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DECLINE OF THE DREADNOUGHT: BRITAIN AND
THE WASHINGTON NAVAL CONFERENCE, 1921-1922

A Dissertation Presented

by

RAYMOND C. GAMBLE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February 1993

Department of History

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DECLINE OF THE DREADNOUGHT: BRITAIN AND
THE WASHINGTON NAVAL CONFERENCE, 1921-1922

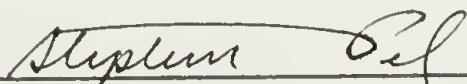
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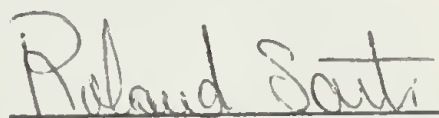
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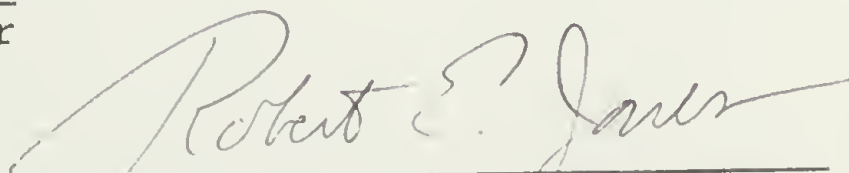
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of
FRANKLIN B. WICKWIRE,
a gentleman and a scholar.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have assisted me in the preparation of this study. Dr. Mariam Chrisman of the Department of History at the University of Massachusetts took patience with a beginning graduate student and encouraged me to write the best work within my grasp, rather than to wait for a perfected product. Lieutenant Colonel James Wheeler of the Department of History at the United States Military Academy, where I was privileged to serve as a member of the faculty, strongly encouraged me to continue beyond my first graduate degree and made time available for further research. The Science Research Laboratory at the United States Military Academy provided funds to support the research upon which this work is based. Dr. Franklin Wickwire of the Department of History at the University of Massachusetts kindly spent untold hours polishing the initial drafts of this manuscript. My dissertation committee, chaired by Dr. Mary Wickwire, greatly improved the final product. I alone bear responsibility for any errors of fact or interpretation. Special thanks go to my wife Sharon, whose encouragement and great patience made this work possible.

ABSTRACT

DECLINE OF THE DREADNOUGHT: BRITAIN AND
THE WASHINGTON NAVAL CONFERENCE, 1921-1922

FEBRUARY 1993

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This dissertation examines Britain's decision to cede naval parity to the United States at the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922. The study recognizes that scholarly opinion emphasizes the role of economic weakness in Britain's decision to accept capital ship limitation. The most useful sources in this study are the Cabinet and Admiralty records at the Public Record Office, London. The accounts of the various subcommittees of the Committee of Imperial Defence and the Cabinet Finance Committee are essential. Three sets of records are particularly helpful for the Conference itself: the papers of the British Empire Delegation, the State Department's Conference on the Limitation of Armament, and Butler and Bury's Documents on British Foreign Policy. The papers of the members of the British government provide limited assistance. At the turn of the century, the Royal Navy, imbued with the Alfred Thayer Mahan's doctrines of sea power, enjoyed the nation's confidence. The Great War

damaged the reputations of both the battleship and its most ardent supporters. At the Paris Peace Conference, the United States challenged the supremacy of British sea power. In the face of the continuing American naval construction, the British policy of supremacy with economy became untenable. The Jutland and submarine controversies of 1920 exacerbated the government's loss of faith in the battleship and led to an investigation into the future weapons of the Navy. The Imperial Conference of 1921 precluded the possibility of Dominion support for a naval building program or a decision to renew the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in the face of American opposition. The British Empire Delegation at the Washington Conference sought the maximum relief from naval expenditure consonant with traditional measures of national security. In the face of American proposals for Anglo-American equality and a ten-year holiday in naval construction, Britain salvaged superiority in cruisers and a two new battleships. These results lead to the conclusion that the Cabinet no longer believed that the battleship remained the ultimate arbiter of naval disputes. The Cabinet therefore choose to disregard the advice of the Admiralty and accept the naval limitation agreement.

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INTRODUCTION

This work developed from a question posed by a cadet at the United States Military Academy. After listening for most of a semester to an interpretation of modern history colored by frequent and respectful references to the power of the Royal Navy, he wanted to know why the British had agreed to the limitations on their naval strength imposed by the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922. The resulting treaties struck the cadet as a repudiation of longstanding British national policy; the question struck his teacher as worthy of investigation. Since the Restoration, a long line of British statesmen pursued the security and prosperity of the British Empire through adherence to three constant principles: a balance of power in Europe, the defense of imperial possessions, and, above all, the command of the seas. The Royal Navy served as the twine which bound the Empire together. Why, in 1921, had London agreed to a conference on naval disarmament?

The answer, in short, reflected the changes wrought by the First World War. When George Nathaniel Curzon, K.G., P.C., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., F.R.S., Baron Curzon of Kedleston, Baron Ravensdale, Viscount Scarsdale, and 1st Earl of Kedleston, assumed duties as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in January, 1919, the traditional formula for security seemed inadequate. The First World War had imposed a massive strain on the Treasury and had given rise to new

challengers for naval supremacy, Japan and the United States of America. The war had also complicated the formulation of British national policy; the official British mind, once comfortably insulated in a small office in Whitehall, increasingly felt the pressure of public opinion and the Dominions. The tension between retaining command of the seas, establishing satisfactory foreign relations, and relieving the current economic burden caused division within the Lloyd George ministry. British participation in the Washington Naval Conference reflected a resolution of that tension.

I suggest that a specific pattern of events informed the British decision to accept President Harding's invitation to Washington. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Royal Navy, imbued with the doctrine of sea power espoused by Alfred Thayer Mahan, enjoyed the nation's confidence. The First World War damaged the reputations of both the battleship and its most ardent supporters. At the Paris Peace Conference, the United States challenged the supremacy of British sea power. In the face of the continuing American naval construction, the British policy of supremacy with economy became untenable. The Jutland and submarine controversies of 1920 exacerbated the government's lack of confidence in the capital ship and led to an investigation, independent of the Admiralty, into the future role of the capital ship in the Navy. The Imperial

Conference of 1921 precluded the possibility of Dominion support for a naval building program or a decision to renew the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in the face of American opposition. Thus, the British Empire Delegation (B.E.D.) at the Washington Conference sought the maximum relief from naval expenditure consonant with traditional measures of national security. In the face of sweeping American proposals for Anglo-American equality and a ten-year holiday in naval construction, Balfour salvaged superiority in cruisers and a small program of new battleship construction.

The most useful sources in this study are the Cabinet and Admiralty records. The Admiralty records on most issues contain the Board's position and reasoning in considerable detail, largely in the form of Board minutes and memoranda to the Cabinet. The Cabinet papers, which far too often register conclusions with only scant summaries of the preceding discussions, are generally less effective at illuminating the government's decision-making processes. The accounts of the various subcommittees of the Committee of Imperial Defence (the Cabinet's strategic planning forum) and the Cabinet Finance Committee constitute fortunate exceptions to the general trend. The Parliamentary Debates (commonly known as Hansard) supported C.L. Mowat's generalization: "low-grade ore for the historian."¹ Three

¹C.L. Mowat, Great Britain Since 1914 (Ithaca, NY, 1971), 54.

sets of records were particularly helpful for the Conference itself: the papers of the British Empire Delegation (CAB 30 series), which unfortunately were available only in microfilm; the State Department's Conference on the Limitation of Armament, which contained the transcripts of the plenary and committee sessions in a more accessible format than the Cabinet records; and Butler and Bury's Documents on British Foreign Policy, which published most of the correspondence between the Cabinet and the B.E.D. in Washington.

Of the major actors within the British government, Admiral David Beatty wrote most extensively on the development of British sea power between 1919 and 1922. The private papers of Arthur Balfour proved marginally helpful. Eric and Auckland Geddes left no writings at all. I have not had the opportunity to examine the papers of Austen Chamberlain or those of David Lloyd George, who, to a great degree, relied on oral arguments rather than detailed position papers. Winston Churchill's contributions are well established through the voluminous biographies of Randolph Churchill and Martin Gilbert. The published papers of Admirals Fisher and Jellicoe are extremely good on limited points, while most of the political memoirs (those of Colonel House excepted) provide little more than anecdotes.

The work of four or five historians has been particularly useful. Max Beloff provides the best overview

to the concerns of the Cabinet. Stephen Roskill contributes a reliable introduction to the workings of the Admiralty during the inter-war period. The Sprouts, who have written the standard work on the arms control negotiations from 1918-1922, emphasize the American perspective. Roger Dingman, who seems unduly concerned with parochial interests, still renders the most detailed coverage of the naval arms limitation process in Britain. In my opinion, however, none of these authors places sufficient weight on the Cabinet's loss of confidence in the capital ship in their explanation of the British decision to accept naval arms limitation.

CHAPTER 1

BRITAIN'S MATERIAL POSITION

The story of Britain's participation in the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922 is closely bound up with the rise and fall of the pound sterling. Two leading naval theorists, Alfred Thayer Mahan and Paul Kennedy, have taken diametrically opposed views on the value of the Royal Navy as a creator of wealth in the twentieth century. Most historians of the naval conference have attributed Britain's willingness to bargain away her long-standing naval superiority to economic difficulties. But considerations other than financial also figure in some historical assessments. One school of thought has focused on the role of Canada in the transformation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, completed at Washington. Another group of authors has emphasized the desire of British leaders to promote Anglo-American cooperation. Recent work on the conference, while acknowledging the role of finance, has moved away from simple economic determinism and underscored developments in British domestic politics.

Modern naval theory began with Alfred Thayer Mahan at the end of the nineteenth century. Earlier naval historians, influenced by Edward Creasy's concern with "decisive battles" and Thomas Carlyle's emphasis on heroes, focused on the finer points of tactics and the exploits of charismatic captains without examining the larger framework

within which fleet engagements took place. Mahan, a career naval officer, surveyed the rise and fall of nations rather than the exchange of broadsides. He produced his seminal work The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783 in 1890.¹ As a publicist as well as an historian, he sought to influence naval development within Great Britain and his native America. Mahan discussed the factors that influenced maritime strength and then examined the course of modern European history to demonstrate the value of sea power.

Sea power, according to Mahan, involved control of the sea, particularly the world's shipping lanes. He saw sea-borne commerce as an irreplaceable source of wealth. He recognized that the development of railroads and motorways had reduced the relative superiority of water transport, but he asserted that water remained "the great medium of transportation."² Monopoly of the shipping lanes therefore enabled the holder to profit through sea-borne commerce and to deny the same benefits to an opponent.³ Mahan argued:

¹His other major works included The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire 1793-1812 (1892), and The Life of Nelson: The Embodiment of the Sea Power of Great Britain (1897).

²Alfred Thayer Mahan, as recorded in Margaret Sprout, "Mahan: Evangelist of Sea Power" in Edward Earle, ed, The Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler (Princeton, 1971), 424.

³Bernard Brodie, A Guide to Naval Strategy (Princeton, 1958), 13-14, notes the same functions and adds the shelling of shore installations, the transportation of troops between theaters, and the denial of those options to the enemy.

It is not the taking of individual ships or convoys, be they few or many, that strikes down the money power of a nation; it is the possession of that overbearing power on the sea that drives the enemy's flag from it, or allows it to appear only as a fugitive; and which, by controlling the great common, closes the highways by which commerce moves to and from the enemy's shores.⁴

Mahan clearly appreciated the economic component of war, identifying the profit of commerce, "the sinews of war," as the ultimate object of naval warfare. His analysis reflected traditional British strategic thought. Henry Dundas, Secretary at War under Pitt the Younger, had adopted a similar attitude. Defending British strategy since the onset of war with Revolutionary France to the House of Commons in March 1801, Dundas stated:

we ought as early as we can at the beginning of a war to cut off the commercial resources of our enemies as by doing so we infallibly weaken or destroy their naval resources.⁵

Although he never precisely defined sea power, Mahan advanced the possession and concentration of a superior fleet as the most effective strategy for obtaining command of the sea.

Mahan clearly stood for the concentration of ships into a powerful fleet. In order to achieve control of the sea, he felt a nation should focus its sea power on the

⁴Alfred Thayer Mahan, The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783 (Boston, 1894), 138.

⁵Henry Dundas, as recorded in Herbert Richmond, Statesman and Sea Power (Oxford, 1946), 338.

destruction of the opposing fleet, guerre d'escadres (fleet combat). He wrote:

If naval warfare is a war of posts, then the action of fleets must be subordinate to the attack and defence of the posts; if its object is to break up the enemy's power on the sea, cutting off his communications with the rest of his possessions, drying up the sources of his wealth in his commerce, and making possible a closure of his ports, then the object of attack must be his organized military forces afloat; in short, his navy.⁶

The success of such an attack depended upon the strength of broadsides, "the power of offensive action," rather than speed.⁷ Mahan insisted that "the maximum power of the fleet..and not the maximum power of a single ship, is the true object of battleship construction" and utterly denounced any division of the battle-fleet.⁸ He extolled the value of numerical superiority, echoing Nelson's dictum that "numbers only can annihilate."⁹

⁶Mahan, Sea Power, 288.

⁷ Alfred Thayer Mahan, as recorded by Sprout, "Mahan: Evangelist of Sea Power" in Earle, Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler, 433. Sprout suggests that Mahan's emphasis on concentration of the fleet reflected his reading of Swiss military theorist Antoine-Henri, Baron de Jomini, who advocated concentration of force as an eternal principle of war.

⁸ Alfred Thayer Mahan, as recorded in Philip Crowl, "Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Naval Historian" in Peter Paret, ed, Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age (Princeton, 1986), 458.

⁹ Alfred Thayer Mahan, The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire 1793-1812 (Boston, 1895), Vol II, 186.

Mahan considered commerce raiding as a supplementary activity to guerre d'escadres. Commercial vessels, without naval protection, stood little chance for survival in times of war and thus represented a lucrative target for a rival fleet. Other theorists, particularly the contemporary French Jeune École, advocated guerre de course (commerce raiding) as the primary focus of naval warfare. Admiral Hyacinthe Aube, leader of the influential French school of naval thought, shared Mahan's appreciation for the value of the sinews of war and asserted that "everything which gets at the source of these riches becomes not only legitimate but obligatory."¹⁰ Mahan admitted that "the harassment and distress caused to a country by serious interference with its commerce will be conceded by all." As a war-fighting strategy, however, he portrayed commerce raiding as "a most dangerous delusion."¹¹ He reasoned that a nation which dispersed its warships against the opposing merchant marine would see her naval strength destroyed piecemeal by successive encounters with the enemy fleet. Mahan thus referred to raiding as "a secondary operation" of war."¹² He

¹⁰Admiral Aube, as recorded in Arthur Marder, The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880-1905 (New York, 1940), 87.

¹¹Alfred Thayer Mahan, as recorded by Crowl, "Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Naval Historian" in Paret, From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age, 459.

¹²Mahan, French Empire, Vol II, 197.

suggested that the absolute priority in naval warfare should be the destruction of the opposing fleet, after which the hapless merchant marine would face a Hobson's choice of remaining uselessly in port or facing inevitable capture.

Naval strategy, according to Mahan, remained unchanging. He defined strategy as follows: "Naval strategy has for its end to found, support and increase, as well in peace as in war, the sea power of a country." He made a clear distinction between strategy and tactics, which concerned particular battles and on which he acknowledged the impact of technology. He noted that "from time to time, the superstructure of tactics has to be altered or wholly torn down; but the old foundations of strategy so far remain, as though laid upon a rock."¹³ The possessor of a superior fleet assumed the offensive and sought an engagement, while a nation faced with superior sea power maintained its fleet in an impregnable port, as the existence of such a "fleet in being" compelled the enemy to sustain a burdensome blockade.¹⁴ The turbine engine replaced the wind as the motive power of warships, but the workings of sea power remained constant for Mahan. Maritime commerce still provided unmatched economic benefits, and the concentration of battleships into a powerful fleet

¹³Mahan, Sea Power, 88-89.

¹⁴Sprout, "Mahan: Evangelist of Sea Power" in Earle, Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler, 433.

constituted the most effective means of competing for control of the sea.

Mahan also addressed the crucial role of the national government which affected sea power through the resourcing and management of the navy. He argued that the sea power of any given nation reflected her endowment with certain resources: "geographical position; physical conformation, including, as connected therewith, natural productions and climate; extent of territory; number of population; character of the people; and character of the government, including therein the national institutions."¹⁵ Geography determined the quality of a country's ports, requirements for defense upon land (which reduced the resources available for use at sea), and ease of access to the shipping lanes. A merchant marine served as a source of revenue and a reservoir of ships and trained sailors for the navy. The natural resources which informed sea power varied according to the era; oak trees (2,500 of which sufficed to build Nelson's Victory) had given place to coal, which would in turn yield to oil. While he advocated unequivocally the maintenance of a superior fleet as the timeless strategy for obtaining command of the sea, he complained that democratic regimes "are not generally favorable to military expenditure, however necessary" and that the British had

¹⁵Mahan, Sea Power, 28-29.

neglected their fleet in the late nineteenth century.¹⁶ He sought to awaken the Anglo-American publics to the value of investing in sea power, particularly the battleship. His writings offered support to those who argued for more men, more ships, bigger ships, faster ships--at ever-increasing costs.

Posterity credits Mahan with raising important questions to which the march of time has rendered his answers largely irrelevant. One analyst, after citing "the vastly increased strength of land power vis-à-vis sea power in Europe, and certain technological developments which made sea blockade a less deadly weapon than it had previously been," questioned whether "Mahan grasped the significance of these world-wide changes."¹⁷ Another condemned his neglect of "power-projection from the seas" and "the interdependence of armies and navies in wartime."¹⁸

The validity of these criticisms appears increasingly questionable as one moves chronologically backward from the Second World War. A modern strategist noted that Mahan's "architecture of naval power...explained clearly why the handful of big battleships would actually make all the

¹⁶Mahan, Sea Power, 67.

¹⁷Sprout, "Mahan: Evangelist of Sea Power" in Earle, Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler, 422.

¹⁸Crowl, "Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Naval Historian" in Paret, From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age, 461.

difference" until the advent of the submarine.¹⁹ A contemporary naval historian explained the success of the primitive German submarines in the Great War largely in terms of the British Admiralty's unwillingness to adopt the practice of convoy rather than any inherent superiority of the submarine over the anti-submarine weapons of the time.²⁰ From a naval perspective, Mahan's discussion of sea power remained valid in the first third of the twentieth century.

Although Mahan's ideas held sway before World War I, subsequent scholars who studied the relationship of sea power to the economy differed. One such theorist, the naval historian Paul Kennedy, offered an alternative interpretation of the relationship between economic and military power. To be sure, both theorists recognize the mutual influence of economic and military strength. Kennedy, however, rejected Mahan's proposition that sea power directly produces wealth. In his most recent work, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000, he suggested that since the Industrial Revolution, economic strength generates military might with far more certainty than the reverse, in effect turning Mahan on his head.

¹⁹Edward Luttwak, On the Meaning of Victory: Essays on Strategy (New York, 1986), 100.

²⁰Dan van der Vat, The Atlantic Campaign: World War II's Great Struggle at Sea (New York, 1988), 36-42.

The ability of the Great Powers to supply their armed forces with the "sinews of war" rested upon their economic capacities. Kennedy wrote:

Once their productive capacity was enhanced, countries would normally find it easier to sustain the burdens of paying for large-scale armaments in peacetime and of maintaining and supplying large fleets in wartime.

Kennedy then went beyond the truism that military strength requires an adequate economic base. First, he noted that Great Powers experience economic growth at varying rates. Second, while admitting that "economic prosperity does not always and immediately translate into military effectiveness," he asserted that changes in the economic capacity of the Great Powers have led to all of the shifts in their relative military power.²¹ The outcomes of the Great Power wars have in turn confirmed these shifts in relative economic position.²²

From the general position that wealth produces military strength more effectively than the reverse, Kennedy went on to challenge Mahan's interpretation of the wealth-producing nature of sea power at the turn of the twentieth century.

²¹Paul Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000 (New York, 1987), 439, xvi.

²²Kennedy, Great Powers, 537, questions whether the changing status of the Great Powers contributed to the outbreak of war. Geoffrey Blaney, in The Causes of War (New York, 1973), suggests that constantly changing economic and military strengths would increase the potential for disagreement as to relative strengths and hence conflict.

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the sea provided the most efficient mode of transportation. From about 1850, however, the major advances associated with industrialization--steam, the factory system, railways, and later electricity--subsequently reduced the economic advantage associated with water-borne transportation.

Kennedy highlighted commentary by navalist Gerald Graham:

It is an interesting commentary on human affairs that Mahan's exposition of the influence of sea power on the course of European and American expansion should have occurred at the very time when new instruments of the Industrial Revolution were beginning to erode principles and theories upon which his doctrines were based.²³

He thus suggested that in accordance with the ideas of British geo-politician Sir Halford MacKinder, sea power had waned relative to land power by the turn of the century.

Kennedy himself noted that "what industrialization did was to take away some of the advantages hitherto enjoyed by smaller, peripheral, naval-cum-commercial states and to give them to the great land-based states." Sea power, according to Kennedy, had failed to keep pace with land power as a source of either economic or military strength.²⁴

In fact, he argued, it became a liability. The international situation which Kennedy depicted featured

²³Gerald Graham, as recorded in Paul Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1983), 177.

²⁴Kennedy, Great Powers, 157.

