was aroused among members of the Cabinet who were not 'in the know', and some of this was directed against the Committee of Imperial Defence, which was completely innocent in the matter; Morley frequently cross-examined me on subject but, as I had no precise knowledge, I was unable to inform him" (p.63).

Asquith, Grey and Haldane denied all knowledge to Parliament of the arrangements being made, using very careful language that conveyed the impression that nothing was being done that committed England to war on Germany in conjunction with France (and Russia).

John Dillon of the Irish Party and some Liberal backbenchers subjected Grey and Asquith to scrutiny on the matter in the Commons but the Home Rule alliance encouraged Dillon and the Liberal backbenchers who were suspicious, to drop it after they had been rebuffed.

Despite the secrecy Hankey reveals that by 1908 a considerable body of planning and preparation for war with Germany had been undertaken, albeit in an independent manner with the Admiralty and War Office working on their own parallel rival projects, without any reference to each other.

Hankey concludes:

> "We are now in a position to summarize the general situation of our war-preparedness at the beginning of 1908, when the Supreme Command, working through the Committee of Imperial Defence, began to formulate its policy for the contingency of war with Germany. The Navy had been reorganized; the redistribution of the fleet had made great progress; the rearrangement of its bases and coaling stations had been approved and was in hand, together with the necessary defences. Naval war plans had been worked out and sent to the naval Commanders-in-Chiefs concerned for their remarks, but neither the Cabinet, the Committee of Imperial Defence nor the War Office were aware of their existence. The Army had been reorganised… Technical plans for the despatch of an Expeditionary Force to France in the event of war with Germany had been discussed between the British and French

General Staffs, but without the knowledge of the Cabinet or of the Committee of Imperial Defence" (p.64).

Hankey notes that the problem, as he saw it, was that—

"the naval and military plans were as yet being worked out almost in complete isolation… No central body was privy to both plans and able to give a guiding hand. The Committee of Imperial Defence had done some invaluable preparatory work, but was still far from fulfilling the task prescribed for it…" (p.64).

Hankey knew everything there was to know about the planned naval war on Germany, but apparently little, at this point, about the military arrangements being made with France in the *"utmost secrecy"*.

Balfour Intervenes

After Asquith, the Liberal Imperialist, replaced Campbell-Bannerman, the Gladstonian, as Prime Minister, things began to change and the coordination that Hankey thought necessary was able to take place. This is when the Committee of Imperial Defence began to come into its own.

Balfour, the founder of the CID and Leader of the Unionist Opposition, called for an Inquiry to be held about the possibility of a German invasion. This prompted the CID to finally begin to fulfil the purpose Balfour had established it for in relation to co-ordinated war planning.

Hankey relates what this Inquiry did:

"Comparisons of the respective fleets over a long period of years were worked out; the possible moves and counter-moves at sea were explained; the importance of an important intelligence system was emphasized; the possibilities of the rapid and secret mobilization of an expeditionary force by Germany and of its consequences in her ports were examined; elaborate tables were worked out to show the amount of merchant shipping which could be made available in German ports at the selected moment; the capacity of the German ports in such matters as railway facilities and wharfage, and the limitations in passing great numbers of ships out of the lock-gates and down the tidal rivers were investigated; the difficulties of marshalling and escorting fleets of merchant ships, unaccustomed to keep station in a convoy were duly weighed…" (*The Supreme Command*, p.67).

This was much more than just an investigation into the possibility of German invasion (which Fisher called the *"invasion bogey"*) and on that count, as Hankey notes, the answer *"was never seriously in doubt"* (p.67). A German invasion was entirely ruled out as a possibility.

However, that issue, for which the Inquiry was established, seems not to have been the real point of the exercise:

"The Invasion Inquiry of 1908 focused the attention of our statesmen and the naval authorities, on one of the most important problems which they would have to face in the event of war with Germany. It defined the respective responsibilities of the Admiralty and the War Office, and laid down the broad lines of policy on which their plans would have to be based… It brought our statesmen and our leading sailors and soldiers into intimate personal contact, to their mutual advantage. The whole subject was lifted out of the sphere of party politics by Asquith's decision to send the whole of the evidence to Balfour, the Leader of the Opposition, and to hear his views before adopting the report" (pp. 68-9).

In March 1914 Balfour, whilst vigorously contesting the issue of Home Rule with Asquith, sat with the Prime Minister on the Committee of Imperial Defence that was coordinating the final plans for war on Germany. In November 1914 when Asquith set up his War Cabinet he took the unusual step of including within it Balfour, from the Opposition benches. As Hankey noted this was not an *"unprecedented step"*, given Balfour's work in establishing the CID and working formally within it during 1907-8 and 1913-14 (Government Control in War, p.36).

This information should be emphasized due to a point that was made in a recent debate over the origins of the Great War in the Cork *Evening Echo*.

This came in relation to a 1910 conversation between Arthur Balfour and Henry White, the United States Ambassador in London, which is included in a book of White's experiences written in 1930:

"Balfour: We are probably fools not to find a reason for declaring war on Germany before she builds too many ships and takes away our trade.

"White: You are a very high-minded man in private life. How can you possibly contemplate anything so politically immoral as provoking a war against a harmless nation which has as good a right to a navy as you have? If you wish to compete with German trade, work harder.

"Balfour: That would mean lowering our standard of living. Perhaps it would be simpler for us to have a war.

"White: I am shocked that you of all men should enunciate such principles.

"Balfour: Is it a question of right or wrong? Maybe it is just a question of keeping our supremacy" (Henry White and Allan Nevins, *Thirty Years Of American Diplomacy*, p.257).

It was suggested by a naive Irish defender of Britain's Great War that Balfour was by this time inconsequential in relation to what the British State was doing with regard to its war planning.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Balfour knew more of what was going on from the Opposition Front Bench than most of the Liberal Government and certainly the vast majority of Liberal MPs on the Government benches or the British Parliament as a whole.

Despite being in formal Opposition at this time he worked on the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1907-8 and 1913-4 and, alone among the Opposition Front Bench he was invited onto and joined Asquith's War Cabinet in 1914. It appears that for only one year (1912) did Balfour not have some membership of the CID and during that year he was apparently kept fully informed of its doings by Winston Churchill.

And all this whilst the two parties of State were heading toward a new English civil war over Irish Home Rule!

Continental versus Atlanticist

In its report of December 1908 the Committee of Imperial Defence recognised that a Blockade alone would be too slow acting in supporting France during a war on Germany, so it was agreed that the British Expeditionary Force that

was in construction would need to consist of 5 divisions to beef up the French lines to hold the Germans back in order that the Royal Navy could do its work.

Having revealed the military plans to the gaze of the Navy the CID instituted a new inquiry authorized by Asquith. This Inquiry brought the issue of Continental warfare into the open and brought on a conflict between Admiral Fisher and the War Office.