Great Powers that experienced economic change at different rates, leading to shifts in relative strength. Rising nations, particularly the leading Great Power, tended to assume "overseas obligations (dependence upon foreign markets and raw materials, military alliances, perhaps bases and colonies)" vacated by powers in decline. Kennedy noted:

if a state overextends itself strategically...it runs the risk that the potential benefits from external expansion may be outweighed by the great expense of it all--a dilemma which becomes acute if the nation involved has entered a period of relative economic decline.²⁵

Sea power thus led Great Britain at the turn of the twentieth century toward imperial overstretch--to incur in relation to unprofitable regions costs which would later aggravate the massive deficits imposed by war. The British Empire in the late nineteenth century, in the face of growing French and German competition, increasingly became formal (i.e., London established direct political control, rather than working through local elites) and more expensive to administer. British historian Correlli Barnett denigrated the net value of the Empire to Britain during the Great War, claiming "the whole British position in the Middle East and Southern Asia was in fact a classic, and gigantic, example of strategic over-extension."²⁶ Kennedy

²⁵Kennedy, Great Powers, xvi, xviii.

²⁶Correlli Barnett, The Collapse of British Power (New York, 1972), 75-80.

himself cited the work of Barnett on the British Empire in support of his argument for the concept of imperial overstretch.²⁷

Kennedy's analysis, however, seems ill-suited to Britain during the reign of George V. First, his application of imperial overstretch to the British Empire between the World Wars appears unsound. One historian noted that after 1920, "the empire was very far from being an anachronism; that on the contrary it was only just beginning to pay the dividends its old champions had always expected from it."²⁸ Second, his correlation between the economic strength of a nation and its military might remains a generalization, rather than a description of British circumstance. During the Great War, for example, Britain, despite its massive wealth, experienced enormous difficulty translating its riches into the specific forms of production needed for mass warfare on land.²⁹ The British shipbuilding industry, on the other hand, proved able to respond to wartime demands and to compete successfully in the post-war

²⁷Paul Kennedy, personal interview at the United States Military Academy, April 7, 1989.

²⁸The Empire's share of Britain's exports, for example, rose from 37% between 1920-24 to 49% between 1935-39. See Bernard Porter, The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism 1850-1983 (New York, 1984), 260-61.

²⁹Barnett, Collapse, 84-89. Luttwak, Victory, 142-43, makes the point that there is no automatic correlation between productive capacity and diplomatic power.

world market.³⁰ Finally, Kennedy's reference to the declining importance of Britain's peripheral location only assumes validity at least a decade after the Great War with the development of the bomber and later the rocket. From the perspective of British statesmen in the opening decades of the twentieth century, Mahan's conceptualization of sea power might have constituted the more useful paradigm.

Ignoring the relationship between sea power and economic strength, most interpretations of the Washington Conference have reduced British motives for participation to economic exhaustion. Raymond Buell pioneered this approach in 1922 when he wrote:

For the time being at least, Great Britain was unable to answer the challenge of the United States who was now threatening the British supremacy of the seas. Its finances were in a state of semianarchy and it could not afford to engage in a new race for armaments.³¹

Harold and Margaret Sprout, writing in 1940, shared Buell's emphasis on economic factors. They noted:

Yet, to maintain even a nominal naval equality with the United States, in open and unrestricted competition, would require a financial outlay which Great Britain's war-weakened and seriously depressed economy was then in no condition to bear. Also it could scarcely be doubted that any large British effort in this direction would further stimulate navalism within the United States...requiring still larger expenditures by

³⁰Trevor Wilson, The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918 (Oxford, 1986), 782-83.

³¹Raymond Buell, The Washington Conference (New York, 1922), 141-42.

Great Britain.³²

Thomas Bailey, in a standard short treatment of the subject, noted in 1964 that Britain's economy "had been so badly strained by the war that her taxpayers would welcome a holiday in building."³³ William Braisted took a similar line in 1971:

What Britain needed to compete successfully with the United States was a throbbing economy capable of undertaking new ships comparable to the dreadnoughts and battle cruisers already authorized by Congress and far more. This Lloyd George did not have in his hand.³⁴

Part of the explanation for this monocausal view of British motivation lies in the fact that much of the major work on the subject has been written by Americans.³⁵ These authors concentrated on the United States rather than treating all participants in the conference equally. Yet, lest it be thought that this economic fixation merely reflects American oversimplification, Canadian James Stokesbury, a naval

³²Harold and Margaret Sprout, Toward a New Order of Sea Power: American Naval Policy and the World Scene, 1918-1922 (Princeton, 1940), 26.

³³Thomas Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the American People (New York, 1964), 641.

³⁴William Braisted, The United States Navy in the Pacific 1909-1922 (Austin, TX, 1971), 437.

³⁵C.L. Hoag, Preface to Preparedness: The Washington Conference and Public Opinion (Washington, D.C., 1941); John Vinson, The Parchment Peace: The United States Senate and the Washington Conference 1921-1922 (Athens, GA, 1955); Thomas Buckley, The United States and the Washington Conference, 1921-22 (Knoxville, TN, 1970).

specialist, wrote in 1983:

The treasury was empty; the war had transformed Britain into a debtor country, and a nation that lost thirty-five million working days to strikes in 1919 was not going to welcome an increase in taxes for a new naval race.³⁶

Kennedy himself, in Strategy and Diplomacy 1870-1945, limited his explanation to a brief reference to British economic weakness.³⁷

The general tenor of these dismal appraisals of the British economy seems substantially correct, if somewhat imprecise. That the war weakened His Majesty's Exchequer can scarcely be doubted. The doubling of the value of retained imports from £600 millions in 1914 to £1200 millions in 1918 while exports remained stable at £550 millions during the same period adversely affected Britain's balance of payments. Furthermore, the British national debt, £650 millions before the war, increased by approximately £7 billions during the course of the Great War.³⁸ As a result of these trends, the relative influence

³⁶James Stokesbury, Navy & Empire: A Short History of British Sea Power from the Armada to the Falklands (London, 1983), 343.

³⁷Paul Kennedy, Strategy and Diplomacy 1870-1945 (London, 1983), 68.

³⁸Sidney Pollard, The Development of the British Economy 1914-1967 (New York, 1969), 66-75, gives a figure of £7,186 millions as the deficit on the wartime budgets and notes that the national debt increased by a similar figure; Robert Bunselmeyer, The Cost of the War 1914-1919: British Economic War Aims and the Origins of Reparations (Hamden, CT: 1975), 137.

of Treasury officials vis-à-vis the spending departments, the concept of "Treasury control," increased tremendously immediately upon the signing of the Armistice.³⁹

Nonetheless, Braisted's notion that Britain could not afford "new ships comparable to the dreadnoughts and battle cruisers already authorized by Congress" under the 1916 building program appears an exaggeration. In 1920, the First Sea Lord estimated that four new capital ships would maintain the Royal Navy at a strength roughly equal to that of the American Navy. The construction of four such ships, at that time, would have cost some £38 millions.⁴⁰ Dividing that sum over three years of construction, the outlay required to meet the 1916 program would have been under £13 millions per annum. In the 1920-21 Budget, which surpassed £1400 millions, the Naval Estimate exceeded £84 millions.⁴¹ The Admiralty, which at this time possessed considerable autonomy to determine naval priorities and reallocate funds within total constraints determined by the Cabinet, could have offset partially the cost of capital ship construction by measures such as retiring older ships and putting a higher percentage of the navy into reserve commission. The

³⁹Robin Higham, Armed Forces in Peacetime: Britain, 1918-1940, a Case Study (Foulis, 1962), 278-79.

⁴⁰ADM 116/1775: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Policy and New Construction", November 22, 1920.

⁴¹Robin Higham, Armed Forces, 113.

Lloyd George ministry in the summer of 1921 in fact authorized four such ships to meet the American 1916 program.⁴² This analysis suggests that, from a purely monetary perspective, naval competition remained unwelcome rather than impossible and that financial pressure constituted one reason for the British appearance at Washington, but not the only one.

The economic school contributed an important perspective on the British decision to attend the Washington Conference by emphasizing that naval competition with the United States dominated strategic debate in London from 1919 to 1921. Buell noted the origins of the naval competition in President Woodrow Wilson's demand of February 1916 that the United States develop "incomparably the most adequate navy in the world" and the consequent Naval Appropriation Act, which authorized the huge 1916 program of naval construction of sixteen post-Jutland capital ships.⁴³ The Sprouts discussed the "seemingly hopeless disagreement" over the second of Wilson's Fourteen Points. British reservations toward freedom of the seas, "utterly abhorrent to British naval authorities and to the majority of British statesmen," led to the ensuing American announcement of "a

⁴²CAB 23: Conclusion 60 (6), July 20, 1921.

⁴³Buell, Washington Conference, 140-41.

huge post-war building program in the late autumn of 1918."⁴⁴ Braisted detailed "the naval battle of Paris," where the Anglophobia of American Admiral William Benson exacerbated existing Anglo-American antagonism and permitted only a temporary naval settlement (Britain supported Wilson's League of Nations in exchange for cancellation of the U.S. Navy's proposed 1918 program) rather than permanent resolution between the world's major naval powers.⁴⁵

J. Kenneth MacDonald, in a valuable essay in 1971, discussed Britain's search for a naval policy in 1919. In the aftermath of Versailles, American naval construction under the 1916 program threatened Britain's naval superiority. At the same time, "pressure for the reduction of expenditure," according to MacDonald, led to the promulgation of the ten year rule, which directed the fighting services to base their estimates on the assumption of no major war within the next decade. "The conflict between the immediate pressure to reduce navy spending and the prospect of an impending naval race with the United States," in MacDonald's view, led Prime Minister David Lloyd George to explore the possibility of a naval agreement. He dispatched a special envoy to Washington, where the physical incapacity of President Wilson dashed any hope that the

⁴⁴Sprouts, New Order, 60-61.

⁴⁵Braisted, United States Navy, 414-38.

emissary could convince the American government to allow Great Britain to retain her world maritime supremacy unchallenged.⁴⁶ In the fall of 1919, the British government thus realized that for at least the next fifteen months their naval policy could not involve agreement with Washington.

Stephen Roskill, in Naval Policy Between the Wars, I: The Period of Anglo-American Antagonism 1919-1929 (1969), provided the Admiralty's perspective on the major developments in British naval policy during the inter-war period. In the spring of 1920, First Lord Walter Long "reaffirmed the principle of the One Power standard" of naval strength. On the same occasion, the First Lord "took a firm stand on the future of the capital ship." Later that year, First Sea Lord David Beatty opened a campaign for new capital ship construction "with particular reference to the relative strength of the British and American navies." The Cabinet then directed the Committee of Imperial Defence to investigate the role of the capital ship in the navy. In the spring of 1921, the committee issued conflicting reports, "which left matters very much where they were." The Cabinet then struck a deal with the Admiralty. In return for cost-cutting measures which included reducing the

⁴⁶J. Kenneth MacDonald, "Lloyd George and the Search for a Post-War Naval Policy, 1919" in A.J.P. Taylor, ed, Lloyd George: Twelve Essays (New York, 1971), 191-222.

number of capital ships in full commission from twenty to sixteen out of the thirty on the effective list, they authorized the construction of four new capital ships, deemed replacements "to avoid providing ammunition to the 'Big Navy School' in America." The First Lord, meanwhile, issued an informal invitation to certain American contacts in the hopes that the new Harding Administration might consider "an international agreement on naval limitation."⁴⁷

The role of American competition is central to an understanding of the British willingness to consider naval disarmament. At the conclusion of hostilities, the Royal Navy possessed a massive superiority in fighting strength over any possible opponent.⁴⁸ Churchill, before the Paris Peace Conference, trumpeted Britain's absolute refusal to accept "any fettering restrictions which will prevent the British Navy maintaining its well-tried and well-deserved supremacy."⁴⁹ The relentless progress of the American 1916 program, however, combined with the Royal Navy's extensive post-war demobilization, effectively challenged that

⁴⁷Stephen Roskill, Naval Policy Between the Wars, I: The Period of Anglo-American Naval Antagonism (New York, 1969), 218-229.

⁴⁸Stokesbury, Navy & Empire, 342. McDonald, "Lloyd George and the Search for a Post-War Naval Policy, 1919" in Taylor, Twelve Essays, notes that the Royal Navy nearly equaled all of the remaining major fleets combined.

⁴⁹Winston Churchill, as recorded in Sprouts, New Order, 62.

supremacy. The Admiralty, aware of the challenge, advised the Cabinet:

The Board believes it to be unquestioned that Great Britain owes her leading position among the Nations to her long-maintained pre-eminence upon the sea. They believe this pre-eminence cannot be relinquished without her ability to hold her position being profoundly affected, with all that position involves in respect of prestige, authority, and commercial advantage.⁵⁰

The Board then presented the alternatives of new capital ship construction or diplomatic agreement. The American building program forced the Cabinet to choose between maritime inferiority, an extensive construction program, or a naval limitation agreement, thus bringing into play economic weakness and other factors.

The second scholarly group to study the British presence at Washington, the Dominion school, dominated by Canadian historians, emphasized the growing influence of the Dominions in the foreign policy of the British Empire. Britain's heightened concern for Dominion considerations sprang from a recognition of their contributions to the war effort and from a desire to develop a common Imperial foreign policy. At the Imperial Conference of 1921, British and Dominion statesmen jointly considered the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which apparently was due to expire in a matter of weeks. J.B. Brebner in 1935 detailed the

⁵⁰ADM 116/1774: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Policy and Expenditure, October 24, 1919.

role of Canada's Prime Minister Arthur Meighen in preventing a renewal of the alliance. Brebner wrote:

Arthur Meighen...practically unassisted, checked his British and Dominion colleagues at an Imperial Conference in their determination to renew the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, thereby...facilitating the movement which culminated in the Washington Conference.⁵¹

John Galbraith, writing in 1948, emphasized the deference which the delegates of the Imperial Conference paid to the reaction of the United States, "perhaps the most powerful influence in shaping the decisions of the Conference."⁵² In 1966, A.R.M. Lower highlighted the influence upon Meighen of Loring Christie, the legal adviser to Canada's Department of External Affairs. Christie's memorandum on the alliance, which advocated a conference on Pacific affairs, provided Meighen with the arguments he would employ in London.⁵³ Michael Fry in 1967 qualified the extent of Canada's influence at the Imperial Conference. He pointed out that Meighen "by forceful argument, had succeeded in directing the imperial meeting toward the calling of a [Far Eastern] conference, but he had not secured non-renewal." Prime

⁵¹J.B. Brebner, "Canada, The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, and the Washington Conference", (Political Science Quarterly, L, 1935).

⁵²John Galbraith, "The Imperial Conference of 1921 and the Washington Conference", (Canadian Historical Review, XXXIX, 1948).

⁵³A.R.M. Lower, "Loring Christie and the Genesis of the Washington Conference of 1921-1922", (Canadian Historical Review, XLVII, 1966).

Minister William Hughes of Australia, who sought protection against Japanese expansion in the Pacific, secured retention of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance pending the resolution of President Harding's opportune invitation to Washington.⁵⁴

Although they thus present an intriguing picture, the Dominion school in general and J.B. Brebner in particular have misstated the role of Arthur Meighen in "facilitating the movement which culminated in the Washington Conference." Meighen's stance on the Anglo-Japanese Alliance had little impact on London's willingness to go to Washington. The British Cabinet, even before the Imperial Conference, decided:

that the President of the United States should be asked to summon a Conference of the Pacific Powers, but only after it has been made clear to Japan and to the other Powers concerned we had no intention of dropping the Alliance.⁵⁵

After the shouting match at that conference between Meighen and Hughes died down, the Cabinet concluded:

That the representatives of the United Kingdom at the Imperial Meetings should have the authority to propose or assent to the initiation of full and frank conversations with the Governments of both the United States of America and Japan with a view to some arrangement satisfactory to all parties.⁵⁶

After some legerdemain involving a legal opinion from the

⁵⁴Michael Fry, "The North Atlantic Triangle and the Abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance", (Journal of Modern History, XXXIX, 1967).

⁵⁵CAB 23: Conclusion 43 (2) a, May 30, 1921.

⁵⁶CAB 23: Conclusion 56 (3) a, June 30, 1921.

Lord Chancellor, the Imperial Cabinet agreed the following day that the Alliance remained in force and that the Foreign Office should contact America and Japan concerning an international conference. When Lloyd George informed the Imperial Cabinet of President Harding's invitation to a disarmament conference, no one suggested refusing to attend. Arthur Meighen thus caused neither the abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance nor the British Cabinet's acceptance of President Harding's invitation.⁵⁷

Meighen, on the other hand, profoundly influenced the range of choices open to the British delegation in Washington. On July 4th, Lord Lee and Admiral Beatty provided the Dominion leaders a briefing on imperial defense and explained Britain's difficulties with the cost of new naval construction.⁵⁸ In a series of meetings among the prime ministers two weeks later, after the Imperial Conference had accepted the American invitation, Hughes of Australia proposed that the Dominions share in the burden of imperial defense on a per capita basis of white population. Meighen demurred. Smuts proposed applying German reparations payments towards naval construction, but Meighen again refused. Hughes in turn refused to contribute unless Canada did so. Meighen's obstruction thus precluded any

⁵⁷CAB 32/2: Minutes 12/13, July 1, 1921; CAB 32/2: Minute 21, July 11, 1921.

⁵⁸CAB 32/2: Minute 14, July 4, 1921.

concrete arrangements for Dominion contributions for imperial defense. He influenced the British mission to Washington by denying it options based on economic constraints rather than by his insistence that British diplomacy defer to his views.

Another interpretation of British foreign policy stressed London's own desire to maintain favorable relations with the United States. In the aftermath of the Versailles peace settlement, Britain recognized a community of interests, the advancement of which depended upon Anglo-American cooperation. John Vinson in 1955 thus described Britain's wish "to cultivate the good will of the United States."⁵⁹ Such an explanation easily incorporated Britain's economic woes and her debt to America.

Correlli Barnett, in 1972, discussed the origins of Pan Anglo-Saxon feeling in Britain. He suggested that in the 1880s the British ruling class began to cultivate a myth whereby America assumed first an "identity of race" and later "identity of political and cultural traditions and national aspirations." This myth, according to Barnett, had its roots in the manicured lawns of the East coast oligarchy, where English aristocrats such as George Nathaniel, 1st Marquess of Curzon, courted their American brides. Within the Lloyd George Cabinet of 1920-21, Winston

⁵⁹John Vinson, Parchment Peace, 29.

Churchill and Austen Chamberlain shared the distinction of American descent on the distaff side.⁶⁰

Michael Fry further refined Vinson's interpretation in the same year by identifying the Atlanticists, those elites within the British Empire who supported "the creation of a global hegemony enjoyed by the United States and the British empire, expressed in maritime and financial terms."⁶¹ Even among this group, motives for cooperation with America varied considerably. Liberals Sir Edward Grey, Richard, Viscount Haldane, and H.A.L. Fisher supported the radical-liberal program of President Woodrow Wilson, while Sir Robert Cecil and General Jan Smuts sought to further the League of Nations. The imperialists of the Round Table group desired to harness the North American republic to their vision of missionary idealism. Conservatives Arthur Balfour and Arthur, Viscount Lee of Fareham acted from the Pan Anglo-Saxon conviction of the collective heritage and common future of the English-speaking peoples.

Yet, the prevalence of Pan Anglo-Saxon views among British elites constituted at most a subordinate factor in the British decision to enter negotiations for naval disarmament. Lee, who assumed the position of First Lord of the Admiralty in February 1921, certainly used his extensive

⁶⁰Barnett, Collapse, 258-263.

⁶¹Michael Fry, The Illusions of Security (Toronto, 1972), 6-17.

American contacts, which in the past had included friendship with the late Theodore Roosevelt, to promote Anglo-American naval agreement. Yet Lee remained among the "lesser men politically." Fry described him as "a cypher, owing all to Lloyd George."⁶² Curzon, despite his American wife, denigrated America's diplomatic record and urged the Cabinet to renew the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Arthur Balfour, the leading Pan Anglo-Saxon, agreed. During the Imperial Conference of 1921, he noted to the Dominion leaders that "it is, from a strategic point of view, of very great importance that the Japanese Alliance should be maintained."⁶³ Winston Churchill, the former First Lord, preferred to place his trust in British battleships rather than the vagaries of American policy. In February 1921, he accepted "the overwhelming case for the capital ship as the foundation and ultimate sanction of sea-power" and advocated an extended building program of four capital ships every year.⁶⁴ While several members of the Lloyd George Cabinet held pro-American convictions, only the politically trivial Lee sought to construct a naval policy on such a basis.

Perhaps the best general account of the developments that led the British government to agree to the naval

⁶²Fry, Illusions, 16.

⁶³CAB 23: Conclusion 43 (2), May 30, 1921.

⁶⁴Winston Churchill, as recorded in Kenneth Young, Arthur James Balfour (London, 1963), 419.

conference can be found in Max Beloff's Imperial Sunset, Volume I: Britain's Liberal Empire 1897-1921 (1970). The First World War unleashed a host of new influences--the increasingly self-conscious colonies; ideological opposition to Bolshevism; a loss of confidence among the ruling elites; growing popular desires for both pacifism and domestic consumption; and, of course, "the weakening of Britain's material position"--which constrained the choices open to British statesmen. They assumed, according to Beloff, that "the international world was one of competing powers and that their duty was to make the most of whatever assets were available."⁶⁵ The war affected the nature of the great game, introducing new rules, sweeping old pieces from the board, and changing the way Britain looked at familiar players.

Beloff suggested that psychological factors weighed heavily in Britain's decision to accept naval limitation at the end of the First World War. He noted a change in Britain's outlook on the world which undermined the need for maintenance of the traditional degree of naval superiority. This devaluation of the importance of the fleet stemmed from three causes. First, the reduction of the German and Russian fleets served to eliminate serious threats to the home islands. Second, the supporters of the League of Nations argued that the new organization had assumed

⁶⁵Max Beloff, Imperial Sunset, Volume I: Britain's Liberal Empire, 1897-1921 (New York, 1970), 5, 10-18.

responsibility for Britain's defense. Third, the ruling elite increasingly questioned the purpose and existence of the British Empire, the defense of which constituted an important mission for the fleet.⁶⁶

Beloff's concern for the British attitude towards the Royal Navy appears reasonable. His discussion, however, though reasonable in nature, lacks detailed evidence. He fails to differentiate between elites in general and those in office. Rejection of the Empire characterized the radical wing of the Liberal Party far more than the Lloyd George ministry. Appeals to the League of Nations failed to sway pragmatic senior officials such as Sir Maurice Hankey and Sir Eyre Crowe, who deprecated the ability of that agency to provide protection.⁶⁷ Japan and the United States, in the eyes of the Cabinet, replaced Germany and Russia as naval rivals.⁶⁸ Beloff's investigation of elite support for British sea power might have proved more profitable had he restricted his scope to the Cabinet.

In the most recent major work on the naval conference, Power in the Pacific (1976), Roger Dingman made a valuable contribution to the study of British motivations for naval arms limitation. He focused on the crucial role of British

⁶⁶Beloff, Imperial Sunset, 295, 336, 348, 359.

⁶⁷Barnett, Collapse, 244-45.

⁶⁸CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 134, December 14, 1920; CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 14, July 4, 1921.

domestic politics in the formulation of foreign and defense policy. Dingman noted that David Lloyd George played a critical role in Britain's decision to accept naval parity with the United States and further suggested that the prime minister elevated "Ireland over everything" in the summer of 1921. Thus, in order to maintain his fragile coalition government long enough to resolve the Irish problem, the Welsh Wizard used the Washington Naval Conference as a "middle way out of diplomatic, imperial, and naval problems."⁶⁹

Dingman's emphasis on British internal affairs seems a particularly fruitful line of inquiry. His observation that Lloyd George played a significant role in domestic politics approaches a truism. Dingman's suggestion that Lloyd George's concern for Ireland provided the impetus for a naval agreement, however, appears doubtful. Surely, the nation-wide coal strike, rising unemployment, and the failure of government housing schemes provided other grist for the Irish mill. Furthermore, the Royal Navy, "an institution with roots deep in the traditions and psychology of British political life" in Dingman's own words, would seem at first glance particularly ill-suited as an object of political sacrifice.⁷⁰ Yet, if the national leadership had

⁶⁹Roger Dingman, Power in the Pacific: the Origins of Naval Arms Limitation (Chicago, 1976), xii, 161-63, 172-77.

⁷⁰Dingman, Pacific, 161.

suffered a loss of confidence in the future of the Dreadnought, then the premier's selection of naval limitation as a vehicle makes more sense.

The historiography of the Washington Naval Conference lacks a clear linkage between Cabinet attitudes towards the capital ship and British willingness to conclude a naval limitation agreement. The Sprouts addressed the importance of developments in naval warfare in a very general context. They stated that "only incurable optimists and hopeless reactionaries believed that the submarine peril had been laid to final rest" at the end of the Great War. "Submarines and aircraft, both alone and in combination with surface craft" thus gave rise to "doubts as to the battle fleet's future utility." They noted:

There were uneasy forebodings in certain quarters that further advances in submarine and air power might progressively undermine the security of the island base which supported the sea power of Great Britain.¹¹

Roger Dingman, who considered the British position in depth, flatly opposed this viewpoint. He wrote:

Some commentators have suggested that the negotiators in Washington limited capital ship fleets because they believed battleships were obsolete. This study suggests that precisely the opposite was true.¹²

Dingman is surely correct as far as the views of the

¹¹Sprouts, New Order, 43-46

¹²Dingman, Pacific, 216.

Admiralty were concerned. They shared the world of the American Navy, where Neptune was God, Mahan his prophet, and the Navy the only true Church.

The civilian members of the Cabinet, however, lacked Admiral Beatty's absolute faith in the value of the capital ship. Roskill described Bonar Law, Sir Eric Geddes, and Sir Robert Horne as "impressed by the arguments of the [junior] naval men who expressed doubts regarding the continued dominance" of the capital ship.⁷³ Higham noted that Lloyd George "did not like Beatty's big ships, but felt more attention should be paid to small A.S.W. [anti-submarine warfare] vessels."⁷⁴ Conscious of the American challenge to British maritime supremacy, cognizant of Britain's precarious economic position, and conversant with contemporary criticisms of the capital ship, these men chose to accept the American invitation to a disarmament conference. Their acceptance, unimaginable in 1914, reflected at least in part the British experience with the Great War, in which the performance of the Royal Navy failed to meet popular expectations and in which new technologies emerged to pose a threat to the dreadnought.

⁷³Roskill, Naval Policy, 225.

⁷⁴Higham, Armed Forces, 116.

CHAPTER 2

THE MOST FORMIDABLE FORCE, 1905-1914

In the decade before the First World War, Britain pursued new methods to achieve her traditional defense objectives. British defense policy rested primarily upon the twin pillars of command of the sea and a balance of power in Europe. As the possibility of a major war on the continent grew less and less remote, the island kingdom abandoned her policy of non-alignment to join the Franco-Russian Entente against Germany. The Royal Navy remained, as it had been for centuries, Britain's foremost line of defense. The navy experienced a profound transformation, designed to produce a force prepared to fight the German High Seas Fleet. The senior service enjoyed considerable autonomy in its preparation, as a result of widespread support among the leading elements of British society. In 1914, Parliament felt complete confidence in the ability of the Royal Navy to defend Britain's national interests.

Leading politicians, regardless of party, adhered to two constant principles: the balance of power in Europe and command of the seas.¹ Britain's island character determined the primary considerations of her national defense down to the Great War. Providence provided Britain with a salt-water barrier to the march of continental armies. The British, in

¹Harold Nicolson, Curzon: The Last Phase 1919-1925 (New York, 1974), 49.

order to maintain their sovereignty, needed to prevent sea-borne invasion and to maintain sufficient trade to feed the population and to fuel the economy.² The first priority of national defense thus involved command of the sea, which entailed the defeat of the enemy's main naval forces and provided the subsequent control of maritime communications.³ Command of the sea thus meant control of much of Europe's maritime commerce. This control in turn generated for Britain "a world weight far beyond her resources in manpower and wealth."⁴ Britain frequently used this wealth to intervene in continental conflicts.

Britain traditionally attempted to prevent any power from establishing its ascendancy over Europe by cooperating with others to maintain a rough equilibrium, or balance of power.⁵ Sir Eyre Crowe of the Foreign Office, who went on to serve as permanent under-secretary from 1920-1925, noted in 1907:

It has become almost an historical truism to identify England's secular policy with the

²Britain lost the ability to feed her population from her own agricultural production about 1865 and recognized that enormous disability in 1900. See John Gooch, The Prospect of War: Studies in British Defence Policy 1847-1942 (London, 1981), 9.

³Kennedy, Naval Mastery, 53.

⁴Gerald Graham, The Politics of Naval Supremacy: Studies in British Maritime Ascendancy (Cambridge, 1965), 9.

⁵William Strang, Britain in World Affairs: The Fluctuations in Power and Influence from Henry VIII to Elizabeth II (New York, 1961), 18.

maintenance of this balance [of power] by throwing her weight now in this scale and now in that, but ever on the side opposed to the political dictatorship of the strongest single State or group at a given time.⁶

Her balancing took two forms, small expeditionary forces and, of greater importance, economic subsidies to her continental allies.⁷ Such intervention forced her opponents to focus on military competition and helped Britain maintain her unrivaled naval position. She remained particularly sensitive to the potential of the Low Countries to serve as a base for invasion.⁸ The defense of Britain, at the turn of the twentieth century, began on the Channel ports.

Shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, British diplomacy inclined towards an unusually favorable regard for France. In the late nineteenth century, with the forces of France and Germany in approximate balance, Britain followed a policy of "splendid isolation." The Boer War, 1899-1902, shocked the British, who began to reconsider the basis of their national defense.⁹ In 1902, Britain concluded a military alliance with Japan against the menace

⁶Sir Eyre Crowe, as recorded in Richmond, Statesmen and Sea Power, 355.

⁷Stokesbury, Navy & Empire, 106.

⁸In the age of sail, Britain fought a series of wars to prevent France from seizing the Netherlands, which would have provided "an estimably valuable naval point d'appui." See Strang, Affairs, 27.

⁹Beloff, Imperial Sunset, 79-80.

of Russian expansion in the Far East. A subsequent outbreak of serious unrest in Morocco led Britain in April 1904 to reach an understanding with France, the Anglo-French Entente, in order to reduce colonial differences and to preclude the possibility of being dragged into war in the event of a Russo-Japanese conflict.¹⁰

The Moroccan Crisis of 1905 served to cement the Anglo-French Entente. British Foreign Secretary Henry, 5th Marquess of Lansdowne described the bombastic pronouncements of support for the Sultan of Morocco by Kaiser Wilhelm II as "an extraordinary clumsy bit of diplomacy."¹¹ Lansdowne agreed to support French resistance to German demands for a Moroccan port. Further German demands for an international conference to discuss the Moroccan question, later expanded to include the resignation of French Foreign Minister Theophile Delcassè, reinforced British suspicions of Germany's intentions. When the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 revealed the weakness of the Russian war machine, British leaders feared that the Franco-Russian alliance could no longer balance Prussian power.¹² Sir Edward Grey, who

¹⁰Cedric Lowe and M.L. Dockrill, The Mirage of Power (Boston, 1972), 4-9, 275-77.

¹¹Lord Lansdowne, as recorded in Lowe and Dockrill, Mirage of Power, 425.

¹²Paul Kennedy, The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980 (Boston, 1981), 75-81, 123-24.

replaced Lord Lansdowne as Foreign Secretary in December 1905, authorized staff talks between the British fighting services and their French counterparts in January 1906.¹³ Germany replaced Russia as the greatest threat to the British Empire.

The German bullying of France led Britain to consider the likely course of a Franco-German war. Facing a two-front war in their struggle with France and Russia, the Germans adopted a plan devised by Count Alfred Schlieffen, chief of the German general staff, for a wheeling movement through Belgium for a knockout blow against France. The British saw that a successful violation of Belgian neutrality by the Kaiser's legions would place the southern shore of the North Sea, the sine qua non of successful invasion, under German control.¹⁴ Reginald Brett, 2nd Viscount Esher, defense expert and confidential advisor to King Edward VII, wrote to Prime Minister Arthur Balfour:

It is vital to Germany to absorb Holland...there must come a day when France and England will have to fight Germany in order to neutralize the Dutch Kingdom, and this day may not be very far off.¹⁵

British hegemony at sea thus required British support of France in the event of German aggression on land.

¹³Grey obtained the permission of the Prime Minister but withheld this information from the remainder of the Cabinet. Beloff, Imperial Sunset, 108; Wilson, Myriad Faces, 22.

¹⁴Kennedy, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 129.

¹⁵Lord Esher, as recorded in Young, Balfour, 228.

The rapid expansion of the German navy constituted the most direct threat to Britain's vital national interests. At the close of the nineteenth century, Kaiser Wilhelm II decided that Germany required "world-political freedom," which could be supplied only by a powerful navy. In 1897, the Kaiser appointed a new Secretary of State for the Imperial Navy, Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz.¹⁶ Tirpitz, a disciple of both Mahan and Prussian historian Heinrich von Treitschke, shared the Kaiser's dream of a powerful German fleet. He started to create such a fleet with the German Naval Laws of 1898 and 1900, which authorized a fleet of 38 battleships, 20 armored cruisers, and 38 light cruisers. The admiral rationalized the High Seas Fleet in the following terms:

In order to protect German trade and commerce under existing conditions only one thing will suffice, namely Germany must possess a battle fleet of such a strength that even for the most powerful adversary a war would involve such risks as to make that Power's own supremacy doubtful.¹⁷

Tirpitz made clear that his intended target was the British Grand Fleet. He publicly reasoned that a German fleet concentrated in the North Sea would cause Britain, for fear

¹⁶For conflicting views as to the influence of Mahan on German naval development, see Sprout, "Mahan: Evangelist of Sea Power" in Earle, Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler and Crowl, "Mahan: The Naval Historian" in Paret, From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age.

¹⁷Admiral Tirpitz, as recorded in Richard Hough, The Great War at Sea 1914-1918 (New York, 1983), 4.

of combat which might cripple the Royal Navy, to avoid confrontations with Germany. He ostensibly accepted numerical inferiority to the Royal Navy, arguing that Britain's world-wide naval commitments would insure that the Royal Navy would never be in a "position to concentrate all its forces against us." His ultimate goal, kept secret from the British Admiralty and the Social Democrats in the Reichstag, involved moving through a "Danger Zone" of naval competition to superiority over the Royal Navy.¹⁸ While on other issues the British might have been disposed to compromise, the notion of command of the sea remained the cornerstone of their defense policy.

The British traditionally preferred a navy as their primary means of defense. Their dislike of a standing army dated from the Stuart drive for absolute monarchy and the interregnum under Oliver Cromwell in the seventeenth century. In the nineteenth century, Radical leader Richard Cobden argued that naval strength was necessary for Britain's protection, because it had never been used "for repressive purposes in internal struggle" and because the Navy was cheaper than a combination of conscription and coastal fortification.¹⁹ The Royal Navy had earned the

¹⁸Kennedy, Strategy and Diplomacy, 154; Peter Padfield, The Great Naval Race: The Anglo-German Naval Rivalry, 1900-1914 (New York, 1974), 42-43.

¹⁹Richard Cobden, as recorded in Bernard Semmel, Liberalism & Naval Strategy (Boston, 1986), 80.

public's confidence, saving England from the depredations of Philip II in 1588, Louis XIV in 1692, and Napoleon Bonaparte in 1805. When the growing strength of the major continental powers threatened the Pax Britannica in the late nineteenth century, the British turned to the Royal Navy.

In the face of increasing naval competition, the British embarked on a series of naval building programs. After the French naval scare in 1888, the government introduced the Naval Defence Act of 1889, which provided for a vastly improved fleet at a cost of £21,500,000, and announced the Two Power Standard, whereby the Royal Navy would be maintained "equal to the naval strength of any two other countries."²⁰ Covering the naval display which accompanied the celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (the sixtieth anniversary of her coronation) in 1897, which included over 160 British warships, The Times wrote:

The fleet...is certainly the most formidable force in all its elements and qualities that has ever been brought together, and such as no combination of other powers can rival. It is at once the most powerful and far-reaching weapon which the world has ever seen.²¹

Russian pressure in the Far East led to further expansion in

²⁰Lord George Hamilton, as recorded in ADM 116/1605: Oswyn Murray Memorandum, November 21, 1918. The naval scare of 1888 followed reports by the London Standard of extraordinary naval activity by the French fleet in Toulon.

²¹The Times, 25 June, 1897.

1898. In 1902, Britain possessed 42 first class battleships, against 44 for France, Russia, and Germany combined. The presence of the Channel Fleet rendered impotent the disapproval of the other Great Powers during the Boer War. Coincident with the Naval Defence Act, Britain adopted a new prophet of sea power.

The words of Alfred Thayer Mahan permeated the consciousness of the British naval community. Mahan argued that command of the sea provided unmatched economic benefits and that concentration of a superior fleet provided command of the sea. His second book, The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire 1793-1812, which appeared in Britain in 1892, received rave reviews from Professor J.K. Laughton of Britain's naval college at Greenwich. Arriving in England as part of a lecture tour in 1893, Mahan was, in the words of naval historian Paul Kennedy, "feted and revered, the more especially since he had openly expressed his admiration for the Royal Navy."²² More importantly, according to another student of Britain's navy, Mahan's visit spread "a consciousness of the value of naval strength" beyond the fleet to the mainstream of British politics.²³ The increased concern of Whitehall, Westminster, and Fleet Street for the relative strength of

²²Kennedy, Strategy and Diplomacy, 43.

²³Hough, Great War at Sea, 3.

the Royal Navy based on the writings of Mahan would facilitate the passage of ever-increasing Naval Estimates. The admiration awarded to Mahan's theories by leading statesmen in other capitals--Kaiser Wilhelm II ordered his work placed in the library aboard each German warship--only reinforced his acceptance in British circles. Most British officers drank deeply from Mahan's twin sermons, control of the sea and concentration of the fleet.

One of Mahan's most devoted disciples was Admiral Sir John Fisher. "Jackie" Fisher came from a middle-class family which tended towards clergymen. He joined the Royal Navy as a midshipman in 1854, at the ripe age of thirteen. Although his first ship was Nelson's flagship Victory, Fisher's evaluation of the potential of the new technology of the nineteenth century--steam engines, armour, electricity, breech-loading guns--led him to become, according to naval historian Arthur Marder, "an apostle of unremitting progress, a passionate advocate of the new against the old."²⁴ He drilled into his subordinates the notion that "a Fleet that is always ready to go to sea at an hour's notice is a splendid national life-preserver."²⁵

²⁴Arthur Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone (London, 1952), Vol I, 63.

²⁵Admiral Fisher, as recorded in Marder, Fear God, Vol I, 100. Fisher himself reported to work between 04.00 and 05.30 each day.

Fisher's demonical energy, exceptional memory, and considerable powers of persuasion carried him to the top of his profession.

He served from 1904-10 as First Sea Lord, the professional head of the senior service. The admiral, invoking Mahan, Nelson, and the old Testament prophets with equal facility, dragged the navy, encrusted with tradition, kicking and screaming into the twentieth century.²⁶ Besides a host of administrative reforms, Fisher made two major contributions to the evolution of the Royal Navy: the development of the revolutionary battleship Dreadnought and the strategic reorganization of the navy.

Fisher's reorganization of the Royal Navy reflected Mahan's emphasis on the concentration of the fleet. Fisher scrapped 154 small, obsolete cruisers and gunboats on stations around the globe, since, he argued, "their up-keep is ruinously expensive, and they militate against efficiency because those in them are being educated in an obsolete type of ship."²⁷ With the personnel thus freed for reassignment, he provided nucleus crews (40% of normal complement) to the

²⁶Fisher's habit for disregarding the views of other senior naval officers created many enemies within the service, the most bitter and outspoken of whom was Admiral Charles, 1st Baron Beresford. For a summary of the Fisher-Beresford feud, see Marder, Fear God, Vol II, 32-44.

²⁷Admiral Fisher, as recorded in ADM 116/942: Memoranda compiled during the preparation of naval reorganization, May 1904.

more powerful ships which constituted the Fleet Reserve. These ships, augmented by sailors from shore barracks and training establishments, were available for rapid reinforcement of the Fleet in commission at sea. Perhaps Fisher's most important reform involved the concentration of three-quarters of the strength of the Royal Navy in home waters.²⁸ Mahan had taught him not to divide the fleet, while an Admiralty memorandum of 1902 emphasized the importance of retaining control of the North Sea:

It is a fundamental principle of Admiralty policy that sufficient force shall at all times be maintained in home waters to ensure the command of the seas. And in no other way than by defeat can our naval force be rendered unable to meet the enemy at sea.²⁹

As a result of his abolition of the Pacific and South American squadrons and reduction of the number of vessels in the Mediterranean, Fisher was able to more than double strength in home waters. The size of the Channel Fleet rose from eight battleships in 1904 to seventeen capital ships in 1905.³⁰ In addition to reducing the number of ships in the Navy, and concentrating them in the North Sea, Fisher also increased the fighting power of the individual battleship.

²⁸Marder, Fear God, Vol II, 25.

²⁹ADM 116/900B: Admiralty Memorandum, "Strategic Conditions Governing the Coast Defences of the United Kingdom", March 1902.

³⁰Kennedy, Naval Mastery, 216-218. Marder. Fear Not, Vol II, 25, gives a figure of 18 battleships immediately available.

The ninth ship Dreadnought to serve in the Royal Navy represented the culmination of a series of trends in naval technology that resulted in a potent combination of speed and fire-power. Immediately upon assuming office as First Sea Lord, Fisher established a Committee on Designs with marching orders to create the world's most powerful ship. Fisher, writing to the First Lord of the Admiralty in 1901, explained the need "to have superiority of speed in order to compel your opponent to accept battle."³¹ Parson steam turbines drove the 17,900-ton ship at a speed of 21 knots instead of the maximum 18 knots from contemporary triple-expansion engines. The Dreadnought fired 850-pound shells from ten 12-inch guns, in accord with Fisher's determination to adopt "a uniform armament of the heaviest gun in use."³² The elimination of secondary guns (typically 8 to 10-inch caliber) greatly simplified range-finding and fire control. The new British battleship fired a broadside of eight 12-inch guns, twice as many heavy guns as any ship afloat.³³ The Dreadnought, at the cost of £1.8 millions, constituted

³¹Admiral Fisher, as recorded in Marder, Fear God, Vol I, 177. A decade later, Fisher advised First Lord Winston Churchill that the speed of his new battleships should "vastly exceed" that of their possible opponents.

³²Admiral Fisher, as recorded in Peter Kemp, ed, The Papers of Admiral Sir John Fisher (London, 1964), Vol II, 261-62.

³³The Dreadnought, which mounted a pair of two-gun turrets forward, one on each beam, and one aft, could thus fire eight guns to either beam.

such a quantum leap over its predecessors that it instantly became the measure of naval strength upon completion in December 1906.

Fisher fashioned the Royal Navy into an instrument designed expressly to defeat Germany's High Seas Fleet. Upon completion of his new battleship, Fisher wrote to King Edward VII that "Germany has been paralyzed by the Dreadnought."³⁴ He explained to the First Lord of the Admiralty in 1906 that "Germany is our only enemy for years to come!"³⁵ Later that same year, he explained the focus of his reorganization plan:

Our only probable enemy is Germany. Germany keeps her whole fleet always concentrated within a few hours of England. We must therefore keep a fleet twice as powerful as that of Germany always concentrated within a few hours of Germany.³⁶

In order to defeat German commerce raiders, the First Sea Lord developed a new form of warship, known originally as the dreadnought armoured cruiser and later as the battle cruiser. This hybrid class combined the speed (25+ knots) of a cruiser and the power of a battleship's 12-inch guns.³⁷

³⁴Admiral Fisher, as recorded in Hough, Great War at Sea, 2.