Fisher was opposed to military adventures on the Continent that might lead to an unlimited commitment, distracting Britain's Senior Service from its primary task. The Navy was concerned at this military intervention since it implied a commitment to land warfare in conjunction with allies and a relegation of the Senior Service to a role as an adjunct. It signified something unprecedented in British history—a definite military plan that bound Britain into Continental warfare apparently on the insistence of the French, threatening the Royal Navy's freedom of action.

Fisher maintained that his Navy could destroy Germany on its own, given that country's vulnerability to economic warfare that he and his officers had investigated. However, after a number of meetings of the CID the plan developed in the secret conversations, within which the General Staff had assured the French of a 160,000 strong expeditionary force, was approved. It had, of course, the *caveat* that the contingencies made with the French were subject to a decision made at the time by the Government of the day—a proviso which Grey used to later insist that he had kept *"Britain's hands free"*.

But to all intents and purposes a war that would involve both an expeditionary force to the continent and Royal Navy economic warfare to destroy Germany was planned for by the British State.

Fisher opposed continental involvement at the Military Needs Committee in December 1908. He argued that he had no concern about France falling to Germany and believed such an eventuality would enable his navy to produce a greater tightening of economic pressure on Germany, through a Continent-wide Blockade. Geography had blessed England with a predominant position for this.

Fisher wrote to Hankey:

> "You see my beloved Hankey... Providence has arranged for us to be an island and all our possessions to be primarily islands and therefore 130,000 men provide an invincible armada for the unassailable supremacy of the British Empire whereas it takes 4 millions of Germans to do the same for Germany!" (Avner Offer, *The First World War An Agrarian Interpretation*, p.287)

Fisher and Hankey believed that Britain, by waging war on Germany purely through its Navy, could ensure that its industries need not be denuded of workers, as the Germans would have to do in order to defend their land frontiers. And only a foolish mistake involving a large Continental land commitment, by necessity fed in time by the imposition of military Conscription, would upset this scenario.

Hankey regarded the Continental expedition being secretly planned by the Government as a dangerous gamble that would backfire on the Liberals and ultimately enable the Unionists to lever in the military Conscription, they favoured. From the Boer War there had been a division in politics in which Unionists had began to desire a large Conscript Army as a necessity of the age, for the first time in the history of the British State. On the other side remained the traditional anti-Conscriptionism—something that later brought Liberalism into alliance with the Navy and made the lovers of peace into cheerleaders for the Blockade on civilians.

The Atlanticist orientation of the Navy and the opposition of the Liberals to military Conscription meant that the British war had an anti-civilian focus in the Blockade. The Liberals' War meant the Royal Navy killing German civilians whilst France and Russia did the bulk of the fighting. And when the military forces of Britain's allies were not enough to see off Germany neutral countries were enticed into the War with irredentist promises, to avoid Compulsion in England, despite the *"war for civilisation"*.

Hankey championed the traditional, indirect approach to war—limited liability and commitment on Britain's part that made military disengagement possible, as in the past, retaining the possibility of damage limitation. He understood England's limitations in war making, which were not always seen at the high point of Imperial swagger. He knew that the English made up a small number of humanity, who were no longer breeding at a great enough rate for further colonial conquest. And he realised that, although the nation was at ease with war, it was not particularly good at the military art, itself. So he wished to bleed Germany to death slowly, at minimal risk, so as to be safe rather than sorry.

Admiral Fisher thought similarly. He regarded the Continental commitment as *"suicidal idiocy"* and dreaded the consequences of *"British Redcoats on the Vosges frontier"*.

Despite all of this Hankey was clear about one thing:

> "Our policy may have been good or bad; there may be room for argument on this. But there are two criticisms to which Asquith's Government is not open—that it had no policy or that its policy was not arrived at after the most thorough investigation" (p.76).

The War Book

From 1910 the task of planning for economic warfare passed from the Navy to Hankey in the Committee of Imperial Defence. And from this time Hankey launched a rival naval mobilisation plan against Haldane's continental expedition plan that he had discovered.

As part of this the CID undertook a series of inquiries involving a wide variety of expertise within the State, across many areas, to lay down guidelines for economic warfare. These inquiries produced volumes comparable in extent to the parliamentary blue books. Specific guidelines

were set out for the construction of machinery capable of launching the Blockade.

After the conflict between Army Continentalists and Navy Atlanticists settled down in late 1909, Hankey led the next phase of planning and preparation for War, including the following investigations and actions:

> "… the compilation of the War Book, this being the first reference to the subject; measures of economic pressure beginning with an investigation of our policy on the question of 'days of grace' to enemy merchant ships, to be followed by consideration of such questions as the cornering of raw materials in war and financial blockade; the capture of enemy colonies; the co-operation of the Dominions in the Committee of Imperial Defence for the study of these and similar questions; also intelligence, treatment of aliens and our own economic position… inquiries were instituted at the beginning of March 1910 into the following questions: the defence of the Suez Canal; war-time transport of military reinforcements; Press and postal censorship… treatment of neutral and enemy merchant ships in time of war; and, in June 1910, into the defence and attack of cable communications" (*The Supreme Command,* pp.85-6).

The *War Book* was a kind of instruction manual, which had detailed sets of instructions, constantly updated, to tell everyone what to do in every Government Department when the War on Germany was declared. All would therefore know their individual tasks to be performed in conjunction with others, what else was supposed to be done at the same time, and the agreed and specific time limits allowed for doing things:

> "Every piece of legislation; every set of instructions; every order, letter, cable, telegram, including those to fleets, military stations, the Dominions, India and the Colonies (some taking the form of dormant instructions in their possession) was drafted and kept ready for issue. All necessary papers, orders in council and pr21oclamations were printed or set in type, and so far was the system carried that the King never moved without having with him those which required his immediate signature.
>
> "The whole was kept continuously up to date by a small standing body to meet the changes and additions required from time to time.
>
> "All these matters had to be worked out by the exercise of forethought and imagination, for we had had no experience of a major war for nearly a century" (*Government Control in War*, p.27).

All the product of this work was contained in draft Orders in Council which were issued upon the British Declaration of War on Germany in August 1914.

Hankey considered that the Prime Minister, Asquith, was fully justified in his autobiography when he wrote:

> "It would not be an unjust claim that the Government by that date (August 1909) investigated the whole of the ground covered by a possible war with Germany—the naval position; the possibilities of blockade; the invasion problem; the Continental problem; the Egyptian problem" (*Government Control in War*, p.26).

Hankey divided the war planning into 3 phases: The *"phase of principle"* during the Balfour period 1904-5. The second stage, from 1906 to August 1909, called *"the phase of policy"*. And finally, the third phase of *"plans and preparations to give effect to policy"*, which lasted up to August 1914. In this period both the Navy and War Office co-ordinated and refined their joint preparations for war on Germany.