³⁵Admiral Fisher, as recorded in Marder, Fear God, Vol II, 92.

³⁶ADM 116/942: Fisher Letter to the Prince of Wales, October 23, 1906.

³⁷Anthony Preston, The Ship: Dreadnought to Nuclear Submarine (London, 1980), 6.

The First Sea Lord claimed they would devour weak cruisers like "an armadillo let loose on an ant-hill."³⁸

Fisher fought to match every increase in the size of High Seas Fleet with more and better ships for the Royal Navy. The admiral, who shared Mahan's belief in the value of superior numbers, explained to Conservative leader Joseph Chamberlain that "'God is on the side of the big battalions,' and that Nelson said truly 'Only numbers can annihilate.'" He saw the answer to German naval expansion: "Of course lose not a moment building ships bigger and faster."³⁹ Fisher sought, in terms of dreadnought strength, at least two British keels for every German--a relationship quite unacceptable to the aims of Tirpitz. One historian described the result: "The obtaining of one country's naval aims meant the failure of the other's: hence a naval construction race which seemed to have no ending."⁴⁰ Fisher, like Tirpitz, understood that naval construction depended upon Naval Estimates, which required Cabinet approval.

Fisher perfected the art of manipulating the British naval community in order to secure funds to support the navy. His experience during the naval scare of 1893 left

³⁸Admiral Fisher, as recorded in Marder, Fear God, Vol II, 29.

³⁹Admiral Fisher, as recorded in Marder, Fear God, Vol I, 167; Vol II, 239.

⁴⁰Kennedy, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 128.

him filled with "bitter contempt for politicians and their lack of principle."⁴¹ At the same time, it gave him a deep appreciation for the power of the press. Lord Esher reinforced Fisher's recognition of the value of "popular fears and popular interest, upon which alone rest the Navy Estimates...An invasion scare is the mill of God which grinds you out a Navy of Dreadnoughts."⁴² During his tenure as First Sea Lord, he exchanged letters with a host of journalists, the most favored of whom was freelance Arnold White. Fisher frequently requested that they produce articles to order on issues affecting the navy.⁴³ Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon noted:

He was the first of our Admirals to make an

⁴¹In 1893, the London Chamber of Commerce published a pamphlet which pointed out that Britain had fewer armoured ships in the Mediterranean than France and that her total tonnage of such ships completed and under construction was less than the combined totals of France and Russia. Sir William Harcourt, Chancellor of the Exchequer in William Gladstone's last Cabinet, provided the House of Commons with an optimistic appraisal of the relative strength of the Royal Navy and the false impression that the Admiralty shared his views. See Padfield, The Battleship Era (New York, 1972), 145-46; Marder, Fear God, Vol I, 101, 344-45.

⁴²Lord Esher, as recorded in Beloff, Imperial Sunset, 120.

⁴³Fisher also corresponded with James Thursfield of The Times, J.L. Garvin of the Observer, J.A. Spender of the Westminster Gazette, and publicists Julian Corbett and Sir George Clarke. During the invasion scare of 1907, for example, Fisher wrote to Corbett: "Wouldn't it be a fine thing for you to have an article in the Nineteenth Century...and it would be peculiarly appropriate if it appeared in November, as the matter is coming before us at the Defence Committee [C.I.D.]." See Marder, Fear God, Vol II, 138.

intelligent use of the press for the benefit of the Navy. He was convinced that, in order to get his various reforms understood and appreciated by the country, it was necessary to have the Press primed with the whole truth about them...he did not hesitate to keep in touch with certain journalists whom he could trust, and to give them as much information as official secrecy permitted.⁴⁴

Fisher also used leading members of British society, including Lord Esher and Francis, 1st Viscount Knollys, the royal secretary, and even foreign dignitaries in his efforts to influence Westminster. His most influential supporter was Edward VII, "a priceless ally." In 1907, Fisher accepted a royal invitation to Biarritz, where he cultivated the youngest member of the Cabinet, an ex-Conservative turned Radical by the name of Winston Churchill.⁴⁵

In that same year, the British Army mounted another campaign in its long struggle to wrest responsibility for defense of the home islands against invasion away from the Royal Navy. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Britain had endured a series of invasion scares concerned with the possibility of a "bolt from the blue," or unexpected attack during temporary loss of naval superiority over the English Channel.⁴⁶ This unlikely scenario received

⁴⁴Admiral Bacon, as recorded in Marder, Fear God, Vol I, 154.

⁴⁵Richard Hough, Former Naval Person: Churchill and the Wars at Sea (London, 1985), 24-26.

⁴⁶Gooch, The Prospect of War, 2-13.

periodic endorsement from service officials desirous of bigger budgets and journalists in a similar quest.⁴⁷ Field Marshal Frederick, 1st Earl Roberts of Kandahar, with the able assistance of Colonel Charles A'Court-Repington, the military correspondent of The Times, propounded the view that Germany had the ability to breach the navy's defenses. The Committee of Imperial Defence (C.I.D.), created in 1902, according to Prime Minister Arthur Balfour, in order "to survey as a whole the strategic military needs of the Empire," examined the invasion question.⁴⁸ The Committee had determined in 1903 that a successful invasion required at least 70,000 troops; that such a force would require at least 200 boats and 48 hours to conduct a crossing; and that the navy would have ample opportunity to attempt a riposte. It also recognized that more serious than the risk of invasion was the risk of starvation, as Britain had become dependent upon imports to feed its populace.⁴⁹ In 1907, the defense committee reached the similar conclusion "that so long as our naval supremacy is assured against any reasonably probable combination of powers, invasion is

⁴⁷George Chesney's The Battle of Dorking, Erskine Childers' The Riddle of the Sands, and William Le Queux's The Invasion of 1910 represent three of the more popular invasion stories.

⁴⁸Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Norman Gibbs, The Origins of Imperial Defence (Oxford, 1955), 18.

⁴⁹Gooch, Prospects of War, 10; Michael Howard, The Continental Commitment (London, 1972), 21-22.

impracticable."⁵⁰ In 1908, the Reichstag's passage of a novelle, or supplementary German Naval Law, which authorized the construction of 3 battleships and 1 battlecruiser each year from 1908-1911, threatened that supremacy.

The Anglo-German naval race in 1909 created the most celebrated peacetime naval scare in British history. London received indications that Germany's premier manufacturer of armaments, the Krupp conglomerate in Essen, had increased its capacity to produce armour, naval guns, and gun mountings, while similar increases in slipways and shipbuilding capacity led British naval intelligence to calculate that Germany could equal the British production of eight capital ships a year.⁵¹ The Admiralty, working necessarily by inference and extrapolation, determined that by 1912 Germany would deploy, instead of the 13 capital ships authorized under Tirpitz' various naval laws, 17 such vessels and that 21 German dreadnoughts seemed a possibility.⁵² The Royal Navy, in January 1909, possessed 10 capital ships in various stages of construction, with 2 more authorized in the 1908 estimates. Fisher informed his political superior, First Lord of the Admiralty Reginald McKenna that the navy needed six dreadnoughts in the 1909

⁵⁰Sir Charles Ottley, as recorded in Howard, Continental Commitment, 40.

⁵¹Padfield, Great Naval Race, 198-202.

⁵²Marder, Fear God, Vol II, 206.

estimates to maintain its position. The First Lord took Fisher's case to the Cabinet.

The Cabinet under Prime Minister Herbert Asquith conducted a lengthy and passionate debate on the subject of naval construction. The Liberal-Radical element in the Cabinet, led by David Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Winston Churchill, President of the Board of Trade, preferred to support the Cabinet's social programs. Churchill, who completely accepted the value of British maritime supremacy, felt that Britain and Germany shared so many economic ties as to render war unimaginable. In a speech in Swansea in August 1908, he said:

I think it is greatly to be deprecated that persons should try to spread the belief that war between Great Britain and Germany is inevitable. It is all nonsense.

He thus opposed the naval estimates of 1909 as containing "a great field for reduction."⁵³ Lloyd George decried the cost (almost £3 millions) of Fisher's new program of naval construction:

The laying down of the Dreadnought (sic) seemed to many of us a piece of wanton and profligate ostentation...[The Anglo-German battleship rivalry] was an exhausting drain upon resources sadly needed for social amelioration and national development.⁵⁴

⁵³Winston Churchill, as recorded in Randolph Churchill, Winston S. Churchill Volume II, 1901-1914: Young Statesman (Boston, 1967), 494, 502.

⁵⁴David Lloyd George, as recorded in Peter Rowland, David Lloyd George: A Biography (New York, 1975), 205.

Churchill and Lloyd George sought to limit the construction of new capital ships to four, while the big-navy wing of the Cabinet, led by McKenna and Grey, the Foreign Secretary, demanded the six requested by Fisher. Asquith, in February 1909, fashioned a compromise. The navy received four capital ships in 1909, with an additional four in April 1910 contingent on future developments.⁵⁵ News that Austria had commenced a program of capital ship construction led the Prime Minister in July 1909 to authorize the additional four dreadnoughts.⁵⁶

The course of the Cabinet conflict demonstrated the depth of support for the capital ship in the leading elements of British society. King Edward VII, the direct predecessor of George V, explained to his nephew the Kaiser that "the great increase in building German ships of war" forced Britain to reciprocate.⁵⁷ In both the House and the press, the Conservative party adopted George Wyndham's slogan: "We want eight, and we won't wait!"⁵⁸ An important

⁵⁵Marder, Fear God, 207.

⁵⁶Winston Churchill, in defeat, summarized the compromise: "In the end a curious and characteristic solution was reached. The admiralty demanded six ships: the economists offered four: and we finally settled on eight." See Hough, Great War at Sea, 15-17.

⁵⁷Edward VII, as recorded in Padfield, Great Naval Race, 182.

⁵⁸George Wyndham, as recorded in Rowland, David Lloyd George, 210-214.

segment of the Liberal party considered naval supremacy to be vital to the British Empire. Sir Edward Grey explained that "if the German Navy were superior to ours...for us it would not be a question of defeat. Our independence, our very existence would be at stake."⁵⁹ Opposition to naval armaments came from a coalition of Radicals and Labourites, of which a majority were religious Nonconformists with pacifist beliefs. The very limited realm of discourse in the debate, 4 dreadnoughts versus 6 versus 8, reflected two important facts. First, according to historian Howard Weinroth, "many Radicals and Labour men, traditionally critics of excess armaments," accepted the prevailing consensus that "British naval security might be jeopardized."⁶⁰ Second, no one (except a few diehard cavalry colonels) proposed any alternatives to the capital ship as the basis of Britain's defense.

The Moroccan Crisis of 1911 exacerbated this fear that British naval security might be jeopardized.⁶¹ It influenced the future of the Royal Navy in three ways. First, David

⁵⁹Sir Edward Grey, as recorded in Padfield, Great Naval Race, 220.

⁶⁰Howard Weinroth, "Left-Wing Opposition to Naval Armaments in Britain before 1914" (Journal of Contemporary History, VI, 1971).

⁶¹Unrest in Morocco led France to intervene there militarily in 1911. Germany, determined to receive compensation, dispatched the gunboat Panther to Agadir in order to force the French to negotiate.

Lloyd George, the Welsh radical and hitherto opponent of all the Tories held dear, assumed an uncharacteristic belligerence in response to the arrival of the German gunboat Panther in Agadir. With the approval of both Asquith and Grey, he spoke on July 21, 1911 to the assembled bankers of London at Mansion House:

I can conceive of nothing that could justify disturbance of international goodwill except questions of the greatest national moment, but if a situation were forced upon us, in which peace could only be preserved by...allowing Britain to be treated, where her vital interests are affected, as if she were of no account in the Cabinet of nations, then I say emphatically that peace would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure.⁶²

This speech moved Lloyd George, who would later have a significant impact on the senior service, away from the Radical camp and toward the mainstream of the political spectrum.

Second, the British government sanctioned a new role for the British army in the event of hostilities with Germany. At a meeting of the C.I.D. on August 23, 1911, Asquith met with the services chiefs to consider the deployment of British forces in case of war. General Sir Henry Wilson argued that the army should be employed rapidly to reinforce the left flank of the French. First Sea Lord

⁶²Lloyd George, as recorded in Rowland, David Lloyd George, 250. In the debate over the finance bill for 1909-10, Lloyd George remarked that "a fully-equipped duke costs as much to keep up as two Dreadnoughts (sic), and they are just as great a terror, and they last longer."

Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson, on the other hand, advocated "a close blockade of German ports, the capture of advanced bases, and possible landings on the enemy's coast."⁶³ He argued that the army would tie down more German divisions if it retained the potential to conduct major amphibious operations. Committee secretary Maurice Hankey supported the admiral, noting that:

if the army has been committed to the centre of the campaign at the outset of the war, all possibility of influencing the course of the war in...a manner which sea power alone can render possible, disappears, and the great advantage of sea power is to a great extent thrown away.⁶⁴

The C.I.D. nonetheless approved General Wilson's plan, leaving the navy the responsibility of ferrying the army to France. This decision would profoundly affect the British experience in the First World War.

Finally, the Moroccan Crisis also led to a shakeup at Admiralty House. McKenna firmly supported Admiral Wilson's opposition to allowing the army to enter the line in France. Asquith was further distressed to find at the height of the crisis that the First Lord and the First Sea Lord had neither written war plans nor a staff for their creation.⁶⁵

⁶³Hough, Great War at Sea, 24.

⁶⁴Maurice Hankey, as recorded in Howard, Continental Commitment, 43.

⁶⁵The Admiralty had war plans in the sense of general strategy for a war with Germany. At that time, however, they did not possess detailed war orders, which allocated specific missions to particular fleets and squadrons.

Asquith believed that "the present position in which everything is locked up in the brain of a single admiral [the First Sea Lord] is both ridiculous and dangerous."⁶⁶ The Prime Minister thus transferred McKenna to the Home Office in October 1911 and brought Churchill to the Admiralty.

Winston Churchill carried out the responsibilities of the First Lord of the Admiralty with more vigor than perhaps any of his predecessors. Churchill's attitude towards Germany changed dramatically after the Moroccan Crisis of 1911, when he declared: "If Germany makes war...we shd join with France."⁶⁷ The day after he assumed office, the new First Lord opened liaison with Admiral Fisher (retired), who began sending frequent missives from Lucerne, Switzerland. Three days later, Churchill finished an imposing memorandum on the need for a Naval Staff, which he created in January 1912.⁶⁸ When First Sea Lord Wilson disagreed, the First Lord demanded his resignation. Churchill then set off in the Admiralty yacht Enchantress for a whirlwind inspection of the fleet. His assaults on the traditions of the senior

⁶⁶Herbert Asquith, as recorded in Leslie Gardiner, The British Admiralty (London, 1968), 314.

⁶⁷Winston Churchill, as recorded in Churchill, Winston S. Churchill Volume II, 505.

⁶⁸The memorandum is reproduced in its entirety in Randolph Churchill, Winston S. Churchill Companion Volume II (Boston, 1969), Part 2, 1303-1312.

service earned the distrust of a conservative element within the naval community.⁶⁹ His primary accomplishments at Admiralty House paralleled those of Fisher: a reorganization of the fleet and a revolutionary new battleship.

Churchill assumed a degree of responsibility highly unusual for a First Lord in the design of the latest class of battleships, the Queen Elizabeths. He wrote to Fisher in April 1912 about the new ships, suggesting a speed of 22 knots and the replacement of the scheduled 13.5-inch guns, in use on contemporary warships, with an untried 15-inch gun design. Fisher responded emphatically: "These MUST be the 15-inch gun...there MUST be further VERY GREAT INCREASE IN SPEED."⁷⁰ Churchill decided upon 25 knots and the 15-inch guns, which increased the displacement of the super-dreadnoughts to 27,500 tons. To reach the goal of 25 knots required the switch from British coal to the more efficient fuel oil, which Churchill secured through a Royal Commission (under the direction of Fisher!) which supported the decision to switch fuels and led to the creation of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. The Queen Elizabeth class of

⁶⁹Churchill, for example, proposed to George V to name a new battleship Oliver Cromwell and, upon rejection, resubmitted the same name. He dismissed First Sea Lord Wilson and his replacement Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman within thirteen months. His decisions to switch from coal to oil fuel and to reduce the strength of the Mediterranean squadron also generated distrust.

⁷⁰Admiral Fisher, as recorded in Marder, Fear God, Vol II, 451.

battleships, which cost £2.5 millions apiece, would prove their worth in two World Wars.⁷¹

Churchill also modified both the geographical disposition and the standard of strength of the Royal Navy. In January 1912, the First Lord became aware of another of Tirpitz' novelles, which increased the authorized German capital ship strength in the North Sea from 21 to 36 capital ships. The Naval Law of 1912 provided for the construction of 3 new battle ships and immediate increase of 12 dreadnoughts through the activation of ships in reserve and the redeployment of those abroad.⁷² Churchill convinced the Cabinet to accept a modification of the Two Power Standard, which he announced to the House in March: "Sixty per cent in Dreadnoughts (sic) over Germany as long as she adhered to her present declared programme, and two keels to one for every additional ship laid down by her."⁷³ To insure an adequate margin of superiority in home waters, Churchill sought to recall the last major contingent of British battleships abroad.

In 1912, the First Lord fought a hard campaign to move the battleships in the Mediterranean Fleet to the North Sea.

⁷¹Hough, Great War at Sea, 27-28.

⁷²Churchill, Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume II, Part 3, 1518.

⁷³Winston Churchill, as recorded in Churchill, Winston S. Churchill Volume II, 548.

He expressed his conception of strategy in a memorandum which echoed the phrases of Fisher and Mahan to the Prime Minister:

Gt Britain will keep a Navy strong enough to deal with the strongest probable combination in the decisive theatres. This means concentration, & consequent abandonment of all seas except those in wh the supreme issue will be settled.⁷⁴

The enemy was Germany; the decisive theater, to the First Lord, was the North Sea. He explained to members of the C.I.D. that "the German fleet...exists for the purpose of fighting a great battle in the North Sea."⁷⁵ Churchill recommended that the 6 battleships at Malta be ordered to the Atlantic Fleet and that "a definite naval arrangement should be made with France without delay."⁷⁶ This recommendation drew criticism, according to historian Michael Howard, from Liberals and Radicals "because of the alliance it implied with France" and Conservatives "because no such alliance existed."⁷⁷ The C.I.D. reached a compromise in July: the Royal navy would maintain "a reasonable margin of superiority in home waters" and "a battle fleet equal to

⁷⁴Winston Churchill, as recorded in Churchill, Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume II, Part 3, 1558.

⁷⁵Winston Churchill, as recorded in Churchill, Winston S. Churchill Volume II, 560-61.

⁷⁶Winston Churchill, as recorded in Churchill, Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume II, Part 3, 1567.

⁷⁷Howard, Continental Commitment, 48-49.

a one-power Mediterranean standard, excluding France."⁷⁸ Churchill then replaced the ships in question with 4 British cruisers, which in his evaluation equalled twice their number of Austrian battleships. This easy victory, however, could not hide the rising cost of the Anglo-German naval rivalry.

Naval Estimates placed a steadily increasing burden on the Treasury after the turn of the twentieth century. In 1903, the year before Admiral Fisher came to Admiralty House, the Naval Estimates totalled £34.5 millions. Upon his retirement in 1910, the Estimates reached £40.4 millions.⁷⁹ On December 5, 1913, First Lord Winston Churchill informed the Cabinet that the 1913-14 Estimate of £46.3 millions would not suffice to meet the cost of the navy's operating expenses and that he required a Supplementary Estimate for 1913-14 of not less than £1.4 millions. At the same time, he proposed a Naval Estimate for 1914-15 of £50.7 millions, with authorization for 4 new capital ships.⁸⁰ The Cabinet did not appreciate Churchill's proposal, and a number of junior ministers quickly formed a bloc in opposition to the Estimates.

⁷⁸C.I.D. Minute 117, July 4, 1912, as recorded in Lowe and Dockrill, Mirage of Power, 56.

⁷⁹Kennedy, Naval Mastery, 193.

⁸⁰Churchill, Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume II, 1819.

The Naval Estimates of 1914-15 gave rise to serious division within the Cabinet. On December 16th, Churchill resisted suggestions for cutting two dreadnoughts and satisfied the Cabinet by agreeing to reduce the 1914-15 Estimates to under £50 millions.⁸¹ Two days later, however, the First Lord notified the Chancellor of the Exchequer that he would require a Supplementary Estimate for 1913-14 in the amount of £3 millions rather than £1.4 millions as forecast. The hard-pressed Lloyd George then placed himself at the head of the anti-Churchill coalition with a public interview attacking "the overwhelming extravagance of our expenditure on armaments."⁸² Asquith, in an effort to prevent a split, announced in a private meeting with the Chancellor and the First Lord that the consequence of resignation would be an immediate general election.⁸³ Churchill then exacerbated the problem by increasing his requirement for 1914-15 to £52.8 millions. On January 29th, Asquith warned the Cabinet of "the disastrous consequences of a split" over the Naval

⁸¹Ministers who opposed the estimates included Herbert Samuel, Postmaster-General; Walter Runciman, President of the Board of Agriculture; Sir John Simon, Attorney-General; J.A. Pease, President of the Board of Education; Charles Hobhouse, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster; and McKenna at the Home Office. See F.W. Weimann, "Lloyd George and the Struggle for the Navy Estimates of 1914", in Taylor, Twelve Essays, 78.

⁸²Lloyd George, as recorded in Rowland, David Lloyd George, 273.

⁸³Weimann, "Lloyd George and the Navy Estimates", in Taylor, Twelve Essays, 83.

Estimates and achieved consensus on a figure of £2.5 millions for the supplementary estimates. Asquith privately asked Churchill to "throw a baby or two out of the sledge," whereupon Churchill cut his demand to £51.6 millions.⁸⁴ The Cabinet accepted his figure (and 4 new battleships) on February 11, 1914.

The Estimates Crisis of 1914 revealed the hegemony of the value of the capital ship within leading Liberal circles. Three of the more influential members of the Cabinet, Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey; Lord Chancellor Richard Burdon, 1st Viscount Haldane; and Secretary of State for War John Seely, supported the First Lord throughout the crisis. The City merchants at Guildhall unanimously resolved:

That this Meeting of the Citizens of London begs to assure the Prime Minister and His Majesty's Government of the support of the Commercial Community in any measure--financial or otherwise--that may be necessary to ensure the continued supremacy of the Navy and the adequate protection of the Trade routes of the Empire.⁸⁵

King George V wrote Churchill in his own hand that "this year's programme of 4 Battleships must be adhered to."⁸⁶ The Prime Minister later informed his sovereign that the

⁸⁴Herbert Asquith, as recorded in Churchill, Winston S. Churchill Volume II, 656, 659.

⁸⁵Lord Mayor Sir Thomas Bowater, as recorded in Churchill, Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume II, 1867.

⁸⁶George V, as recorded in Churchill, Winston S. Churchill Volume II, 651.

opposition objected "not so much to the programme of new construction, as to the growing cost of maintenance."⁸⁷

After Churchill left the Admiralty, Liberal opponents of his naval estimates revealed they objected more to Churchill himself than to his proposals.⁸⁸ One of the leaders of the economy faction disingenuously argued that "the loss of WC, though regrettable, is not by any means a splitting of party--indeed large admiralty estimates may be capable of being carried only because WC has gone."⁸⁹

One member of the economy faction who did object to the Naval Estimates was Lloyd George. He had consistently opposed "Tory extravagance on armaments."⁹⁰ Furthermore, Churchill's annoying habit of changing his figures played havoc with the Chancellor's attempts to produce a balanced budget. The Welsh Wizard, however, realized that opposition to more dreadnoughts was a weak reed on which to base a party revolt. One of his biographers admitted "that the Chancellor's sympathies were never really engaged by this

⁸⁷Herbert Asquith, as recorded in Churchill, Winston S. Churchill Volume II, 656.

⁸⁸Most feared Churchill would bolt the Liberal Party over the issue of Home Rule, while McKenna resented his replacement at the Admiralty. See F.W. Weimann, "Lloyd George and the Struggle for the Navy Estimates of 1914", in Taylor, Twelve Essays, 77-78.

⁸⁹Sir John Simon, as recorded in Churchill, Winston S. Churchill Volume II, 658.

⁹⁰David Lloyd George, as recorded in Rowland, "David Lloyd George, 213.

particular conflict."⁹¹ Lloyd George thus repeatedly sought to arrange a compromise at the lowest possible level of spending. He expressed his capitulation one morning to Churchill:

Oddly enough, my wife spoke to me last night about this Dreadnought (sic) business. She said, "You know, my dear, I never interfere in politics; but they say you are having an argument with that nice Mr. Churchill about building Dreadnoughts (sic). Of course I don't understand these things, but I should have thought that it would be better to have too many rather than too few." So I have decided to let you build them.⁹²

The Chancellor's finely tuned appreciation of the sensibilities of the Liberal Party warned him that in 1914 battleships remained a shibboleth he could not afford to attack.

Between 1905 and 1914, the British defense policies of supporting a balance of power in Europe and maintaining command of the sea led to an increasingly substantial commitment to France against Imperial Germany. That commitment took the dual forms of a small expeditionary force reserved for the Franco-Belgian border and an unprecedented period of peacetime expansion for the Royal Navy. Fisher and Churchill, inspired by the edicts of Mahan, guided the evolution of the navy toward a fleet of dreadnoughts concentrated in the North Sea. Despite

⁹¹Rowland, David Lloyd George, 272

⁹²David Lloyd George, as recorded in Churchill, Winston S. Churchill Volume II, 662.

challenges from its Radical wing, at no time after Asquith assumed the premiership in 1908 had the Liberal Party denied the capital ships demanded by the Admiralty. Nor had the Asquith Ministry ever seriously considered an alternative basis for its military preparations. At the onset of the war, the Royal Navy possessed 31 capital ships of dreadnought or later vintage (with another 16 building) supported by 39 older vessels.⁹³ Parliament obviously believed at the time that the German fleet presented a real threat and that capital ships constituted the most secure means of protection.

⁹³Kennedy, Naval Mastery, 229.

CHAPTER 3

A GREAT PASSIVE VICTORY

In August, 1914, Britain faced the outbreak of war with confidence in the Royal Navy. The opening moves of the war, however, failed to provide the expected victory. The Dardanelles Campaign of 1915 would tarnish the reputation of key members of the naval hierarchy. The Battle of Jutland in 1916, initially portrayed as a British defeat, would cast grave doubts on the value of the dreadnought. The effectiveness of German submarine warfare in 1917-18 would prove the value of new naval weapons and drag down more naval leaders. The Great War thus would damage the reputation of the navy, reducing the fortunes of its supporters and the perceived value of the capital ship.

At 11.00 PM on August 4th, Winston Churchill signalled to all elements of the navy: "COMMENCE HOSTILITIES AGAINST GERMANY." The First Lord of the Admiralty felt confident, having written to the King on August 1, 1914: "The general position and strength of the British Fleets Squadrons & Flotillas is regarded as satisfactory by the Board of Admiralty."¹ The officers and men of the Royal Navy anticipated the coming clash with a massive confidence. The commander of the Battlecruiser Squadron described the condition of his unit in the first days of August: "The

¹Winston Churchill, as recorded in Churchill, Winston S. Churchill Volume II, 706, 698.

enthusiasm was immense. I have never seen such a magnificent and cheerful spirit."² When Londoners heard about the declaration of war, crowds gathered outside the Admiralty building to sing "God Save the King."³ The public expected, according to historian Richard Hough, "an immediate and glorious victory."⁴

The Admiralty's strategy for a war with Germany followed Mahan's general approach of command of the sea through concentration of the fleet. The Admiralty's original analysis of the problem had identified the ultimate purpose of the navy as the control of ocean trade. The Board, after considering Germany's lack of cruisers, poorly sited bases, and the fact that German naval "expenditure is chiefly devoted to battleship construction," had concluded that "it is their intention to dispute the actual command of the sea."⁵ The Admiralty had intended to concentrate the Royal Navy off the German coast with instructions "to seek out the corresponding fleets of the enemy with a view to bringing them to action." Commerce destruction would remain "a subsidiary question" until after combat with the High

²Vice-Admiral David Beatty, as recorded in Bryan Ranft, ed, The Beatty Papers: Volume I, 1902-1918 (Aldershot, 1989), 113.

³Dingman, Pacific, 18.

⁴Hough, Naval Person, 59.

⁵ADM 116/866B: Admiralty Memorandum, "The Protection of Ocean Trade in Time of War", April 31, 1905.

Seas Fleet had secured "the only really decisive factor-- command of the sea."⁶

The Admiralty abandoned the traditional British approach of close blockade of the enemy coast. They saw the destructive potential of mines and torpedoes, particularly in shallow waters. A staff officer in 1906 thus rejected the notion of attacking the German coast and recommended that the Royal Navy withdraw across the North Sea in order to tempt the High Seas Fleet to "attack us in a position of our choosing and under conditions agreeable to us."⁷ Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson endorsed his analysis, which formed the basis of the Admiralty's first war plan in 1908.⁸ In 1912, the Admiralty decided on "a middle course between the two undesirable extremes of a close blockade of the hostile coast...and the abandonment of all observation of the enemy on the other" by effecting a blockade with a line of cruisers in a relatively safe "intermediate position" approximately 170 miles from the German coast.⁹ In 1914,

⁶ADM 116/866B: Admiralty Memorandum, "The Protection of Ocean Trade in Time of War", April 31, 1905.

⁷ADM 116/1036B: Admiralty Memorandum, "War with Germany", September 1, 1906.

⁸ADM 116/1043B: Remarks on War Plans by Admiral A.K. Wilson, May 1907; W.1 War Plan Against Germany, June 1908.

⁹ADM 116/866B: Admiralty Memorandum, "Remarks on War Orders for an Observation Force in the North Sea in connection with the lessons of the 1912 Manoeuvres", September 16, 1912.

the Admiralty decided to withdraw the cruiser force and establish a "distant blockade."¹⁰ The Channel Fleet would close the English Channel, a mere 20 miles wide, in conjunction with a series of minefields and a small screening force, the Dover Patrol. The Grand Fleet, comprised of the bulk of the British dreadnoughts, would block the larger gap between Scotland and Norway.¹¹

The Royal Navy had three important missions upon the onset of hostilities. Its immediate responsibility was to insure the safe transport of Imperial forces to France.¹² The quintessential task of the Royal Navy was the protection of Britain's sea lines of communication, so vital because the home islands produced less than 70% of the foodstuffs required for the British populace. The navy also sought to impose a naval blockade upon Germany, despite German access to the Baltic and the Balkans. Britain's geographical advantage over Germany meant all three missions could be accomplished by blocking German egress from the North Sea.¹³

¹⁰Barry Hunt, Sailor-scholar: Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, 1871-1946 (Waterloo, Ontario: 1982), 30.

¹¹Hough, Great War at Sea, 55.

¹²The navy convoyed 120,000 soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force in August, 50,000 soldiers of the Indian Corps in September, and 25,000 Canadian volunteers in October without the loss of a single man. See Martin Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Volume III, 1914-1916: The Challenge of War (Boston, 1971), 37.

¹³Wilson, Myriad Faces, 77.

The Grand Fleet, composed of 21 dreadnoughts, 8 older battleships, and 4 battle cruisers, thus steamed north to its war stations at Scapa Flow and Cromarty, while the Channel Fleet, nineteen elderly pre-dreadnoughts, slowly assembled in Portland.¹⁴

During the Great War, the Grand Fleet and the High Seas Fleet never deliberately engaged in guerre d'escadres. British leaders assumed their positional advantage would force the German navy to contend for control of the Scotland-Norway passage.¹⁵ One officer wrote that "when the great day comes it will be when the enemy takes the initiative."¹⁶ The High Seas Fleet, however, refused to compete for command of the seas at unfavorable odds. German strategy sought instead to engage nothing larger than isolated squadrons and thus, according to Arthur Marder:

to whittle down the British Fleet through an aggressive mining and submarine policy as a prelude to engaging the Grand Fleet under favourable conditions when an equalization of forces had been obtained.¹⁷

¹⁴The High Seas Fleet at the time possessed 13 dreadnoughts, 16 older battleships, and 5 battle cruisers. See Arthur Marder, From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904-1919 (London, 1970), II, 4-5.

¹⁵Wilson, Myriad Faces, 77; Alfred Patterson, Jellicoe: A Biography (New York, 1969), 61.

¹⁶Vice-Admiral Beatty, as recorded in Ranft, Beatty Papers, 303-04.

¹⁷Marder, Scapa Flow, 45.

The defensive policy adopted by both navies produced a stand-off, which depressed the men of the Grand Fleet. One admiral wrote:

I fear the rascals will never come out, but will only send their minelayers & submarines....It is really very disappointing and looks as if we shall go through the war without ever coming to grips with them. Such a thought is more than I can bear.¹⁸

In an effort to relieve the oppressive stalemate, opposing admirals began to experiment with small operations, such as raids and ambushes.

The Royal Navy, despite the advantages of numbers and position, suffered a number of highly visible setbacks during the opening months of the war. In August, the German cruisers Goeben and Breslau escaped from a more powerful British squadron under Admiral Sir Archibald Berkeley Milne in the Mediterranean to reach sanctuary in Turkish waters. In September, a single German submarine sank three antiquated Bacchante-class cruisers, the Aboukir, the Hogue, and the Cressy, killing over 1400 sailors. In October, the German liner Berlin slipped out of the North Sea and off the Irish coast laid a number of mines, one of which sank the powerful battleship Audacious. Later that month, the sea plane carrier Hermes fell victim to a German torpedo off the coast of France. Throughout the fall, German surface

¹⁸Vice-Admiral Beatty, as recorded in Ranft, Beatty Papers, 134-35.

vessels inflicted a rising toll on the British merchant marine.¹⁹ The German East Asiatic Squadron thoroughly disrupted Australasian shipping and, before defeat off the Falkland Islands, sank a pursuing force of two British cruisers at the Battle of Coronel in November. In December, German battle cruisers shelled the East Coast towns of Hartlepool, Scarborough, and Whitby and escaped cleanly.

The officers of the Royal Navy quickly became disenchanted with elements of their leadership. The escape of the Goeben and Breslau led one distinguished officer to write: "To think it is to the Navy to provide the first and only instance of failure. God, it makes me sick."²⁰ Fisher added: "I should have shot Sir Berkeley Milne for the Goeben."²¹ The court-martial of one of the officers involved found the accused not guilty "in view of the instructions received from the Admiralty" in the form of a telegram from First Lord Churchill.²² The prosecutor himself believed that

¹⁹The Karlsruhe alone claimed 17 victims August-October, 1914. The raiders Emden and Wolf were among the most successful.

²⁰Vice-Admiral Beatty, as recorded in Ranft, Beatty Papers, 138-139.

²¹Admiral Fisher, as recorded in Marder, Fear God, III, 52. In 1912, Fisher had characterized Milne as "unfitted to be the Senior Admiral afloat." See Marder, Fear God, II, 451.

²²Troubridge Court-Martial, as recorded in Dan Van der Vat, The Ship That Changed the World: The Escape of the Goeben to the Dardanelles in 1914 (Bethesda, MD, 1986), 165. Churchill's offending telegram, reproduced on p. 65, read as follows:

"the Admiralty telegram was badly worded."²³ The disquiet within the officer corps of the Royal Navy over the Goeben mishap quickly spread.

Discontent with the management of the naval conflict became more commonplace after the loss of three ancient Bacchante-class cruisers off Holland. Professional officers, as before, were the first to recognize incompetence. A Court of Inquiry identified a decision by the Admiralty to continue the patrol after bad weather had forced its escorting destroyers back to base as the primary factor contributing to the loss of the cruisers.²⁴ A submarine commander, who earlier had begged the Admiralty to "take those Bacchantes away," compared the sinking of those

Should war break out and England and France engage in it, it now seems probable that Italy also will remain neutral and that Greece can be made an ally. Spain also will be friendly and, possibly, an ally. The attitude of Italy is, however, uncertain, and it is especially important that your squadron should not be seriously engaged with Austrian ships before we know what Italy will do. Your first task should be to aid the French in the transportation of the African Army by covering, and, if possible, bringing to action individual fast German ships, particularly Goeben who [sic] may interfere with that transport. You will be notified when you may consult with the French Admiral. Do not at this stage be brought to action against superior forces, except in combination with the French, as part of a general battle. The speed of your squadrons is sufficient to enable you to choose your moment. We shall hope later to reinforce the Mediterranean, and you must husband your forces at the outset.

²³Rear-Admiral Sydney Fremantle, My Naval Career, 1880-1928 (New York, 1949), 174.

²⁴Marder, Scapa Flow, Vol II, 57-59.

ships with the stalking of tame elephants chained to trees.²⁵ A junior officer at the Admiralty described the decision to leave the cruisers on station without a destroyer escort as "the most supreme case of ineptitude."²⁶ Fisher called it "pure murder."²⁷ Asquith wrote to his confidante: "It is a blow, particularly as the navy is not doing very well just now...the Admiralty have not been clever in their outlying strategy."²⁸ This incident, unlike the Goeben fiasco, reached the public. The press blamed the First Lord:

because, despite the warnings of admirals, commodores and captains, Mr. Churchill refused, until it was too late, to recall them from a patrol so carried on as to make them certain to fall victims to the torpedoes of an active enemy.²⁹

Popular backlash from the loss of the Bacchantes thus reached the Admiralty, "the brunt of it falling on Churchill."³⁰

²⁵Commodore Roger Keyes, The Naval Memoirs of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes: The Narrow Seas to the Dardanelles 1910-1915 (New York, 1954), 77, 106-10.

²⁶Captain Herbert Richmond, as recorded in Arthur Marder, Portrait of an Admiral: the Life and Papers of Sir Herbert Richmond (Cambridge, 1952), 110.

²⁷Admiral Fisher, as recorded in Marder, Fear God, Vol III, 61.

²⁸Herbert Asquith, as recorded in Martin Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Companion Volume III (Boston, 1973), I, 127-28.

²⁹Journalist Thomas Gibson Bowles, as recorded in Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Volume III, 86.

³⁰Marder, Scapa Flow, Vol II, 59.

During the war, Churchill increased even more than he had in peacetime his own prerogatives at the expense of the jurisdiction of the Sea Lords. At the onset of hostilities, he bypassed the Admiralty Board and replaced Admiral Sir George Callaghan as commander of the Grand Fleet with Vice-Admiral Sir John Jellicoe.³¹ After the war, he explained:

I accepted full responsibility for bringing about successful results, and in that spirit I exercised a close general supervision over everything that was done or proposed. Further, I claimed and exercised an unlimited power of suggestion and initiative over the whole field, subject only to the approval and agreement of the First Sea Lord on all operational orders.³²

Needless to say, his determination and powers of persuasion rendered immaterial the theoretical limitation on his authority which he acknowledged in retrospect. One of his biographers noted how the professionals at the Admiralty lamented "the authoritarian and completely dominating manner in which he took...control of the main thrust of events."³³ The Chief of the War Staff stated that Churchill's manner

³¹In 1912, Fisher had proposed to Lord Esher that Jellicoe serve as wartime commander should hostilities occur: "If war comes before 1914, then Jellicoe will be Nelson at the Battle of St. Vincent; if it comes in 1914, then he'll be Nelson at Trafalgar." Fisher repeatedly wrote Churchill on the same subject. See Marder, Fear Nought, Vol II, 440, 443, 450.

³²Winston Churchill, as recorded in Marder, Scapa Flow, II, 39.

³³Hough, Former Naval Person, 58-59.

permitted "very little united decision."³⁴ Churchill thus associated himself to an extraordinary degree with the performance of the navy.

Churchill's attempts to keep the Channel ports in Allied hands seriously damaged his reputation. His formation of a naval division for service on the Western Front led the Assistant Director of Naval Operations to declare: "I really believe Churchill is not sane."³⁵ During the first week in October, Churchill rushed to beleaguered Antwerp in an effort to stiffen its defenders. He ordered up two British Naval Brigades and proposed to take command of the city, provided he was given "necessary military rank and authority."³⁶ Asquith, who found the proposal from an ex-lieutenant of Hussars "a real bit of tragi-comedy," criticized the deployment of "the rawest recruits, most of whom had never fired a rifle."³⁷ Lloyd George, to his confidante Frances Stevenson, bitterly condemned the naval intervention for causing heavy and unnecessary British

³⁴Vice-Admiral Doveton Sturdee, as recorded in Hough, Great War at Sea, 85.

³⁵Captain Herbert Richmond, as recorded in Marder, Portrait of an Admiral, 100.

³⁶Winston Churchill, as recorded in Hough, Former Naval Person, 62.

³⁷Herbert Asquith, Memories and Reflections (Boston, 1928), 50, 54.

losses.³⁸ Churchill's former Naval Secretary complained:

If we only had a Kitchener at the Admiralty we could have done so much and the present state of chaos in naval affairs would never have existed. It is inconceivable the mistakes and blunders we have made and are making.³⁹

Churchill's repeated visits to Antwerp led the Morning Post to level harsh criticism against the First Lord on October 19th:

What we chiefly desire to enforce upon Mr Churchill is that this severe lesson ought to teach him that he is not, as a matter of fact, a Napoleon; but a Minister of the Crown with no time either to organize or lead armies in the field.⁴⁰

The Times, also part of the Northcliffe press, carried complaints from Conservative leader Walter Long about the extensive losses (2700 men) in the operation and the lack of training given to the troops involved.⁴¹ The repeated attacks of the Morning Post, which demanded Churchill's resignation, reduced the public's confidence in the navy.⁴²

Churchill's position became rather delicate at the close of 1914. The destruction of Admiral Sir Christopher

³⁸A. J. P. Taylor, ed, Lloyd George: A Diary by Francis Stevenson (London, 1971), 6.

³⁹Vice-Admiral Beatty, as recorded in Ranft, Beatty Papers, 144-45.

⁴⁰Arthur Gwynne, editor of the Morning Post, as recorded in Hough, Former Naval Person, 62.

⁴¹Cameron Hazlehurst, Politicians at War (New York, 1971), 192.

⁴²Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Volume III, 125-27, 144.

Craddock's squadron at the Battle of Coronel led the Cabinet to censure the navy to the King. Frances Stevenson recorded Lloyd George's opinion:

Churchill is too busy trying to get a flashy success to attend to the real business of the Admiralty. Churchill blames Admiral Craddock for the defeat in South America--the Admiral...having gone down with his ship & so unable to clear himself.⁴³

In conversation with editor C.P. Scott, Lloyd George condemned Churchill's decision to bombard the Dardanelles as causing Turkey's entry into the war.⁴⁴ Churchill deflected some of the criticism by accepting the resignation of First Sea Lord Prince Louis of Battenberg, himself under press attack for his German ancestry, but then bought new trouble by bringing Fisher back as First Sea Lord. This decision rankled George V, who described the appointment as "a great mistake" and vainly sought to reverse it.⁴⁵ Pressure mounted in Parliament for Churchill's removal. The Conservatives demanded an explanation of the defeat at Coronel, and both parties questioned his role in the loss of Antwerp.⁴⁶

⁴³Frances Stevenson, as recorded in Taylor, Lloyd George: A Diary, 10.