Things were hurried along after the Agadir crisis in 1911. In August 1911 Asquith summoned a CID meeting to consider giving armed support to France. Here there was another clash between Navy and Army when the Navy insisted it could not carry the Expeditionary Force to France if it was mobilising at the same time for its own war on Germany. It had made its plans and could not do both.

At the meeting Henry Wilson outlined the plan he had constructed for the landing and placing of the BEF on the left wing of the French in an impressive display. Sir Arthur Wilson, in his much less impressive presentation, replying for the Admiralty, dropped his original basis of objection to the Expeditionary Force and came down completely against the idea, advancing a plan for small amphibious landings by the Army on the North German coast in support of the Naval Blockade. Hankey was perturbed by the poor performance of Sir Arthur on behalf of the Navy, which gave the impression it had cooked up its plan over dinner, in comparison to the greatly detailed plan Henry Wilson had worked out and demonstrated.

Bell concluded:

> "The Committee of Imperial Defence passed no collective judgment upon the two plans that were thus laid before them. Nevertheless, it can be concluded, from all that has been written by persons who were present, that the meeting was the end of an old era and the beginning of a new one; for the army leaders certainly left the meeting satisfied that their plan of making war on the continent had been endorsed by the government" (*The Blockade of Germany*, p.29).

The Navy, by refusing to co-ordinate itself with the overall plan, suffered a chastening on the part of the Government as a consequence. Asquith sent Churchill to the Admiralty as First Sea Lord to whip the Navy into shape and make it conform to the overall direction of policy. Sir Arthur Wilson left the Admiralty and a new Naval Staff was established. Admiral Wilson did not believe in blockade as a decisive weapon with the result that he could not endorse it with the enthusiasm his predecessor, Admiral Fisher, did. This caused his downfall in 1911.

Churchill then worked closely with Seely, the new War Minister and then Asquith (when Seely was sacrificed to the Curragh Mutiny and the Prime Minister became his own War Minister to keep things 'in house') to implement the grand strategy agreed upon.

The basis of the British War plan was settled on the prevention of a quick German victory. An Expeditionary Force of sufficient size would to be employed to keep the land forces on Germany's western front in the field so that the Blockade could do its work over months, or years, if needs must.

The position of the Low Countries was problematic for

the Blockade. Neutrality would present a problem for the Royal Navy since Germany would be able to supply itself through Belgium and Holland. The CID, with Asquith in the Chair, decided that if either country stayed neutral they would have to be rationed to prevent supplies ending up in Germany. However, the most beneficial outcome was to involve them in the War, in one way or another. So it became the objective to lure Germany into, at least, Belgium, to prevent its neutrality and limit the neutral ports open to Germany. This Grey was able to achieve in July/August 1914 by refusing to state England's position honestly to Berlin.

The Empire's War

One of the most important elements in preparing for a World War was the necessity of getting the rest of the Empire to embrace the grand strategy against Germany. Hankey's strategy involved a full utilisation of the Empire in the War and this meant the innovation of informing the Dominion Governments of the War Plan (that was still being kept from the British Cabinet).

This was accomplished during the Imperial Conferences of 1907 and 1909 when military cooperation between London and the White Dominions was discussed and finally in 1911 when the Colonies were *"taken into our entire confidence in such questions"* (Supreme Command, p. 128).

The Colonies were vital to economic warfare on Germany since they supplied an amount of Germany's supplies and were well placed to capture its commerce and its small overseas territories. Hankey had an Empire state of mind. His parents were Australian and his wife was a South African.

To get the White Dominions involved in the War Plans became his objective in order to produce the *'War Organization of the British Empire'*. He wanted the establishment of Colonial Intelligence services to track German commerce and shipping, so that the Navy, and that of the Dominions, could destroy its overseas trade. Hankey's ideas were fully outlined to the Colonial representatives by Asquith, Grey and McKenna at the 1911 Imperial Conference.

Edward Grey also made a very significant speech to the leaders of the Dominions that produced in them the desire to go back to their Colonies and prepare for military operations to be undertaken against Germany in Africa and the Pacific on the Declaration of War.

Hankey significantly notes that in Grey's speech to the Imperial Conference *"we find the underlying cause of our intervention in the Great Wars of 1914 and 1939"* (p.129).

The gist of Grey's speech is the Balance of Power: He said that Britain would always wish to involve itself in a war with a European Power or group of Powers who had the ambition of a *"Napoleonic policy"*. By this he meant that a preventative war would be waged against any Power that England believed was attempting to unite Europe so that Britain no longer had any allies on the Continent to use in its traditional Balance of Power policy. The development of what Grey called *"one great combination in Europe, outside which we should be left without a friend"* was a situation which he was not about to allow develop without war.

He also gave a good Liberal argument for acting in an aggressive preventative way: If the situation were to occur without British intervention to prevent it, England would have to pay for ships not to a Two Power Standard but a Five Power Standard to *"keep the command of the sea"*. (Britain in taking Grey's gamble subsequently lost the command of the sea and dramatically increased its balance of payments deficit by ten-fold, crippling it financially for the action required to police the world it had gained after it had won its Great War.)

But in 1911 everyone in the room understood that Grey was talking about a war on Germany.

Hankey related what the Prime Minister did next:

> "Asquith then gave a detailed account of the Committee's main inquiries, including a lurid description of the War Book, which had only been begun a few weeks before"

and asked the Colonies to take *"similar steps"* in preparation for war (p. 131).

Hanley saw this moment as of the *"greatest importance"* when the Empire

> "was taken into the fullest confidence on foreign, naval and military policy. They had been offered a seat on the body which in practice exercised the Supreme Command in the work of defensive preparations." (p.132)

Hankey noted that *"In all the Dominions defence preparations were made before the war to correspond, mutatis mutandis, with our own"* (Government Control in War, p.28).

Of course, when Hankey said *"defence preparations"* he meant preparations for war. In the Imperial lexicon attack was the best and only form of defence and prevention was superior to cure.

Hankey then described the Liberal Imperialist war plan revealed to the White Dominions;

> "The Continental Inquiries had indicated that the small but efficient force we could send to France... would be by no means negligible when thrown into the scale of nearly balanced forces, and that, psychologically, its influence would be very great in proportion to its size. Various other Inquiries had emphasised how great would be the influence of sea-power in exhausting our enemy's resources by blockade and shutting off his supplies" (*The Supreme Command*, p.137).

The Declaration of London Controversy

From 1907 the Liberal Government made an effort to engage in codifying the law of the sea, placing it under an International Tribunal. This began at the Hague Peace Conference of 1907 and continued at the London Naval

Conference of the following year, which issued the *Declaration of London* in 1909. The *Declaration* provoked a great debate in Britain between those who believed it was a useful step in protecting British trade and food supplies in time of war and those who felt it potentially shackled the Royal Navy's power against an enemy.