⁴⁴Rowland, David Lloyd George, 293.

⁴⁵King George V, as recorded in Nicolson, King George V: his Life and Reign (New York, 1953), 251.

⁴⁶Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Volume III, 169-70. Bonar Law described Churchill as having "an entirely unbalanced mind." See Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Companion Volume III, 191.

Any relief provided by Fisher's arrival and the consequent victory at the Falkland Islands evaporated in the face of an attack from Secretary of State for War Field Marshal Horatio Herbert, 1st Earl Kitchener of Khartoum. The Field Marshal mistrusted Churchill's frequent visits to General Sir John French, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) in France. On December 17th, the Earl complained about the "Dunkerque Circus," an ad hoc military force which Churchill had assembled on the continent, and presented Asquith a letter ostensibly proposing that Churchill assume the War Office and Fisher the Admiralty.⁴⁷ Asquith duly chastised Churchill and ordered the First Lord's expeditionary force transferred to the War Office. The cumulative effect of these attacks on the First Lord from the press, Windsor Castle, the House of Commons, and the Cabinet shook Asquith's confidence in Churchill's judgment.⁴⁸ The Prime Minister wrote in December:

Winston came to see me...to report progress or rather (as usual) the lack of it...I expect the whole Navy is a little dispirited & chaffing under the sense of ill-luck and impatience at purely negative results.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Volume III, 166.

⁴⁸Philip Magnus, Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist (New York, 1959), 307.

⁴⁹Herbert Asquith, as recorded in Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Companion Volume III, I, 333.

Churchill realized full well that it was, in the words of the Prime Minister, "time that he bagged something, & broke some crockery."⁵⁰ His focus turned away from the trenches of the Western Front to the more lightly defended reaches of the eastern Mediterranean.

In the winter of 1914-15, the British government conducted a review of grand strategy. On December 28, 1914, Sir Maurice Hankey, secretary of the War Council, presented that body a memorandum which emphasized "the remarkable deadlock" on the Western Front and advocated the use of "our sea power and our growing military strength to attack Germany...through her allies, and particularly Turkey."⁵¹ The following day, Churchill denounced any thought of "sending our armies to chew barbed wire in Flanders" and proposed amphibious action against the island of Borkum, off the German coast.⁵² Asquith, who felt "profoundly dissatisfied" with the prospect of fighting in Flanders, found himself swayed.⁵³

On January 2, 1915, the need for urgency increased when the Foreign Office informed the War Council that Russia,

⁵⁰Herbert Asquith, as recorded in Wilson, Myriad Faces, 110.

⁵¹Sir Maurice Hankey, as recorded in Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Companion Volume III, I, 337-43.

⁵²Winston Churchill, as recorded in Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Companion Volume III, I, 343-45.

⁵³Asquith, Memories and Reflections, 62.

facing offensives from both the Germans and the Turks, had requested that Kitchener arrange "a demonstration against the Turk...either naval or military."⁵⁴ Kitchener then sought French's views on the deployment of troops from France. The commander of the B.E.F. declared that "so large a margin of safety is needed that troops could not be withdrawn from this theater."⁵⁵ Kitchener thus informed the War Council that the Dardanelles constituted the most suitable objective for a new offensive but that he had no forces available for such an operation. On January 13th, the Cabinet decided to accept an Admiralty proposal for a purely naval expedition "to bombard and take the Gallipoli peninsula."⁵⁶

Churchill provided the primary impetus for the operation. Fisher wrote the First Lord on January 3, 1915 and outlined a plan along the lines of Hankey's analysis for an expedition of 100,000 troops and a squadron of second class battleships to force the Dardanelles.⁵⁷ Churchill, under pressure to "bag something," then fired off a telegram

⁵⁴Sir George Buchanan to Sir Edward Grey, as recorded in Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Companion Volume III, I, 359-60.

⁵⁵General Sir John French, as recorded in Magnus, Kitchener, 311.

⁵⁶The War Council, as recorded in Wilson, Myriad Faces, 107.

⁵⁷Marder, Fear God, Vol III, 121-22.

to Vice-Admiral Sir Sackville Hamilton Carden, commander of the squadron blockading the Dardanelles:

Do you consider the forcing of the Dardanelles by ships alone a practicable operation. It is assumed older Battleships fitted with minebumpers would be used.... Importance of results would justify severe loss.⁵⁸

Carden responded cautiously that while he did not believe that the Dardanelles could be rushed, he thought that "they might be forced by extended operations with large numbers of ships."⁵⁹ Churchill then drew from Carden a vague plan for a purely naval assault on the Straits.⁶⁰ Disregarding the reservations of his naval advisors, he carried the plan to the War Council, which, in Hankey's words, "turned eagerly from the dreary vista of a 'slogging match' on the Western Front to brighter prospects."⁶¹

Vice-Admiral Carden, an elderly officer on the verge of retirement when the war broke out, opened the bombardment of the Dardanelles on February 19, 1915. The attacking squadron comprised 10 old battleships (4 French and 6 British), the battle cruiser Inflexible, and the Queen

⁵⁸Winston Churchill, as recorded in Hough, Former Naval Person, 79.

⁵⁹Vice-Admiral Carden, as recorded in van der Vat, Ship That Changed the World, 206-07.

⁶⁰Churchill later implied that he had proposed his plan for a purely naval assault as the surest means of prying an army from Flanders. See Magnus, Kitchener, 317.

⁶¹Sir Maurice Hankey, as recorded in Marder, Scapa Flow, 207.

Elizabeth, the most powerful ship afloat.⁶² The Turkish defenses contained a mixture of permanent fortifications and mobile field batteries overlooking a series of minefields. The forts closest to the mouth of the Dardanelles gradually fell to the more powerful guns of the fleet, which penetrated four miles up the straits. As the waters narrowed, however, the minefields became more serious obstacles, and the Turkish howitzers defeated attempts by a group of fishing trawlers to sweep the mines. The mounting difficulties led Carden to resign his command to avoid nervous collapse in early March.⁶³

His successor, Rear-Admiral John de Robeck, attempted to solve the problem by force majeure. On the morning of March 18, 1915, he ordered forward his battleships, now eighteen strong. The result was unmitigated disaster. A French ship, the Bouvet, struck a mine and foundered with over 600 hands still on board. More mines claimed three British ships, two of which sank. Finally, Turkish gunfire put two more French battleships out of action. Robeck's squadron suffered three ships sunk and three more forced to retire (a loss of one-third strength) in return for minor damage to the Turkish batteries; the minefields remained

⁶²Hough, Naval Person, 91.

⁶³Wilson, Myriad Faces, 111-115; Hough, Great War at Sea, 153-157.

intact.⁶⁴ The naval assault on the Dardanelles drew to an inglorious close.

Differences over the operation caused a permanent break between Churchill and Fisher. The First Sea Lord developed misgivings about the Dardanelles campaign as early as January 19, 1915, when he wrote:

Now the Cabinet have decided on taking the Dardanelles solely with the Navy, using 15 battleships and 32 other vessels, and keeping out there three battle cruisers and a flotilla of destroyers--all urgently required at the decisive theatre at home!...I don't agree with a single step taken.⁶⁵ [Fisher's italics]

The admiral presented his views in late January to the Prime Minister, who worried about "the growing friction between Winston and Fisher."⁶⁶ Fisher felt himself in a dilemma: he sensed the Dardanelles operation would come a cropper; he regarded inaction as unacceptable; and he knew with certainty the War Cabinet opposed his plan for an invasion of the Baltic.⁶⁷ After the naval rebuff on March 18th, Churchill drafted a telegram to Robeck:

You ought to persevere methodically but resolutely with the plan contained in your instructions...You should dominate the forts at the Narrows and sweep the minefields and then batter the forts at close

⁶⁴Marder, Scapa Flow, 245-247; Wilson, Myriad Faces, 116.

⁶⁵Admiral Fisher, as recorded in Marder, Fear God, Vol III, 133.

⁶⁶Herbert Asquith, Memories and Reflections, 70.

⁶⁷Wilson, Myriad Faces, 200.

range.⁶⁸

Fisher adamantly opposed the telegram and told his political superior that he would resign if Churchill were to send it. Churchill, on that occasion, backed down. Fisher did resign in May 1915 because the First Lord ordered certain ships to Gallipoli in excess of a list upon which they had both agreed.

Fisher's handling of the Dardanelles operation and its aftermath cost him his reputation. He had entered the war as a highly respected, albeit controversial, figure and had since energized the wartime construction of new vessels and orchestrated the victory at the Falkland Islands. His manner of resignation, however, placed him beyond the pale of responsible employment.⁶⁹ On May 15th, when the Cabinet believed the German fleet to be at sea, he bolted from the Admiralty to Charing Cross, with plans to go to Scotland, which only the Prime Minister's directive prevented him from executing.⁷⁰ On May 19th, he put forth a series of conditions as his price for returning to office: the removal of Churchill, a guarantee that his replacement would be restricted to "policy and parliamentary procedure," and, above all, a demand for:

⁶⁸Winston Churchill, as recorded in Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Volume III, 365.

⁶⁹Hazlehurst, Politicians at War, 237-38.

⁷⁰Asquith, Memories and Reflections, 109.

complete professional charge of the war at sea, together with the absolute sole disposition of the Fleet and the appointment of all officers of all ranks whatsoever, and absolutely untrammelled sole command of all the sea forces whatsoever.⁷¹

Asquith noted that "his conduct at this critical time convinced me that it had become impossible that he should remain responsible for the Admiralty."⁷² Fisher would never again hold a position which affected government policy.

Fisher's resignation toppled Churchill from his position as First Lord. From his hotel room in Charing Cross, Fisher had written to Conservative leader Andrew Bonar Law: "I am absolutely unable to remain with W.C. (HE'S A REAL DANGER!)"⁷³ When Lloyd George heard Fisher had resigned, he said of Churchill:

It is the Nemesis of the man who has fought for this war for years. When the war came he saw in it the chance of glory for himself, & has accordingly entered on a risky campaign without caring a straw for the misery and hardship it would bring to thousands, in the hope he would prove to be the outstanding man in this war.⁷⁴

Fisher's resignation, coincident with The Times' dramatic announcement of a shell shortage in France, led Bonar Law on

⁷¹Admiral Fisher, as recorded in Marder, Fear God, III, 241.

⁷²Herbert Asquith, Memories and Reflections, 113. George V shared Asquith's opinion. See Nicolson, King George V, 263.

⁷³Admiral Fisher, as recorded in Marder, Fear God, Vol III, 237.

⁷⁴David Lloyd George, as recorded in Taylor, Lloyd George: A Diary, 50.

May 17th to present Asquith with the alternatives of "some change in the constitution of the Government" or a Tory attack in the House upon the conduct of the war.⁷⁵ The Conservative price for coalition was the exclusion of Haldane from the ministry and the removal of Churchill from the Admiralty.⁷⁶ Lloyd George strongly supported accepting the Conservative proposal and dumping Churchill.⁷⁷ The Prime Minister bowed to the pressure and reconstructed the Cabinet. Arthur Balfour assumed the duties of First Lord of the Admiralty from Churchill, who received the sinecure post of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.⁷⁸ Asquith's secretary admitted to Churchill's wife Clementine that "Winston has suffered a blow to prestige, reputation and happiness."⁷⁹

⁷⁵Andrew Bonar Law, as recorded in Asquith, Memories and Reflections, 116.

⁷⁶Asquith, Memories and Reflections, 122; Taylor, Lloyd George: A Diary, 51.

⁷⁷Lloyd George's opposition to Churchill can be traced through the diary of Frances Stevenson. See entries for October 9th, 14th, 23rd, 30th, November 5th, December 16th, 23rd, January 21st, April 8th, and May 15th in Taylor, Lloyd George: A Diary.

⁷⁸Winston Churchill, over a year later complained to Hankey that "whenever I open my mouth in Parliament someone shouts out that I am the man who let us in for the Dardanelles mistake, and the papers are perpetually repeating it." See Hough, Former Naval Person, 125.

⁷⁹Edwin Montagu, as recorded in Hough, Former Naval Person, 119.

Churchill's plan had significant consequences.⁸⁰ First, the failure of the naval assault led the War Council to commit an army contingent under General Ian Hamilton to the Gallipoli Peninsula. That expedition, at the cost of heavy casualties, failed to take Gallipoli and eventually withdrew ingloriously.⁸¹ Second, the failure of the battleships to penetrate the Straits reflected the decline, relative to the nineteenth century, in the military advantage of the European powers over the rest of the world.⁸² Third, the Dardanelles campaign and its aftermath destroyed the cooperation between Fisher and Churchill and ruined their reputations (at least temporarily). The Dardanelles campaign thus weakened the credibility of the Royal Navy's leadership and the public perception of the fleet's ability to project power.

⁸⁰Students of the Gallipoli campaign have given Churchill's concept of opening a route to Russia through the Dardanelles generally positive reviews, while taking an overwhelmingly negative line on his plan to force the Straits with a purely naval force. Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Volume III, 224-380, supports both Churchill's strategy and his advocacy of a naval assault to the War Cabinet; Wilson, Myriad Faces, 103-121, condemns both the concept and the plan; and Marder, Scapa Flow, II, 259-65, adopts the prevalent position of admiring Churchill's strategy while roundly criticizing the First Lord's impetuous support of a flawed operation.

⁸¹Alan Moorehead, Gallipoli (New York, 1956), 80-343, provides the Dominion perspective of the military engagement at Gallipoli.

⁸²In 1807, a British squadron under Admiral Sir John Duckworth successfully forced the Dardanelles.

For the first two years of the war, the Royal Navy's control of the exits of the North Sea remained unchallenged. In the minds of the officers of the Grand Fleet, only German passivity prevented a British victory on the scale of Trafalgar. One officer wrote: "Nothing less than complete annihilation can or must be allowed to satisfy us."⁸³ The fact that the patrolling of the Grand Fleet reduced the German Navy "to virtual immobility" seemed meager compensation.⁸⁴ On a single occasion, however, German miscalculation led to the duel between entire fleets for which the British had longed so earnestly. For a brief moment at Jutland, the dreadnoughts squared off.

Mutual misapprehension contributed to the onset of the battle. Admiral Reinhard Scheer hoped to lure the British cruiser force into a submarine ambush, using his battle cruisers under Vice-Admiral Franz von Hipper as bait. In the event that the cruiser forces engaged heavily, he would bring the main force of German battleships, kept in reserve, into the fray. Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, commander of the British Grand Fleet, similarly hoped to engage only the enemy cruisers with his entire force. The Admiralty misinterpreted certain electronic intelligence and informed him that Hipper's cruisers, rather than the entire High Seas

⁸³Vice-Admiral Beatty, as recorded in Ranft, Beatty Papers, 167.

⁸⁴Wilson, Myriad Faces, 8.

Fleet, would sortie. He ordered his forces east toward Denmark in two divisions, sending his cruisers under Vice-Admiral David Beatty to scout to the south. Beatty's ships made contact on the afternoon of May 31, 1916.⁸⁵

The ensuing battle, fought in four phases, confirmed British control of the North Sea. In the first, Beatty's cruisers chased Hipper's south. The Germans inflicted heavy damage on the British cruisers before reinforcements forced Hipper to give way.⁸⁶ He then led Beatty's force into the arms of Scheer and the German battleships. Upon sighting the main body of the High Seas Fleet, Beatty reversed course and fled north. During this phase, the British rear guard, comprised of battleships rather than battle cruisers, gave better than it received. Meanwhile, Jellicoe deployed his battleships across the path of the onrushing Germans. In the third phase of the battle, the fire of the British

⁸⁵Scheer left harbour with 16 dreadnoughts and 9 older battleships, 5 battle cruisers, 11 light cruisers, and 61 destroyers. British figures were 28 battleships, 9 battle cruisers, 34 light cruisers, and 78 destroyers. See Wilson, Myriad Faces, 285.

⁸⁶A crucial flaw in the design of the British cruisers, a lack of baffles between firing turrets and the magazine, enabled German shells to reach and ignite a ship's ammunition supply, causing the total destruction of three vessels. Beatty remarked to his flag-captain: "There seems to be something wrong with our bloody ships today." See Stephen Roskill, Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty, the Last Naval Hero: An Intimate Biography (New York, 1981), 160.

battleships forced Scheer to seek to break contact.⁸⁷ He used a torpedo attack from his destroyers to gain room in which to maneuver. The Germans then fled from the British. In the final phase, which took place after dark, individual German vessels sought to pass through the British lines in order to make Wilhelmshaven before daylight. The British fleet, which lacked training in night operations, failed to block the German flight.⁸⁸

The Battle of Jutland produced ambiguous military consequences. The Grand Fleet earned the satisfaction of seeing the entire High Seas Fleet turn tail and flee for Wilhelmshaven, but, in accordance with the nature of naval warfare, retention of any given portion of the ocean's surface provided no benefit. The British more importantly won a strategic victory, as they maintained their control of the Scotland-Norway gap, with its resultant effect on blockade. Admiral Jellicoe reported operational readiness on the evening of June 2, 1916, while Admiral Scheer, on

⁸⁷Correlli Barnett, Swordbearers: Supreme Command in the First World War (New York, 1964), 182-188, argues that German naval technology far surpassed that of Britain; Hough, Great War at Sea, 273-280, suggests that British equipment had offsetting advantages.

⁸⁸The standard account of the battle is Marder, Scapa Flow, III, 36-160. John Keegan, The Price of Admiralty: The Evolution of Naval Warfare (New York, 1988), 97-155, emphasizes the destructive nature of combat between dreadnoughts. Trevor Wilson, Myriad Faces, 283-299, argues instead that, except for the design flaw in British battle cruisers, Jutland established the remarkable endurance of both British and German warships.

July 4th, was forced to admit that the High Seas Fleet required at least another five weeks in port.⁸⁹ The design flaw of the British cruisers, however, prevented the Grand Fleet from claiming a numbers-game victory.⁹⁰ The Germans thus were able to claim a tactical triumph, since they sank 14 British ships of 112,000 tons while losing only 11 of 62,000 tons.⁹¹

The Battle of Jutland proved bitterly disappointing for many of Britain's leaders. Jutland failed to produce the victory of annihilation, with its attendant list of ships sunk, that the legend of British naval superiority required. King George V felt stunned by the Admiralty's first, stark report:

Our losses Queen Mary Indefatigable Invincible
Defence Black Prince Sparrow Hawk Ardent Fortune
Tipperary Turbulent also missing at present Shark
Nestor Nomad.⁹²

For Hankey, who expected a victory on the scale of Trafalgar, Jutland was "the most bitter disappointment of

⁸⁹Keegan, Price of Admiralty, 131, 151.

⁹⁰The Germans began the war with a similar flaw, but identified and corrected the problem earlier. British losses, except for the three cruisers which suffered catastrophic explosion, were equal in number but of less displacement than those of Germany.

⁹¹Barnett, Swordbearers, 176.

⁹²Admiralty message, as recorded in Nicolson, King George V, 278. The first three ships listed were battle cruisers.

this disappointing war."⁹³ "The naval battle in the North Sea", echoed Lloyd George, "is most disquieting."⁹⁴

Churchill, from the sidelines, wrote to Asquith that he felt "profoundly grieved."⁹⁵

The officers of the Grand Fleet were uniformly dissatisfied. Jellicoe, writing to Fisher, cited "bad luck with the weather and time of meeting" as the primary reasons for the lack of a decisive victory at Jutland.⁹⁶ Beatty, in a cri de coeur, wrote: "Would that we had been able to make a job of it. To be so near and yet so far was worm and gallwood."⁹⁷ Captain Herbert Richmond recorded in his diary: "It is a nasty knock and there is no denying it. We have engaged an inferior force & got the worst of it." After a ship-board dinner, he noted: "How unanimous these Captains all are that Jutland was a failure! They can hardly bear to speak of it."⁹⁸

⁹³Sir Maurice Hankey, as recorded in Stephen Roskill, Hankey: Man of Secrets, Volume I 1877-1918 (New York, 1971), 277.

⁹⁴David Lloyd George, as recorded in Rowland, David Lloyd George, 337-38.

⁹⁵Winston Churchill, as recorded in Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Companion Volume III, 1511.

⁹⁶Admiral Jellicoe, as recorded in Marder, Fear God, Vol III, 356.

⁹⁷Vice-Admiral Beatty, as recorded in Marder, Fear God, Vol III, 357.

⁹⁸Captain Richmond, as recorded in Marder, Portrait of an Admiral, 213, 248.

The press, at least initially, took a very negative line on the outcome of the Battle of Jutland. The Times trumpeted: "Great Naval Battle Heavy Losses", while the Daily News went so far as to admit "defeat in the Jutland engagement."⁹⁹ Barely a week after the battle, Fisher denigrated "the miserable pessimism that was so ignobly spread abroad."¹⁰⁰ Beatty, on June 18th, complained to the editor of the Morning Post that "one did not expect the Press to put the interpretation on it [Jutland] that they did. It does not say much for their faith, so long and frequently vaunted, in the Navy."¹⁰¹ Public fault-finding adversely affected the navy's unity.

The search to explain the Grand Fleet's failure to win the expected victory led to mutual recrimination between Jellicoe and Beatty. Jellicoe wrote Beatty a week after the battle:

That difference in reckoning between the Lion & Iron Duke was most perplexing. Impossible to avoid, of course, but nonetheless it put me out very much. Then all or one of your cruisers turned to port and I could not make out why.¹⁰²

A month later, Beatty's wife wrote that "there seems to very

⁹⁹Dingman, Pacific, 24-25; Marder, Scapa Flow, III, 196.

¹⁰⁰Admiral Fisher, as recorded in Marder, Fear God, Vol III, 355.