A strange situation developed in which Parliament, through the House of Lords, rejected the *Declaration* while the Liberal Government indicated it felt itself under legal obligation of abiding by it since it had negotiated it.

Grey felt that existing maritime law suited British interests and was keen to strengthen it. Having become the dominant Power in the world England had conceded maritime rights in the *Declaration of Paris* during the 1850s. The exclusion of food from contraband suited England more than any other nation since it depended more for its food than any other state in the world at this time.

At The Hague Conference the British Declaration won support for an International Prize Court and sought to define the law of contraband in a more systematic way.

Grey felt that it was in Britain's interest to reinforce neutral rights, particularly because he envisaged Britain being provisioned by neutrals (particularly the US) during a war. There were three perspectives needed considering: the neutral, defensive and offensive. In two of these the bolstering of neutral rights were in England's interest. In the offensive scenario of Blockading an enemy they were not. Many Liberals wanted a strengthening of protection for trade whilst others saw it as an impediment to British sea power—which was British power.

The Royal Commission of Food Supply in 1905 had only considered the neutral and offensive viewpoints in drawing up Britain's attitude to these questions. It took place before war with Germany was fully formulated. Admiral Ottley, Secretary of the CID before Hankey, was of the belief that as narrow a definition of contraband as possible was good for Britain. German trade, due to its access to neutral ports, the development of railways and its land borders could access goods over land. There was also the danger of a clash with the US, which England had begun to defer to by 1910 over neutral rights, to consider.

So the Committee decided to retain Blockade but limit contraband. The British negotiated this in 1907 at The Hague.

Grey's position was dictated by General Policy. He believed that sea power was not going to be solely decisive in a war and had began making provision for Continental involvement. In such a situation, a curtailing of offensive naval capability was not so crucial and it was felt worth while to trade some of the Navy's punching power for security of trade and food provision.

> But there was a seeming contradiction in the Navy's position. Admiral Fisher, who did not believe that there was anything but aggressive and unrestrained war, was opposed to Grey's desire to codify the law of war at sea. During the previous centuries England had broken any rules that existed as soon as war commenced, particularly in relation to neutrals. For instance, it went to war with the US and burnt Washington to put neutrals in their place in 1812.

Admirals Ottley and Slade argued for full Blockade in planning for War on Germany but conceding restriction in their roles as diplomats in negotiations. It seems that the Admiralty helped to negotiate a new law of the sea with every intention of breaking it during the war they were planning for.

It appears that the Admiralty went ahead with negotiating the Declaration to please the Liberal Government, whilst knowing that if England remained neutral it would benefit from the new law and insist upon it, but if it went into the war it would simply find the opportunity to break it. As the Admiralty noted in *Notes on Contraband* in 1908:

> "When Britain is belligerent, she can be safely trusted to look after her own interests, but the dangerous time for her is when she is neutral and does not wish to take such a strong line as to render herself liable to be drawn into war. At such a time, the existence of a well reasoned-out classification of goods will be of enormous advantage" (p.279).

However, a very public opposition emerged in Britain to the *Declaration* which threatened to unhinge all the subterfuge.

Thomas Gibson Bowles began asking very pertinent and unwelcome questions. Bowles, surveying the situation in England, concluded that the British Empire was determined on having a war with Germany and was obviously making plans for one, albeit in secret.

This led Bowles to take the view that England's re-orientation from vigorous asserter of the rights of the belligerent in war to those of seeming defender of the neutral was a mistaken development brought about by generations of peace. England, Bowles reasoned, had had to attain its state of predominance in the world in the first place through unbridled belligerence and it was giving every sign of having to, and intending to, do so again.

Bowles thought that Manchester Capitalism had established a kind of immunity for English commerce from the inconveniences of war through its signing of the Declaration of Paris at the time of the Crimean War. This provided for the extension of rights of private property at sea. But for Bowles this immunity applied to the private property of the few and not to the public property of the many and raised the possibility that, whilst the rest of the nation was at war, the trading classes could profit by continuing commercial relations unmolested with the enemy. Bowles concluded that the national fighting power of the Royal Navy had been traded in by the Free Traders in the interests of profit-making.

The Declaration of Paris, for Bowles, represented a kind of pivot point between the former era of unrestricted British expansion and the latter period which involved the

mere defence of the global spoils, in the interests of the few.

Bowles warned the Empire that the progress it had instituted to facilitate the expansion of Free Trade would have to be set aside to fight a big war to preserve predominance in the world. Bowles's book *'The Law of the Sea'* was written to prevent further guarantees being given to private property on the sea based on the misapprehension that England could indefinitely pursue life in her Free Trade idyll.

Bowles complained that the Liberal Government declared that the ratification of these proposals (which had been negotiated and settled in secret) needed no sanction from Parliament. But Parliament could not be entirely by-passed because the proposals involved the supersession of British Courts, the Admiralty Prize Courts and the Judicial Committee of Privy Council, and the abolition of their final jurisdiction in matters of naval prize, and the submission of them and their decisions to a new foreign court sitting at The Hague.

A Naval Prize Bill was therefore introduced in order to effect the proposals.

In December 1911 the Bill was rejected by the House of Lords, despite Grey's insistence that it would be forced through by the two-year mechanism introduced under the Parliament Act. And, although it was reintroduced into Parliament, it was handily allowed to fail before the War began.

Thomas Bowles had rounded off his popular book with these pertinent questions:

> "If Peace is cried more loudly, War is more constantly and secretly prepared and more suddenly sprang; that Ambition stalks the earth no less predatory than ever but only smoother spoken; and that Force is but more completely cloaked in Fraud.
>
> "Any day we too, with little or no warning, may have to fight for our own.
>
> "In that day what alone will avail us will be our sea power and our maritime rights; what alone will check our enemy, their full exercise. As they sufficed before, even against all Europe, so they would still suffice. For nothing essential is changed. In that day it will avail us nothing that we have the most powerful fleets, if by our own folly we have in advance suffered them to be protocolised and declared out of their effectual powers, and subjected to a foreign court.
>
> "Is that day so remote that we need now and henceforth think only of our neutral profits in Peace, and not at all of our risks, rights, and powers in War?
>
> "If so, why all these Dreadnoughts? Why this present concentration in the North Sea of British fleets recalled from all quarters of the globe? Why Rosyth? Why this sudden, feverish, ruinous race in armaments? Is it all for nothing?
>
> "Is that day so far off? Is it not rather, quite manifestly, believed by those who know most and are most responsible to be near at hand?" (*The Law of the Sea*, pp.223-4).

HANKEY'S OPPOSITION

Hankey agreed with Bowles that Blockade could not be effective without the power to stop neutral ships and capture their cargo. Admiral Ottley defended his stance on the basis that a declaration for full blown economic war against a civilian population would be impossible for Grey within his Liberal constituency. He assured Hankey that, once the German shipping was driven off the sea, the *Declaration* could be discarded and England could do as she pleased.

There are also some entries in the diary of Major Adrian Grant Duff's diary relating to what Hankey told him about a significant conversation he had with Reginald McKenna, the First Lord of the Admiralty in 1911, which revealed the true British intentions with regard to the *Declaration of London*:

> "22 February 1911: The 'worry over the Declaration of London' still goes on—and Hankey has now turned against it and denounced it as equivalent to tying up our right arm in a war with Germany.
>
> "Fisher apparently allowed it to be negotiated with the deliberate intention of tearing it up in the event of war. Characteristic.
>
> "24 February: McKenna's standpoint seems much the same—the Germans are sure to infringe it in the early days of the war, then with great regret we tear it up—if they don't infringe it we must invent an infringement" (Offer Avner, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation*, p.280).

The British signing of the *Declaration of London* was characteristic of the whole process of deceiving the Germans (and Liberal backbenchers in England) as to the honest intentions of Britain whilst altogether different plans were hidden with clear objectives. The Liberal Government went ahead with the Declaration to produce false confidence in Germany.

And international law was gradually manoeuvred around by Britain when the gloves came off.

A.C. Bell of the CID has a section about Hankey and the Declaration of London controversy in *'The Blockade of Germany'*. Bell notes that many of Hankey's arguments against the *Declaration* could not influence the public debate that was being led by Bowles because they were being, from necessity, only expressed in private.

However, they were highly significant because Hankey knew that the nature of the new war being planned against Germany could not be put in the public sphere, a plan that was making these international agreements irrelevant in many ways, save for being an inconvenience that needed to be got around, when the war plans were activated:

> "Hankey noticed that no code of law produced at London could have made allowance for the changes that he foresaw. The declaration of London could not, in the circumstances that obtained, have been anything but a code of customary law, that is, a body of customs and precedents made orderly. The customs and precedents that the Declaration reduced to order were a century old and out of date" (*The Blockade of Germany*, pp.20-2).

Bell takes issues with the view that the *Declaration* was a dangerous and unnecessary appeasement of the Continental Powers on Britain's part, for a country about to launch a war on Germany in which restrictions on the Royal Navy's activities were most unwelcome. Bell argues his position on the grounds that Hankey was planning an altogether

more extensive war on Germany than the Royal Navy had ever waged through mere blockades of the past:

"The truth is, that the British navy had never exerted decisive economic pressure against France, or against any other enemy, that our enemy's commercial systems made it impossible to do so, and that the British statesmen, who had conducted the great wars of the eighteenth century, had never hoped that a continental enemy could be brought to terms by stopping its commerce. They, after all, were more competent judges than Mr. Gibson Bowles or Captain Mahan.

"The real weaknesses of the Declaration were never properly exhibited by its critics, who maintained that the declaration was an unsound statement of law, and a wholesale adoption of continental doctrines. It was neither the one nor the other: it was merely a body of rules for regulating naval operations against commercial systems that had disappeared.

"Captain M.P.A. Hankey in particular, perceived somewhat vaguely, but in the main justly, that economic warfare would be a gigantic operation of which we had no previous knowledge or experience, and, that the body of rules in the declaration made no allowance for changes in the conduct of naval warfare, which would alter our bare conceptions of blockade and contraband. This was an accurate forecast of what actually occurred.

"First as to blockade, Captain Hankey assumed, that the British fleet would defeat the German, and subsequently blockade the German coasts. This was too hopeful; but Captain Hankey foresaw, that the blockade imposed would not be a blockade of known pattern, but would, on the contrary, be a new operation."

Bell then quotes a report of Hankey's to the CID that was very hostile to an acceptance of the *Declaration of London*:

"Although the declaration of London still permits blockade it has hedged it in with rules and restrictions which, taken in conjunction with recent developments of naval weapons, renders it an inefficient, and easily evaded instrument.

"The negotiators of the declaration of London seem to have forgotten the fact that the torpedo boat, the submarine, and the mine have made blockade, and specially close blockade a very much more difficult matter in the future than in the past. This difficulty is accentuated in the case of ports situated in narrow seas. For example, after we had established a definite and general command of the sea it would be extremely difficult to blockade ports in the Baltic or the Adriatic, for in such narrow seas the torpedo boats and above all the submarines of even a defeated enemy would inflict terrible losses on a blockading fleet… In the opinion of many naval officers, therefore, a close blockade of ports in such narrow waters is a sheer impossibility.

"Such being the case, it is necessary to consider what substitute can be found for a close blockade. Under existing conditions many means can be thought out not for entirely stopping the enemy's commerce, for that is impossible in the case of a continental power, but for so restricting it, and handicapping it, as to raise the price of every imported commodity, or raw material, and so to cause great suffering on the people. If the declaration of London is ratified, however, it is difficult to see how our sea power is to be used as an effective weapon.

"Let us assume war with Germany; the German main fleet defeated; the German mercantile flag driven off the high seas; and a blockade established on the North sea coast of Germany… a blockade of the German Baltic coast is an extremely hazardous and in all probability an impossible operation of war. Under the existing (pre-declaration of London) conditions several substitutes for a close blockade of the German Baltic coast can be thought out.

"For example a blockade of the German ports might be declared, but rendered effective at the entrance to the Baltic…Those bound for or containing cargo consigned to German ports would be sent back. Those bound for neutral ports such as Copenhagen or Riga would be warned that, in the event of their proceeding to a German port they would be considered to have broken the blockade and would be liable to capture when they left the Baltic. It would be necessary, of course, to place British agents in all the principal neutral ports to give notice if such ships, ignoring the warning, sailed to German ports. Recent developments of wireless telegraphy, and the completeness of cable communications render such a course perfectly easy to carry out, though no precise precedent of a similar procedure in past wars can be quoted, as without these modern inventions it would not be practicable."

Bell concludes:

"Captain Hankey's principal contention was well reasoned: we were obliged to impose a blockade by squadrons stationed as no blockading forces had ever been stationed before, and we were obliged to supplement our naval control of the North sea by a vast network of watching posts in neutral harbours.

"Again, Captain Hankey's abstract contention that the old operation of blockade was being merged into the greater operations of economic war, was quite sound."

Bell quotes Hankey again:

"There is no instance to be found in modern history of a war in which commerce has played a vitally important part, owing to the fact that recent wars have not been fought between nations susceptible—as are Great Britain and Germany—to attack through their commerce, and there are no data on which to calculate what means it will be necessary to adopt in such a war. The difficulties of blockade, due to modern inventions, suggest that even greater latitude may be necessary in the future than in the past. The negotiators of the declaration of London have made the fatal error of basing their agreement not on the experience of past wars (for in the Napoleonic wars and all previous wars, when commerce was an important consideration, the greatest latitude was claimed and exercised) and not on a scientific appreciation of possible future wars, but have rested themselves on the experience of a few very recent wars in which the weapon of sea power, as a means of putting pressure to bear on the inferior naval power, had no scope for exertion."