¹⁰¹Vice-Admiral Beatty, as recorded in Ranft, Beatty Papers, 340.

¹⁰²Admiral Jellicoe, as recorded in Ranft, Beatty Papers, 340.

little to say except to curse Jellicoe for not going at them."¹⁰³ This disagreement occasioned, according to one of Beatty's biographers:

the names of Jellicoe and Beatty to become associated in the public mind with two different camps of naval opinion. Self-appointed champions poured forth a stream of calumny and uninformed criticism upon one or the other of the two admirals.¹⁰⁴

The Battle of Jutland thus opened divisions within the navy and between the navy and the public. The Royal Navy, as the bulwark of the British Empire, according to historian Correlli Barnett, "was never again accorded quite the same religious faith" by the British public.¹⁰⁵

Jutland had another result with enormous consequence for Britain. Scheer reported to Kaiser Wilhelm that he held little hope of catching and destroying a detached portion of the Grand Fleet and thus achieving a naval balance which might permit the Entscheidungsschacht, or decisive battle, for which Tirpitz had designed the High Seas Fleet. He then recommended the resumption of unlimited submarine warfare.¹⁰⁶

The greatest challenge to Britain's command of the seas came not from the High Seas Fleet but instead from Germany's

¹⁰³Lady Ethel Beatty, as recorded in Ranft, Beatty Papers, 369.

¹⁰⁴W.S. Chalmers, The Life and Letters of David Beatty, Admiral of the Fleet (London, 1951), 266.

¹⁰⁵Barnett, Swordbearers, 177.

¹⁰⁶Barnett, Swordbearers, 177.

submarines, or U-boats. Germany first initiated unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1915. German U-boats began to attack merchant vessels without warning and, on occasion, from beneath the waves. Before the war, the British had discounted the idea that submarines would be used against merchant vessels as "impossible and unthinkable."¹⁰⁷ They correctly assumed that the laws of naval warfare, should the Germans obey them, would render the submarine ineffective against merchant vessels.¹⁰⁸ Once war began, however, German tactics quickly shattered the wildly optimistic British belief that the Kaiser's empire would adhere to such legal restrictions.¹⁰⁹ The subsequent months demonstrated the destructive power of the unrestricted U-boat against undefended targets. Within 90 days, 22 submarines sank 39 merchantmen. By August 1915, the growing submarine fleet began sinking more ships than the British shipyards had the capacity to replace.¹¹⁰ The

¹⁰⁷Commodore Keyes, Narrow Seas, 53; Marder, Scapa Flow, I, 363-64.

¹⁰⁸Warships were legally required to ascertain their victims belonged to an opposing belligerent, to identify the presence of contraband, and to provide accommodation to passengers and crew.

¹⁰⁹Admiral W.H. Henderson, for example, did not believe that in any future war "territorial waters would be violated, or neutral vessels sunk...No nation would permit it, and the officer who did it would be shot." See Wilson, Myriad Faces, 90.

¹¹⁰Wilson, Myriad Faces, 91-92.

anti-submarine tactics of the Royal Navy, based upon "offensive" patrols, proved singularly hopeless. Only the threat of American intervention following the sinkings of the British liners Lusitania and Arabic caused Germany to redirect her efforts into the Mediterranean, where the danger of killing Americans was remote.¹¹¹

In 1916, submarine warfare led to a shake-up at the Admiralty. Admiral Scheer employed his U-boats in the North Sea against warships, while maintaining a vigorous anti-shipping campaign in the Mediterranean. The growing German submarine fleet increased its destruction of commercial vessels from 113,000 tons per month in 1915 to 192,000 tons per month in 1916.¹¹² Walter Runciman, President of the Board of Trade warned the Cabinet in November:

My expert advisers believed that I am far too sanguine in advising the War Committee that the complete breakdown in shipping will come in June, 1917; they...[believe] it will come much sooner.¹¹³

David Lloyd George urged the navy to convoy merchant vessels, but the Admiralty opposed the practice.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹Hough, Great War at Sea, 175-76.

¹¹²Potter, E.B. and Chester Nimitz, eds, Sea Power: A Naval History (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1960), 459.

¹¹³Walter Runciman, as recorded in David Woodward, Lloyd George and the Generals (Newark, 1983), 116.

¹¹⁴The Admiralty had four principle objections: convoys would be reduced to the speed of the slowest ship; they would congest ports; civilian ships could not maintain the necessary formations; and lack of sufficient escort vessels. See Potter and Nimitz, Sea Power: A Naval History, 466.

First Lord Arthur Balfour instead transferred Admiral Jellicoe from Scapa Flow, where Beatty assumed command of the Grand Fleet, to Whitehall as First Sea Lord to solve the submarine problem. A week later, Lloyd George replaced Asquith as Prime Minister.¹¹⁵ Lloyd George, who regarded Balfour as possessing "neither the energy, initiative, nor the administrative gifts requisite for the position of First Lord of the Admiralty," appointed Sir Edward Carson to the Admiralty.¹¹⁶ The war immediately tested the new team.

Lloyd George quickly lost faith in his subordinates. Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare in February, 1917, accepting the risk of American intervention. The U-boats quickly proved they could inflict greater losses than at earlier stages of the war. Allied merchant losses rose from 171 ships (49 British) of 370,000 tons in January to 234 ships (105 British) of 500,000 tons in February.¹¹⁷ The First Sea Lord publicly maintained a particularly glum attitude, leading a senior Army officer to write: "The situation at sea is very serious indeed. It has never been so bad as at present, and Jellicoe almost daily announces it

¹¹⁵Asquith never served in the Cabinet after his defeat in December 1916. From the perspective of the Royal Navy, the resignation of Asquith, who believed that the war would be decided at sea, was a grave loss. See Taylor, Lloyd George: A Diary, 19.

¹¹⁶David Lloyd George, as recorded in Marder, Scapa Flow, 288.

¹¹⁷Patterson, Jellicoe, 159; Wilson, Myriad Faces, 429.

to be hopeless."¹¹⁸ Jellicoe attacked the problem on two fronts. First, he sought "to restrict imports and to cut down consumption drastically." Second, he attempted to increase the number of escort vessels "acting offensively against enemy submarines."¹¹⁹ The Cabinet wholeheartedly supported the effort to increase the available shipping tonnage by chartering ships from neutrals, increasing maritime construction, rationing imports, and increasing internal production.¹²⁰ As to the use of escort vessels, however, Lloyd George had come to prefer convoy to offensive patrolling. In late February, the Prime Minister attempted to convert Carson and Jellicoe.¹²¹ Carson, however, refused to overrule his naval advisors. He responded publicly: "As long as I am at the Admiralty, the sailors will have full scope. They will not be interfered with by me, and I will allow no one else to interfere with them."¹²² The

¹¹⁸General William Robertson, as recorded in Randolph Churchill, Lord Derby: King of Lancashire (New York, 1960), 268.

¹¹⁹Admiral Jellicoe, as recorded in Alfred Patterson, ed, The Jellicoe Papers (London, 1968), Vol II, 154-56.

¹²⁰Alfred Gollin, Proconsul in Politics: A Study of Lord Milner in Opposition and in Power (Letchworth, U.K., 1964), 410-413.

¹²¹Lloyd George's advocacy of convoy reflected the counsel of Hankey, who served as a conduit for the ideas of younger officers. See Roskill, Hankey, Vol I, 356-578.

¹²²Sir Edward Carson, as recorded in Gollin, Proconsul in Politics, 421.

Admiralty's continued opposition to convoys exasperated the Prime Minister.¹²³

Yet the Admiralty, for a number of reasons, eventually adopted the general practice of convoying merchant vessels. First, Commander Reginald Henderson discovered an error of methodology in the Ministry of Shipping statistics which supposedly had shown the number of merchant ships hopelessly exceeded the available escorts.¹²⁴ Henderson's discovery, combined with the entry of America into the war on April 6, 1917, undermined any argument about the lack of escort vessels. Second, Admiral Beatty convinced Jellicoe to implement convoys for Scandinavian trade, which had previously suffered a 25% loss rate. Losses there plummeted dramatically.¹²⁵ Finally, in April, submarines sank 373 vessels of 870,000 tons, damaged another 300,000 tons of shipping, and reduced the number of neutral merchantmen calling in Allied ports by 25%. On April 25th, Lloyd George announced in the War Cabinet his intention of visiting the Admiralty five days later to review the anti-submarine campaign. When he arrived, he found Jellicoe determined to

¹²³Rowland, David Lloyd George, 396-98.

¹²⁴Henderson discovered the figure of 5,000 ships per week using British ports included an overwhelming majority of coastal vessels and that the ocean-going steamers which required escort numbered perhaps 300 per week. See Marder, Scapa Flow, 150.

¹²⁵Frederick Dreyer, The Sea Heritage: A Study of Maritime Warfare (London, 1955), 218.

give convoy "a thorough and fair trial."¹²⁶ Convoy, once implemented, steadily reduced the losses from U-boat attacks.¹²⁷

Lloyd George, in 1917, decided to replace Carson and Jellicoe. In early June, the Prime Minister took counsel with Captain Herbert Richmond, one of the navy's most original thinkers, who criticized Jellicoe's organization of the Admiralty staff.¹²⁸ On June 20, 1917, Jellicoe told the War Policy Committee that Britain's survival depended on clearing the Belgian coast and that "we should not be able to continue the war next year for lack of shipping."¹²⁹ Lloyd George disliked Jellicoe's pessimism and resented the admiral's support for the Army's proposals for offensives in Flanders.¹³⁰ The Prime Minister realized that Carson would never move against his First Sea Lord and decided that Carson, therefore, needed to go.¹³¹ Alfred, 1st Viscount Milner, who shared Lloyd George's derogatory opinion of the

¹²⁶Admiral Jellicoe, as recorded in Hough, Great War at Sea, 308.

¹²⁷Wilson, Myriad Faces, 439; Potter and Nimitz, Sea Power: A History, 466-69.

¹²⁸Marder, Portrait of an Admiral, 257-59.

¹²⁹Admiral Jellicoe, as recorded in Roskill, Hankey, Vol I, 404.

¹³⁰Hankey noted in his diary on July 3rd that Lloyd George "was hot for getting rid of Jellicoe." See Roskill, Hankey, Vol I, 406.

¹³¹Rowland, David Lloyd George, 406-07.

Carson-Jellicoe regime, then suggested "promoting" Carson to the War Cabinet and making Sir Eric Geddes, Controller of the Navy, the new First Lord.¹³² Lloyd George proposed the change to Carson, who accepted in July 1917.

The new First Lord quickly became disillusioned with Jellicoe. In October, Geddes took counsel with Balfour, Carson, and Lloyd George as to the advisability of replacing the First Sea Lord.¹³³ In December, Geddes, upon the recommendation of Deputy First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, directed Jellicoe to relieve the commander responsible for the Dover Barrage, Vice-Admiral Reginald Bacon, a close friend. The First Sea Lord demurred. Geddes, with Lloyd George's approval, informed Jellicoe on the evening of December 24th that "a change is desirable in the position of First Sea Lord."¹³⁴ The news that Admiral Wemyss had assumed the duties of First Sea Lord pleased the Prime Minister.¹³⁵

The German submarine effort, contributing to Jellicoe's fall, had far-reaching consequences for the navy. First, the replacement of Jellicoe and Carson marked the eclipse of

¹³²Gollin, Proconsul in Politics, 423-42.

¹³³Stephen Roskill, "The Dismissal of Admiral Jellicoe", Journal of Contemporary History (I, 1966), 69-93.

¹³⁴Sir Eric Geddes, as recorded in Patterson, Jellicoe, 203.

¹³⁵Rowland, David Lloyd George, 426.

two of the Royal Navy's most ardent supporters.¹³⁶ Second, the destruction wreaked by the U-boats demonstrated the need to modify Mahan's premise that concentration of a superior fleet resulted inexorably in command of the sea. The future role of the capital ship would become the dominant question in naval circles.

The Great War was not kind to the Royal Navy. Despite the ultimate defeat of both the High Seas Fleet and the U-boat threat, the public remained dissatisfied. The Dardanelles campaign, the damage done by German submarines, and above all the Battle of Jutland contributed to "expectations unfulfilled." Admiral Beatty, the day after the armistice, wrote: "The Fleet, my Fleet is broken-hearted...All suffering from a feeling far greater than disappointment, depressed beyond measure."¹³⁷ Leading supporters of the navy, including both civilians (Churchill, Asquith, and Carson) and sailors (Fisher and Jellicoe) lost their positions and preeminence. Only debonair David Beatty remained to carry the torch for the capital ship in a world characterized by rising idealism and shrinking defense budgets.

¹³⁶Carson resigned from the Lloyd George ministry in January 1918, primarily over issues related to Ulster. See Gollin, Proconsul in Politics, 464-65.

¹³⁷Admiral Beatty, as recorded in W.S. Chalmers, Life and Letters of David Beatty, 341.

CHAPTER 4

CONFLICT AT THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE

At the conclusion of the Great War, the Allied and Associated Powers gathered in Paris to conclude a peace agreement. The Fourteen Points of President Woodrow Wilson, as the basis of the Armistice with Germany, dominated the early discussions. The British contingent strongly opposed Wilson's proposal concerning freedom of the seas. The question of relative naval strength and the fate of the captured High Seas Fleet further strained relations between Britain and the United States. Lacking the cement of a common enemy, the former wartime alliance cracked under the pressure of divergent national interests.

Although President Wilson first arrived in Europe in December 1918, his ideas had long preceded him. He presented his program for the future of Europe in a series of talks in 1918. The first of these speeches, on January 8, 1918, contained the famous "Fourteen Points."¹ Wilson's plan contained three major components. First, it advocated nationality as the primary basis for the determination of territorial boundaries.² Second, Point XIV proposed the

¹The president's Four Principles of February 11th and Five Particulars of September 27th expanded the original Fourteen Points. Arthur Walworth, America's Moment: 1918 - American Diplomacy and the End of World War I (New York, 1977), 283-84, contains Wilson's principles and particulars.

²Points V, VI, VII, IX, XI, XII, and XIII. See J.A.S. Grenville, The Major International Treaties 1914-1973: A History and Guide with Complete Texts (New York, 1974), 57.

creation of a supranational organization, a "general association of nations," to arbitrate international conflict. Third, the plan provided several measures designed to reduce the possibility of such conflict. These measures included open diplomacy (Point I), freedom of the seas (II), the removal of trade barriers (III), and the reduction of armaments (IV).

David Lloyd George shared Wilson's desire for a world safe for every peace-loving nation and developed a parallel approach to post-war security. Knowledge that Wilson intended to make an address on the subject of war aims combined with Labour party demands for a Cabinet statement on the subject spurred the British Prime Minister to reach the public first. Lloyd George, in a Cabinet discussion of war aims on January 3, 1918, took a position remarkably similar to Wilson's only five days before the President pronounced his Fourteen Points.³ With the aid of Hankey, the Prime Minister drafted a speech on war aims which won approval from Asquith and Grey.⁴ On January 5th, the Prime Minister spoke to a meeting of trade union delegates at Caxton Hall on the subject of post-war reconstruction and

³He advocated the restoration of Belgium, Alsace-Lorraine, and Poland, together with "the principle of self-determination" for German colonies and the Austrian nationalities. CAB 23/5: War Cabinet 312, January 3, 1918, as recorded in Lowe and Dockrill, The Mirage of Power, 599-600.

⁴Rowland, David Lloyd George, 428.

advocated the right of self-determination, the sanctity of treaties, and "the creation of some international organization to limit the burden of armaments and diminish the probability of war."⁵ The British government, which thus supported the general tenor of Wilson's proposals, nonetheless entertained serious reservations concerning Point II and Wilson's vision of freedom of the seas.

The second of Wilson's Fourteen Points sought to establish the right of neutrals to trade freely in time of war. It read:

Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas outside territorial waters, alike in peace and in war, except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action for the enforcement of international covenants.⁶

Belligerent nations would lose the right to interfere with the trade of privately-owned vessels, regardless of the nature and destination of the cargo involved. Wilson argued that "the freedom of the sea is the sine qua non of peace, equality, and cooperation."⁷ The General Board of the United States Navy had articulated America's traditional

⁵David Lloyd George, as recorded in George Egerton, Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations: Strategy, Politics, and International Organization, 1914-1919 (Chapel Hill, 1978), 61.

⁶Point II as recorded in Grenville, International Treaties, 57.

⁷Woodrow Wilson, as recorded in Edward Buehrig, Woodrow Wilson and the Balance of Power (Bloomington, IN, 1955), 261.

position on the issue after reviewing the British blockade against Germany in 1915:

The claim now put forward by the British government of the right to take neutral vessels from the high seas and conduct them into a British port for the purpose of search without capture is untenable under any law or custom of maritime war hitherto known, and is one that cannot be conceded without the gravest sacrifice of the most vital neutral rights.⁸

In February 1916, Wilson had sent emissary Colonel Edward House to Europe on a mission, which ultimately proved futile, to present to both belligerent camps a peace plan based upon: "(a) military and naval disarmament and (b) a league of nations to secure each nation from aggression and maintain absolute freedom of the seas."⁹ Wilson sought to protect neutrals against the disregard for maritime law displayed during the Great War by strictly regulating the right of belligerents to establish future blockades.

Britain viewed the issue of freedom of the seas from the perspective of a belligerent, rather than from that of a neutral. In her long series of struggles with continental states, sea power, to include blockade, had played a crucial part. British use of blockade in the First World War faced

⁸General Board Memorandum 438, March 3, 1915, as recorded in Roskill, Naval Policy, 80-81.

⁹Buehrig, Woodrow Wilson, 213. House contributed to Wilson's formulation of freedom of the seas, arguing "that in time of both war and peace a merchantman should traverse the seas unmolested." See Charles Seymour, The Intimate Papers of Colonel House (Boston, 1928), Vol III, 327.

restrictions arising from the Declaration of London (1909), which divided goods into three categories: absolute contraband, subject to seizure under all conditions; conditional contraband, subject to seizure if destined to a belligerent government; and free goods, which were immune from blockade.¹⁰ Britain resorted, as she had in 1807 after the advent of Napoleon's Continental system, to a series of Orders in Council which steadily increased the list of contraband goods. In 1915, the Cabinet adopted the principle of continuous voyage, whereby neutral goods ultimately bound for Germany were subject to seizure, regardless of their immediate destination. In the same year, Hankey produced an analysis of blockade which emphasized the importance of economic pressure in modern warfare and argued that national interests dictated that the blockade weapon remain under the control of the Cabinet, rather than any international body.¹¹ In early 1916, Robert, Viscount Cecil assumed control of the Ministry of Blockade and supplemented the British blockade effort with vigorous attempts to dissuade neutrals from trading with Germany.

¹⁰The Liberal Cabinet of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman accepted these restrictions on the right of blockade in the belief that Britain would remain neutral in the event of a future European conflict. The Declaration of London never achieved the force of law because the House of Lords rejected it. See Richmond, Statesmen and Sea Power, 280.

¹¹CAB 17/130: Hankey Memorandum, "Freedom of the Seas", June 11, 1915.

American criticism towards Britain's implementation of blockade influenced two Englishmen to publish in 1917 essays concerning the freedom of the seas. Professor Ramsay Muir labelled the arbitration between belligerent and neutral rights in wartime as "one of the most vexed and difficult problems of international law."¹² He asserted that custom had established two prerogatives for belligerents: the destruction of the sea-borne commerce of the enemy, subject to the safeguarding of the lives of non-combatants and neutral property; and the use of blockade, a practice which interferes with neutral trade attempting either to run the blockade or to carry war materials (known as contraband) destined for the enemy. Muir then criticized the German naval war effort for seven categories of major violations, including the destruction of "all shipping, enemy or neutral, which ventures to traverse any areas of the world's seas which she [Germany] chooses to indicate" and the subsequent abandonment of "men, women, and children in open boats, in stormy seas, and far from land." He admitted that Britain exceeded customary practice in two respects: forcing neutral vessels to submit to contraband searches in British ports rather than on the high seas, thus to avoiding submarine attack at some expense of time and fuel; and the significant extension of contraband lists to include all

¹²Ramsay Muir, Mare Liberum: The Freedom of the Seas (London, 1917), 6-16.

goods, taken in reprisal for the German policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. Muir ended with a warning that "to disarm sea-power while leaving land-power in possession of all its weapons of offense...would be a positive danger to the liberties of the world."¹³

Naval historian Julian Corbett sought even more directly to respond to Wilson's demand for freedom of the seas. Corbett, who would later write Britain's official naval history of the Great War, professed that the American President realized "the impossibility of absolute freedom so long as naval warfare is admitted as part of the machinery of international relations." Freedom of the seas, according to Corbett, thus meant "nothing more than the liberty of neutrals to trade with belligerents subject to the time-honoured restrictions of blockade and contraband." He then noted the complications introduced by advances in naval technology--the mine, the torpedo, and the submarine--and the increasingly intimate relationship between war and industrial society. Corbett concluded by arguing that restrictions on sea power would adversely affect the viability of Wilson's proposed League of Nations by reducing "the executive ability of the Naval Powers," Great Britain and the United States.¹⁴

¹³Muir, Mare Liberum, 6-16.

¹⁴Julian Corbett, The League of Peace and a Free Sea (London, 1917), 6.