Bell commented:

"Captain Hankey noted, against Mahan and Bowles, that economic pressure had not been decisive in the past against France; but it might be made so in the future, against Germany, if it were exerted by more than one engine of pressure. This proved true, and on the question of contraband, Hankey also foresaw, that inasmuch as economic warfare was inevitable, so, contraband would inevitably be assimilated to all substances that are essential to modern industries."

Bell quoted Hankey again:

"It will now be shown that the severe limitations placed by the declaration of London on the articles which can be declared contraband will have a most important effect in counteracting the results of our efforts to produce economic pressure on Germany by naval means. The articles included in the list of conditional contraband and in the free list comprise to all intents and purposes the whole of Germany's seaborne trade. That is to say that all these articles can be conveyed during war into or out of any German port in neutral bottoms unless we have declared a blockade of that port. The only remedy is to establish a blockade of the whole German coast. So far as the ports in the North sea are concerned this should present no insurmountable difficulty. In the case of the Baltic ports it is far otherwise...

"How then is economic pressure to be exerted? What becomes of the stoppage of Germany's income derived from import duties? How are the shrinkage of capital, the closing down of factories,

and the simultaneous raising of prices to be effected, when the whole of Germany's trade can be carried by neutral vessels… entering Hamburg "through the back door," viz., the Kiel canal, to say nothing of the Baltic ports?

"From the above it would seem that those critics of the declaration of London who state that the declaration ties our right arm have good grounds for their assertion.

"Now let us examine what the position would be if the declaration did not exist. In that case our obvious course, to be adopted as soon as the naval situation permitted, would be to declare a blockade of the North sea ports, and simultaneously to make a sweeping declaration of what was contraband, including all the principal raw materials on which German manufactures depend as well as her main articles of export. Neutral vessels would be rigorously held up and examined outside the Cattegat; the doctrine of continuous voyage would be rigorously applied; a system of agents in Swedish, Danish and Russian ports would apprise us as to how trans-shipment was taking place and measures would be taken to deal with offenders; these steps would probably be supplemented by raids by destroyers and light craft into the vicinity of Baltic ports with which trade was known to continue. These measures would not absolutely stop trade from the outside world with German Baltic ports—even in the Napoleonic wars trade with the continent never ceased altogether—but the trade would be diminished and harassed as was the trade of France in the wars of a century ago." (pp. 22-7)

The New Naval Strategy

And so the Admiralty abandoned its plans for a close Blockade of Germany for a distant one:

"As the new high command considered, that, if any attempt were made to execute the existing war plan, the fleet would sustain severe and even dangerous losses, during the first weeks of the war, it was natural, that they lost no time in cancelling it, and superseding it by another. They did, indeed, prepare a new project very quickly; for the first draft was ready in May, 1912, and this draft, after many alterations in points of detail, but few or none in points of principle, became the orders under which the fleet took up its war stations in August, 1914.

"The great novelty in these orders is, that, henceforward, there is to be no watch upon the German bight, and that no coastal operations are to be attempted, until the German fleet has been fought and defeated. The fleet and the cruiser squadrons were, therefore, all withdrawn to the outer edges of the North sea, and frequent sweeps into German waters were substituted for the permanent patrol of previous projects. In these orders, therefore, the blockade of the German coast was specifically abandoned. Admiral Troubridge, who was then chief of the staff, seems to have hoped that the watching forces now stationed at the head of the North sea could be vested with the rights of a blockading force, if the declaration of London were not ratified. This was, however, quite untenable; it was not the declaration of London, but the declaration of Paris that made this impossible.

"The project of blockading the German coasts, which had been examined so frequently during the previous four years, was thus abandoned in May, 1912. From that date, the economic objects of the war plan were to stop all trade that was being carried under the German flag, and to confiscate all contraband that was on its way to the enemy" (*The Blockade of Germany*, p.30).

Bell describes the new plan:

"The general idea upon which the initial stage of operations will be based is to utilise our geographical position to cut off all German shipping from oceanic trade. The situation will offer a parallel to that which prevailed in the Anglo-Dutch wars, and the same strategy will be applicable. Investigations have shown that such a proceeding would inflict a degree of injury upon German industrial interests likely to produce serious results upon the economic welfare of the whole State. A close commercial blockade is unnecessary for this purpose provided that the entrances to the North sea from the westward are closed" (*The Blockade of Germany*, p.30).

A line of 70,000 mines were to be laid across from the Royal Navy base in Scapa Flow to the coast of Norway. In front of that sat squadrons of British cruisers barring the way. This sealed the sea route to and from Germany in the North. In the South the English Channel was sealed by the Dover Patrol in front of a double line of mines and nets.

This was not a blockade as would be recognized by international law. Blockades from far-off were illegal. The Declaration of London only restated the established position that a blockade must not extend beyond the ports and coasts of an enemy, and had to be effective in order to be binding. A fleet sealing off the North Sea and English Channel did not constitute a blockade of the enemy and therefore had no right to seize naval prize beyond what constituted 'contraband.'

The British Admiralty was aware of this and the fact that it would have to make an effort to subscribe to international maritime law due in particular to considerations of satisfying America. Therefore, in the absence of a legal blockade the fullest extension of 'contraband' would have to be instituted, despite the Declaration of London, to make Royal Navy operations against German trade effective.

As a result the Order in Council of 20th August 1914 abolished the difference between 'absolute contraband' (recognised war material that could be seized on the way to any destination) and 'conditional contraband' (material that had not a specifically military application and which could only be seized if intended for an enemy but not if destined for a neutral port).

A recent book has appeared suggesting that there was another British strategy that ran parallel with the one that was developed and put into practice. The book is *'Planning Armageddon'* by Nicholas Lambert. Lambert claims that Britain intended to launch another form of economic and commercial war to destroy the German economy quickly by disrupting its credit, insurance provision and commercial infrastructure. This was a kind of economic cataclysm that, it was thought, with the aid of the City of London, work much faster than the traditional blockade of the Navy to bring Germany to melt-down.

Lambert shows that an attempt to implement it was made but upon putting it into practice it threatened to engulf the entire financial system, endangering the City itself, and was quickly abandoned. The pre-existing plans, developed over a decade by the Navy and CID were fallen back on.

The Naval Blockade was the traditional way of war for England for historical reasons. It was an immensely flexible form of warfare because it could be loosened or tightened as seen fit, as needs must. In the Great War certain products

like coal and cotton were allowed by England to find their way through neutral countries to the enemy in the initial stages. Later the Blockade was ratcheted up when German trade was captured. When the US entered the War in April 1917 this removed the main neutral consideration and the gloves really came off.

British wars were slow acting affairs because they were aimed at crushing continental opponents and taking their commerce in the most destructive way possible. They were designed to grind an opponent into the dust in a way that made the maximum impression upon them and others who might be tempted to step into their shoes. Short wars fought by land armies were effective at militarily defeating an enemy but they were not suitable for British purposes in the world. They were for the more stylish Continentals who did not find war a normal way of life and who wanted to finish with it as soon as possible, so that normal life could resume. War, as long as it remained in this form of limited liability, was normal life for England.

The length of the Great War was determined by the unexpected ability of the Germans to resist. But it was also affected by the objectives of the Great War on Britain's part. Those Liberals and Irish who supported it imagined the War would be quick because they convinced themselves that it was just about the defeat of Evil. They refused to accept it as a Balance of Power commercial war that needed more time to run its course and achieve its objectives. Those who understood its real character and took the moral froth as no more than necessary dressing understood it as an attritional project. And when the Liberals who started the War showed themselves unwilling to wage it fully they were replaced by those who were.

But they did not expect how attritional it would actually be. It was meant as a British Naval Blockade, while Russia and France, supported by a small British Expeditionary Force, did most of the fighting and dying. But England had to take on more of the fighting and dying than imagined, volunteering was amazingly successful under the moral propaganda and then there was Conscription. And so England expended far more blood and treasure in winning its War than was good for it, or the Empire, and its position in the world.

Hankey Reveals All

By 1912 all the elements of Britain's Great War on Germany were coming together. Hankey described these openly in *The Supreme Command*:

> "Let it be placed to their credit that, having taken their decision and having adopted a clear and definite policy, the Government worked it out in full detail so that... The country was in many respects well prepared... The naval plans were fully elaborated, and the Admiralty had ready alternative plans to meet developments in the situation. The dispositions of the various elements in the fleet had been predetermined. The fleet rendezvous were decided on... Rapid mobilisation was ensured. The Army was equally ready. Every detail had been worked out for the mobilisation of the Regular Army and its transport to a place of concentration in France prearranged with the French General Staff... The railway and shipping and embarkation arrangements were complete. The rapid mobilisation of both the regular and territorial forces was organised,,, Behind the naval and military preparations much had been done by the Committee of Imperial Defence to organise the resources of the nation. The maximum of secrecy both of naval and military movements had been provided for by the various means of censorship... Provision had been made for cutting the enemy's cables. World-wide systems of naval and military intelligence had been preconcerted... In all parts of the British Empire plans had been worked out for seizing and detaining enemy ships in our ports on the outbreak of war and for intercepting those on the high seas. A commercial policy, based on the old rule against trade with the enemy, and designed to increase the pressure of the blockade upon him and to preserve our own essential supplies, had been decided upon... The general lines of our policy on all these questions were known to the Governments of the Dominions, and corresponding arrangements had been throughout the British Empire. Every detail had been thought out and every possible safeguard provided for ensuring that, once decided on, these arrangements should be put in operation rapidly and without a lurch. The responsibility for all action was fixed, and there was neither hiatus or overlap between the departments. The necessary instruments—legislation, Orders-in-Council, Proclamations and Instructions—were drafted and set up in type and in the hands of those who would have to act on them. From the King to the printer, everyone knew what he had to do" (*The Supreme Command*, pp. 137-9)

The fleet was mobilised to battle positions prior to the Declaration of War on Germany on 4th August 1914. The British and French had divided up the theatres of operation against the Germans with the Royal Navy taking the primary position in the North Sea and the French Navy, the Mediterranean.

In March 1914 it had been decided to place every available Royal Navy warship in home waters and on a war footing during July and the 30,000 strong reserves was called out. On 29th July, six days before the declaration of war on Germany, a force of 150 battleships, cruisers and destroyers, accompanied by a large force of ancillary vessels, steamed out of their ports to take up battle positions for action against Germany. They began to sweep the seas clean of German commerce.

The British Expeditionary Force was landed in less than 48 hours in France after Asquith's gave the order. The planning for this operation had been taking place over eight years.

The Royal Navy cut the German undersea cables on the opening day of the War making the Germans reliant on the British cables for communicating across the Atlantic and to other parts of the world.

Hankey's work at the Committee of Imperial Defence was revealed in a series of Royal Proclamations on the day after War was declared: It was made an act of treason for any British subject to trade with any German individual or organisation; owners of British merchant ships were warned that their ships would be confiscated if they carried 'contraband' between foreign ports (with 'contraband' being defined by the Admiralty); exporters were warned not to

sell 'contraband' to any foreign buyers.

This had resulted from a key investigation involved the issue of *'Trading with the Enemy'* and how to counter it through the law and the use of severe sanctions against anyone who persisted in it after it was declared illegal. The *'Trading with the Enemy' Inquiry* of 1911-12 produced a 500 page report based on how much commercial intercourse could be tolerated with Germany in wartime but dealing with the Blockade in its entirety. Its conclusion was that, despite loss of business, the War would have to be a total one with no toleration of trading with the enemy.

The War Room which had been monitoring and plotting the position of every German naval vessel and large merchantman at eight hourly intervals since 1907 communicated its information to the Royal Navy. Within a week all German maritime trade was driven from the seas (see Nicholas Lambert, *Planning Armageddon*, p. 211-2).

Another Committee of Imperial Defence contingency was put into operation when Lloyds of London issued an order for all ships to proceed to the nearest British port or lose insurance cover. Any carrying foodstuffs and proceeding east were seized and their cargoes confiscated and declared 'prize'. All German-owned ships were declared 'prize'. Neutral ships were prevented from leaving British ports unless they surrendered their cargoes.

The Blockade of Germany and Europe began.

Britain's Colonial allies, who had been informed by Grey of the War against Germany in the years prior to its declaration, and who had been involved in planning for the event as part of the War, put their forces at the Empire's disposal. Within weeks of the British declaration of war South African troops moved against German possessions in Togo, and South West Africa. Australian and New Zealand armies occupied German bases in the Pacific e.g. Samoa. The Indian Army descended on Mesopotamia even before a declaration of war on the Ottomans in November 1914.

Within a few weeks the British Government began to ignore the *Declaration of London*, seizing cargoes bound for Germany regardless of the flag that carried them. Food was then treated as absolute contraband after the German Government nationalised its food production as a defence mechanism against the Blockade.

Hankey's work at the Committee of Imperial Defence began to bear its fruit.

In his lectures at Cambridge in 1945 Hankey quoted Sir Julian Corbett from his *'Official History. Naval Operations'* (p.18) as *"summing up the position very fairly"* when he wrote:

> "Amongst the many false impressions that prevailed, when after a lapse of a century we found ourselves involved in a great war, not the least erroneous is the belief that we were not prepared for it. Whether the scale on which we prepared was as large as the signs of the times called for, whether we did right to cling to our long-tried system of a small Army and a large Navy, are questions that will long be debated; but given the scale that we deliberately chose to adopt, there is no doubt that the machinery for setting our forces in action had reached an ordered completeness in detail that has no parallel in our history" (*Government Control in War*, p.28).

Edward Grey's famous 3rd August speech had three times referred to England's sacrifice in entering the War as being primarily an economic one and as having been much the same if she had decided to stay out. It was anticipation, therefore, of Blockade plus small expeditionary force as Britain's War on Germany. It was intended as a blending of continental and Atlanticist strategies—Hankey's Blockade and Haldane's British Expeditionary Force. There was no Liberal intention of fighting a large extensive land war or any plans for it—although others in the British State, who now took command of the War Office, had every desire and intention of doing so.

Grey presented the War he had had planned by Hankey as an easy option for England—a kind of sure bet. And he totally believed it himself.

Prime Minister Asquith appointed Lord Kitchener to the War Office and he began to make contingencies for large volunteer armies almost immediately. Hankey's and Admiral Fisher's fears that an escalation of commitment was inevitable were proved to be correct—although the infusion of a great moral dimension to the War by the Liberal and Irish converts to war-mongering that led to large scale volunteering staved off conscription for two years.

Hankey wrote in *The Supreme Command*:

> "On the night of August 4th-5th, once the War Telegraph had been dispatched, nothing that I could do could influence the situation. I felt no great anxiety about the ultimate result of the war. Years of saturation in the subject had led to the conviction that in the long-run sea-power must bring us victory. My belief in sea-power amounted almost to a religion. The Germans, like Napoleon, might overrun the Continent; this might prolong the war, but could not affect the final issue, which would be determined by economic pressure. Hence, on that eventful night, I went to bed excited but confident" (p.165).

Pat Walsh

Appendix—

Plans for War on Ottoman Turkey

Historians have overlooked the role of Maurice Hankey in conducting spying operations on behalf of Royal Naval Intelligence in the Summer of 1907 based on the contingency that Britain would soon be at war with Germany and Turkey.

Hankey and his colleagues scrutinized the harbours and naval defences of the Ottoman Empire from Syria, through to Smyrna and Istanbul, up to Trabzon on the Black Sea. He surveyed, in particular, the coastal defences of the Dardanelles with an amphibious landing at Gallipoli in mind, to follow up a report of the Committee of Imperial Defence entitled *'The Possibility of a Joint Naval and*

Military Attack upon the Dardanelles', which had been produced originally in December 1906.

And it was Hankey, as Secretary to the CID, who first proposed to the British War Cabinet in December 1914 that the pre-War plans should be considered and put into operation as soon as possible.

In the Summer of 1907 Hankey went with the fleet to Constantinople. The Royal Navy were guests of the Ottoman Sultan who entertained and decorated the English visitors. As an ally of Britain, the Sultan allowed Hankey and the Navy Intelligence officers to tour the defences of Istanbul and the Straits. However, Hankey used the opportunity for Intelligence gathering for one of the future plans of the Great War on Turkey, an attack on the Straits:

> "During the journey up and down the Dardanelles I made such scrutiny of the defences as was possible from the ship, enlisting the assistance of some of the most able officers of the fleet. We all agreed that they could not be forced by naval attack, and I reported accordingly to the admiralty, a fact I was to recall in 1915 when the attack on the Dardanelles was under construction" ((The Supreme Command, p.42).

Hankey noted further investigations taken in this area later:

> "Another somewhat elaborate inquiry… which lasted from March 1908 to the end of January 1909, had been held into the Baghdad Railway, Southern Persia, and the Persian Gulf, which had resulted in defining our policies in these regions. As early as February 1907… the Committee of Imperial Defence had examined the question of forcing the Dardanelles, and it is interesting to recall that the conclusion had been reached that the landing of an expeditionary force on the Gallipoli Peninsula would involve great risk and should only be undertaken if no other means for putting pressure on Turkey were available" (*The Supreme Command*, p.75).

One of the greatest British concerns at this time was the proposed Berlin-Baghdad Railway which threatened to enhance Eurasian trade beyond the guns of the Royal Navy. This was also seen as a cheaper and faster way of moving goods that gave the European continent a competitive edge over the maritime market established and controlled by Britain.

In 1907 Britain concluded an agreement with Tsarist Russia involving a settling of accounts in the Great Game and the partition of Persia between England and Russia that secured the Persian Gulf for Britain. Edward Grey sold the agreement in England as a peace policy and that was music to the ears of the Liberal backbenchers, who despite their detestation of 'Russian autocracy' were prepared to celebrate the agreement as securing the peace of the world.

An alliance with France was, by itself, of no use to England against Germany. The great prize was also an understanding with Russia coupled with the *Entente Cordiale*. Britain was an island nation and it was primarily a sea power. It did not have a large army and it had opposed conscription. Therefore, it would have been impossible for Britain to have defeated Germany by itself. It needed and wanted the large French army and the even larger Russian army to do most of the fighting on the continent for it.

The Russian Army was particularly important and it was seen to be like a 'steamroller' that would roll all the way to Berlin, crushing German resistance by its sheer weight of numbers. Britain's main weapon of war and her instrument for the strangulation of Germany was the Royal Navy. A British blockade of Germany could only be effective if Russia was at war with her at the same time and sealing off her supply of food from the east. If not, Germany could derive an inexhaustible supply of food and materials from eastern Europe and could not be strangled by the Royal Navy—despite its immense power. And even an alliance between England and France could not achieve the crushing of Germany since only one frontier could be blocked.

Hankey's revelations confirm that it was Britain's intention to draw the Ottoman Empire into its war on Germany, at least seven years prior to the Great War itself. This became essential when the arrangement with Russia was made since the Tsar wanted Constantinople as the price for the loan of his steamroller.

The agreement with Russia gave the Tsar the chance to expand into the Balkans and possibly to the Straits at Istanbul where he desired an exit point for his fleet—a desire of Russia's for centuries and the Tsar's first strategic priority which Britain had up till then taken great care to prevent.

Half of all Russian trade went through the Straits and grain exporting was essential in creating the agricultural reforms necessary to produce a stable class of Russian peasantry. Britain forbade Russian naval entry into the Mediterranean and war involved the closure of the Straits to shipping. So the Tsar was desperate to secure this outlet with British consent. So Grey turned the British foreign policy of a century around to organise the war alliance against Germany. In doing so he made war on and the destruction of the Ottoman Empire a prerequisite.

Grey's future gift of Constantinople would mean the end of the Ottoman Empire and a free for all involving its territory. So Britain began to make plans for the strategic parts it wanted—in Mesopotamia and Palestine.

As his biographer Stephen Roskill notes when Hankey mentioned *"certain contingencies"* in a letter to his wife, *"'certain contingencies' were a war with Germany in which Turkey were her ally"* (*Hankey—Man of Secrets*, p.82).

And so Britain's Great War on Germany became a World War.

3rd-4th Quarters 2014, January 2015

Orders to: athol-st@atholbooks.org