While fully cognizant of the value of naval blockade, the British government also recognized the hazard of offending neutral opinion on the issue of blockade. In August 1914, Radical Charles Trevelyan warned President of the Board of Trade Walter Runciman:

I feel great uneasiness about the trend of action of the Government towards trying to exclude German food-supplies passing through neutral countries...It would be bad enough to alienate Dutch opinion. But it will be infinitely worse if you alienate the U.S.A. Remember that under very analogous circumstances the U.S.A. went to war with us against its will.¹⁵

The British government chose to subordinate maximum naval efficiency to diplomatic relations with neutral powers, particularly the United States. The Cabinet, over the stiff objections of Admiral Jellicoe, repeatedly directed the navy to release neutral vessels loaded with foodstuffs. Captain Herbert Richmond complained bitterly about the "half-measures" imposed on the navy's cruisers.¹⁶ Asquith, late in 1916, noted in his diary:

It is highly creditable to the Foreign Office that during the last two years we have escaped a breakdown of our blockade policy, which, in spite of continual obstruction and bad faith, has produced excellent results; but we have been within an ace of grave complications with Sweden and the United States.¹⁷

¹⁵Hazlehurst, Politicians at War, 186.

¹⁶Captain Richmond, as recorded in Marder, Portrait of an Admiral, 198.

¹⁷Asquith, Memories and Reflections, 170.

The German decision to resume unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917, which led the United States to join the anti-German coalition, temporarily eclipsed Anglo-American differences over the legality of the blockade. Historian Charles Seymour noted:

After entering the struggle against Germany, the American Government naturally changed its point of view and in its efforts to prevent goods from entering Germany rather improved upon the strictness of Allied measures."¹⁸

Wilson's public address of January 8, 1918 reopened the issue.

David Lloyd George fired a counter salvo in the struggle over freedom of the seas. In a speech in January 1918, he noted:

"Freedom of the Seas" is a very elastic term. There is a sense in which we would rejoice to accept it, but we must guard very carefully against any attempt to interfere with the capacity to protect our shores and our shipping that has alone enabled us even to exist up to the present moment.

Lloyd George carefully portrayed his concerns with Britain's ability "to protect her lines of communication" as defensive in nature, yet Wilson's proposal would have enhanced such protection.¹⁹ In reality, the proposal restricted the offensive use of British sea power.

¹⁸Seymour, The Intimate Papers of Colonel House, Vol III, 193.

¹⁹Beatty MSS: Memorandum, "Freedom of the Seas", November 29, 1918.

There the matter rested until October 6, 1918, when Wilson received a note from Germany asking the President to invite all belligerents to arrange an armistice on the basis of his program for peace. Two days later, the President sent back a note asking whether the German government accepted the Fourteen Points as a basis for negotiations and whether the German Army would withdraw from captured territories. On the urging of Lloyd George, the Supreme War Council sent two telegrams to Wilson which indicated that any armistice terms would have to receive the approval of Allied military experts and that they would appreciate consultation in advance of further communications with Germany.²⁰ Wilson decided to send his emissary Colonel Edward House to Europe to consult with the Allies.

The British government resurfaced its earlier fears concerning freedom of the seas. On October 12th, Lloyd George cautioned Geddes, then in Washington seeking to influence the American naval construction effort, against any premature suggestion that Britain shared the American position on freedom of the seas:

You should be careful to express no approval or disapproval of President Wilson's attitude towards Prince Maximilian's note about which we were not consulted. As you are aware we cannot accept his views about freedom of the seas.²¹

²⁰Rowland, David Lloyd George, 453.

²¹ADM 116/1809: Lloyd George to Geddes, October 12, 1918.

An informal meeting of a majority of the Cabinet the next day manifested the British conviction, maintained throughout the process of peace negotiation, that the Allies could not, in the final treaties, go much beyond the terms of the armistice. Lloyd George deftly guided seven leading officials to a pair of conclusions. First, the Cabinet members objected to the apparent agreement between Wilson and Germany that, in Hankey's words, "evacuation of occupied territory [was] to be the sole condition of armistice."²² More importantly, the group criticized the Fourteen Points as unclear and roundly condemned freedom of the seas.

The Admiralty shared fully the Cabinet's opposition to Wilson's Fourteen Points. British naval leadership had a clear appreciation of the value of blockade. First Sea Lord Rosslyn Wemyss objected to the notion that neutral rights took precedence over those of belligerents in wartime and to any surrender of British sovereignty to the League. The Admiralty in October sent a memorandum to the Cabinet:

The British idea of freedom of the seas is free and unfettered access to all the seas by all...but in time of war this privilege must be fought for by belligerent navies, causing as little damage as possible to neutrals, but maintaining the right of searching neutral merchant ships...to verify their nationality and prevent...aiding a belligerent.²³

²²Sir Maurice Hankey, as recorded in Roskill, Hankey, Vol I, 613.

²³ADM 116/1771: Admiralty Memorandum, "An Inquiry into the Meaning and Effect of the Demand for Freedom of the Seas", October 17, 1918.

The memorandum argued that restrictions on blockade would prove detrimental to Britain, since "the value of naval power for attack and defence...would be correspondingly diminished." The Board contended that the untested League of Nations could not defend Britain's national interests as well as British sea power, which "had been exercised beneficially for centuries."²⁴

The Board convinced Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour. He suggested that "if the League of Nations develops into an efficient instrument for securing international peace," then Britain might entrust the proposed organization with the right of blockade and its corollary, the right of search at sea. Until such time as the peace-keeping mechanisms of the League became "firmly established," however, Balfour noted that "every attempt to limit the use of sea power merely adds to the relative strength of land power." The Foreign Secretary thus cautioned against accepting Wilson's Fourteen Points until the League could provide "full security to all Nations against aggression" and "enforce its own decrees against recalcitrant Nations."²⁵

In mid-October, the Cabinet received, in addition to the Admiralty and Balfour memoranda, reports of two separate

²⁴ADM 116/1771: Admiralty Memorandum, "An Inquiry into the Meaning and Effect of the Demand for Freedom of the Seas", October 17, 1918.

²⁵ADM 116/1651: Memorandum, "Freedom of the Sea", October 23, 1918.

interviews with Wilson concerning his views on the freedom of the seas. First Lord Geddes, who had spoken with Wilson on October 6th, suggested that Wilson's views on sea power "appeared to be unformed," but that the President desired the League to exercise control over all wartime naval action.²⁶ Foreign Office liaison Sir William Wiseman, who had talked with Wilson on October 16th, corroborated Geddes' notion that the President's views on sea power were elastic and further indicated that Wilson desired a formula enabling him to harness British naval power to the League.²⁷

The British War Cabinet considered the possibility of an armistice with Germany at greater length in a meeting on October 26th. Sir Austen Chamberlain opened the discussion by complaining that Wilson's position on freedom of the seas served to shackle sea power while leaving land power unrestricted. Lloyd George immediately concurred. Next, Geddes informed the Cabinet that Wilson had placed a request before Congress for a major increase in the size of the United States Navy. The Cabinet then voted to reject "the doctrine of Freedom of the Seas" and decided that "a notification to this effect must be made in some form to

²⁶Sir Eric Geddes, as recorded in Roskill, Hankey, Vol I, 605.

²⁷Beloff, Imperial Sunset, 272-73.

Germany before we entered into peace negotiations."²⁸ The Cabinet never found cause to reconsider this decision to oppose freedom of the seas. To surrender the time-tested weapon of blockade to international action required a faith in the community of nations with which the British government was not imbued.

Colonel House, together with naval advisor Admiral William Benson, arrived in Paris in late October for his discussions with the Allied Supreme War Council. On October 29th, Lloyd George and French Premier Georges Clemenceau informed Colonel House that they were not prepared to accept the Fourteen Points. Lloyd George explained his opposition to Point II:

This point we cannot accept under any conditions; it means that the power of blockade goes; Germany has been broke almost as much by the blockade as by military methods; if this power is to be handed over to the League of Nations and Great Britain were fighting for her life, no league of nations would prevent her from defending herself.

The Prime Minister then relented slightly and admitted his position on blockade was not unconditional: "I should like to see this League of Nations established first before I let this power go."²⁹ In the face of this rejection, House hinted that the United States might end its war effort if

²⁸CAB 23/14: War Cabinet 491B, October 26, 1918, as recorded in Lowe and Dockrill, Mirage, 717-18.

²⁹David Lloyd George, as recorded in Seymour, Intimate Papers, Vol IV, 163-64.

the entire program were not accepted. Lloyd George riposted swiftly: "We should deeply regret it, but, nonetheless, should be prepared to go on fighting." He quickly added that "to give up the right of using its Fleet was a thing no one in England would consent to."³⁰ House then presented the Allied leaders with a commentary on the Fourteen Points which had the blessing of Woodrow Wilson.³¹ In the case of a future war in which a presumed league of nations should remain neutral, the commentary read: "The rights of neutrals shall be maintained against the belligerents, the rights of both to be clearly and precisely defined in the law of nations."³² House conceded the right to blockade, without specifying its extent. The meeting ended with House's suggestion that the Allies draft their reservations to the Fourteen Points.

House cabled the results of the first meeting to Wilson, who replied the next day. The President demonstrated the high moral tone which characterized his

³⁰David Lloyd George, Memoirs of the Peace Conference (New Haven, 1939), Vol I, 42.

³¹Rowland, David Lloyd George, 455, states that House produced the commentary at the end of the meeting; Seymour, Intimate Papers, 153-63, states that House distributed the commentary at the start.

³²House Commentary, as recorded in Walworth, America's Moment, 275-283. The commentary advocated complete freedom of the seas in time of peace and in time of war reserved for the League the right to close the seas to an offending nation.

diplomacy:

I feel it my solemn duty to authorize you to say that I cannot consent to take part in the negotiations of a peace which does not include the Freedom of the Seas, because we are pledged to fight not only Prussian militarism but militarism everywhere.

Wilson ended with a threat to appeal to popular opinion: "I hope I shall not be obliged to make this decision public."³³

The second meeting between House and Lloyd George produced no substantial agreement. The American warning failed to move Lloyd George, who insisted on reserving Britain's acceptance of Point II.³⁴ House then relayed Wilson's threat to "build up the strongest navy that our resources permit."³⁵ That, too, failed of effect, as Lloyd George remained obdurate.

On November 3rd, House and Lloyd George managed to find a formula for compromise. The Prime Minister started by restating the impossibility of accepting freedom of the seas and added that Britain "would spend her last guinea to keep

³³Woodrow Wilson, as recorded in Seymour, Intimate Papers, Vol IV, 168.

³⁴The Prime Minister proposed the wording: "that the freedom of the seas is liable to various interpretations, some of which we cannot accept." See Roskill, Hankey, I, 623. France expressed similar reservations with regard to Point VIII, which dealt with reparations. See Renè Albrecht-Carriè, A Diplomatic History of Europe (New York, 1958), 356-57.

³⁵Woodrow Wilson, as recorded in Michael Fry, "The Imperial War Cabinet, the United States, and the Freedom of the Seas", Journal of the Royal United Service Institute (XC, 1965), 353-62.

a navy superior to that of the United States or any other power."³⁶ He cited the pressures of British domestic politics, in which freedom of the seas translated loss of blockade. The Prime Minister explained:

It's no use saying I accept the principle. It would only mean that in a week's time a new prime minister would be here who would say that he could not accept this principle. The English people would not look at it. On this point the nation is absolutely solid.³⁷

Wiseman then suggested that the issue could be reserved for discussion at Versailles without including Germany. Lloyd George finally wrote House a note stating that Britain remained willing to discuss freedom of the seas in Paris.³⁸ This Anglo-American settlement reflected an agreement to disagree.

The second naval issue raised by Wilson's communication with the German government involved the disposition of the German fleet. Admiral Wemyss sought Germany's acknowledgment of defeat at sea in the same degree as defeat

³⁶Lloyd George, as recorded in Seymour, Intimate Papers, Vol IV, 180-81.

³⁷David Lloyd George, as recorded in Walworth, America's Moment, 64.

³⁸The Supreme War Council subsequently agreed that the "freedom of the seas, is open to various interpretations, some of which [the Allies] could not accept. They must therefore reserve to themselves complete freedom on this subject when they enter the peace conference." See David Trask, Captains & Cabinets: Anglo-American Naval Relations, 1917-1918 (Columbia, MO, 1972), 341-42.

on land.³⁹ The Admiralty desired that the naval conditions of the armistice include surrender of ten battleships, including the flagship Baden, six battle cruisers, and the entire submarine force, so as to preclude the possibility of German resumption of hostilities.⁴⁰ Admiral Beatty made a lengthy presentation to the War Cabinet on October 20th. He argued:

To achieve the destruction of German Sea Power and reduce Germany to the status of a second-rate Naval Power, it is necessary to lay down in the Naval Terms of the Armistice conditions which would be commensurate with the results of a Naval action.⁴¹

To achieve that purpose, Beatty emphasized the need to obtain the surrender of both the High Seas Fleet and the German submarine force. Despite the persuasiveness of Beatty's presentation, the meeting proved inconclusive.

The War Cabinet finally resolved the issue on October 26th. Lloyd George suggested a more conciliatory position on submarines, but the First Lord stuck to his guns. The War Cabinet decided:

The naval condition of the armistice should represent the admission of German defeat by sea in the same degree as the military conditions

³⁹ADM 116/1771: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Conditions of Armistice", October 19, 1918.

⁴⁰Marder, Scapa Flow, Vol V, 177.

⁴¹Admiral Beatty, as recorded in Chalmers, Life and Letters of David Beatty, 333.

recognize the corresponding admission of German defeat by land.⁴²

Wemyss recorded his gratification that the War Cabinet had accepted his position that "as far as the Naval terms are concerned it is impossible not to embody terms of peace."⁴³

Admiral Wemyss took these demands to the Allied Naval Council.⁴⁴ French Minister Georges Leygues on October 28th opened the sixth session of the Allied Naval Council with a proposal to demand the surrender of a large number of submarines and surface vessels and to maintain the blockade. First Lord Geddes then argued that the armistice terms "must leave the German fleet reduced to impotence and unable at will to disturb the peace of the world."⁴⁵ The Naval Council accepted the British calculations as a basis for negotiation and established a committee to determine specific figures. Admiral Benson, the American Chief of Naval Operations and a pronounced Anglophobe, sat quietly through the first meeting. His primary concern involved the disposition of the German fleet, any distribution of which

⁴²War Council 491B, as recorded in Trask, Captains and Cabinets, 326.

⁴³Admiral Wemyss, as recorded in Victoria Wester Wymess, The Life and Letters of Lord Wester Wymess (London, 1935), 386.

⁴⁴The Allied Naval Council, which comprised the civil and service chiefs of Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, met for the first time in November 1917.

⁴⁵Sir Eric Geddes, as recorded in Trask, Captains and Cabinets, 332.

he feared would strengthen the Royal Navy against his own service.⁴⁶

Admiral Benson soon shattered the apparent unity of the Allied Naval Council. On October 29th, he received a cable from President Wilson which advocated moderate naval terms in order to avoid unnecessary humiliation of Germany. Benson then sought, without much success, to persuade his naval colleagues that the ultimate disposition of the German fleet could await the peace conference and that the internment of the submarine force alone would suffice. Wemyss felt Benson's efforts lacked substance but made the council meeting "tiresome."⁴⁷ The Naval Council's draft armistice terms (surrender of 160 submarines, ten battleships and six battle cruisers, as well as a host of lesser craft) mirrored the Anglo-American positions on the 14 Points; the position of the Admiralty carried the day, while the United States reserved its views.⁴⁸ Admiral Benson sought help from his superior, Colonel House.

⁴⁶Admiral Benson flatly opposed the British position on freedom of the seas. The wartime American naval attaché in London, Admiral William Sims, while testifying before Congress in 1920, reported that Benson had told him: "Don't let the British pull the wool over your eyes. It is none of our business pulling their chestnuts out of the fire. We would as soon fight the British as the Germans." See Mary Klachko, Admiral William Shepherd Benson: First Chief of Naval Operations (Annapolis, MD, 1987), 58, 97, 122-23.

⁴⁷Admiral Wemyss, as recorded in Wester Wemyss, Lord Wester Wymess, 387.

⁴⁸Trask, Captains and Cabinets, 330-334.

On the disposition of the German fleet, the views of the political leaders assumed much greater convergence than those of their naval advisors. Geddes presented the terms of the Naval Council to the Supreme War Council on November 1st, with the accompanying explanation:

The list of ships to be surrendered has been drawn up on the basis that if the Grand Fleet and the High Seas Fleet were to fight a battle, the German fleet would come out of it with the loss of the equivalent of these ships.⁴⁹

He added that Germany possessed a lead in battle cruisers which if unchecked would force the Allies to resume shipbuilding. Allied Commander-in-Chief Ferdinand Foch attacked these terms as unduly harsh--perhaps so harsh as to lead the Germans to continue the war. Lloyd George, who considered the proposals of the Allied Naval Council "rather excessive," proposed a compromise: surrender of the submarines together with the battle cruisers and internment of the battleships.⁵⁰ This suggestion satisfied the Supreme War Council.

The Allied Naval Council reconsidered the situation the same day. Geddes explained the compromise worked out by the Supreme War Council. Wemyss then reiterated the Admiralty arguments in favor of surrender of a large portion of the

⁴⁹Sir Eric Geddes, as recorded in Seymour, Intimate Papers, 127.

⁵⁰Lloyd George, as recorded in Marder, Scapa Flow, Vol V, 181.

German Navy. French Chief of Staff Admiral Ferdinand de Bon strongly supported Wemyss' position. Only Benson, who feared a surrender of German battleships would result in a distribution which would benefit the Royal navy--despite assurances from Geddes--supported the Lloyd George proposal.⁵¹ The Naval Council voted to resubmit its original recommendation. Geddes privately sent a note to Lloyd George explaining that if Germany regained the battleships tentatively scheduled to be interned, she would have twelve more than she had at the beginning of the war.⁵²

The Supreme War Council reached a substantive agreement on the future of the German Fleet on November 4th. Benson argued that internment of the ten German battleships would "increase the probability of acceptance of the terms of the armistice."⁵³ Foch once again protested that the harsh terms of the naval experts threatened the armistice in return for nominal gain. Lloyd George then proposed that Germany should surrender her submarines, but that all surface vessels might be interned in neutral ports. This suggestion won acceptance from all political leaders present.

The Allied Naval Council thus found their room for maneuver seriously restricted. The politicians told their

⁵¹Marder, Scapa Flow, Vol V, 182.

⁵²ADM 116/1651: Geddes Note, November 2, 1918.

⁵³Admiral Benson, as recorded in Seymour, Intimate Papers, 132.

service advisors that the only responsibility of the Allied Naval Council was to draw up the terms of internment. Lloyd George then somewhat cushioned the blow by announcing that the Supreme War Council had agreed that Germany would never recover any of the interned vessels. First Lord Geddes expressed his reluctant endorsement: "The Naval Council did not agree but accepted the decision of the Ministers."⁵⁴ The Allied Naval Council subsequently added several minor modifications to the armistice terms: internment of the German flagship Baden in place of the unfinished battle cruiser Mackensen and the provision that if the victors were unable to find neutral harbors, then they would utilize Allied ports.

The terms of the armistice profoundly disturbed Admiral Beatty. During the negotiations in Paris he sent a note to the Permanent Secretary of the Admiralty, Sir Oswyn Murray, opposing any substitution of internment for surrender.⁵⁵ After hearing from Wemyss that the Supreme War Council had balked at requiring Germany to surrender the High Seas Fleet, the Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet sent an angry missive to the First Sea Lord on November 5th:

I was very perturbed at the underlying tone of your letter, which indicated that the Supreme Council might override the Naval Council. You speak about, "If we are obliged to ease up our

⁵⁴Sir Eric Geddes, as recorded in Trask, Captains and Cabinets, 348.

⁵⁵ADM 116/1651: Beatty Note, November 2, 1918.

Naval terms", also "If our terms are put down by the Supreme War Council, we can do nothing but enter a protest."

Beatty's concerns, furthermore, were not limited to the future of the High Seas Fleet. He also addressed the absence of any mention of the German island fortress of Heligoland, "which means that Germany, with any fleet of battleships at all, can menace the Sea Power of this country with her submarines."⁵⁶ He even went so far as to suggest the resignation of the Board of Admiralty in the event the Supreme War Council decided on further reductions in the naval terms of armistice with Germany. His anger was only partly assuaged on November 21st, when he enjoyed the sight of the High Seas Fleet sailing helplessly into Scapa Flow under the guns of the Grand Fleet.⁵⁷

Beatty then sought to stiffen the position of the Admiralty and ultimately the Cabinet on the issue of freedom of the seas at the upcoming peace conference. In November, he produced a paper, based on the Admiralty's work, which portrayed blockade as "an economic weapon for use in extreme emergencies against predatory continental emperors."⁵⁸ He

⁵⁶Admiral Beatty, as recorded in Chalmers, Life and Letters of David Beatty, 337-338.

⁵⁷The decisions by Norway and Spain to refuse the German fleet led the Allied Naval Council to decide on November 13, 1918 for internment at Scapa Flow. Detailed procedures for the internment can be found in Ranft, Beatty Papers, 562-69.

⁵⁸Beatty MSS: Memorandum, "Freedom of the Seas", November 29, 1918.

depicted the British blockade as a vital weapon in the recent struggle with Germany:

The essential facts therefore are that the blockade, with its kindred operations, has sapped the vigor of the enemy people, has weakened their financial resources, has killed their hope of speedy economic recuperation, and has to some extent impaired the efficiency of their fighting machine.⁵⁹

About a month later, in another memorandum on the same subject, Beatty condemned the confusion in maritime law which resulted from the lack of precise definition of conditional and absolute contraband and predicted that "in the future, the distinctions between conditional and absolute contraband will become hopelessly muddled." He suggested that maritime rules "designed to protect a neutral assisting a belligerent" (i.e., Wilson's Point II) would "inevitably break down when vital issues are at stake and the opposing navy is in a position to dispute them."⁶⁰

The Admiralty, in preparation for the peace conference, focused on three issues. The Board manifested its opposition to both freedom of the seas and submarine warfare in early November.⁶¹ Wemyss shared Beatty's belief in the need to oppose Wilson's position on freedom of the seas.

⁵⁹Beatty MSS: Memorandum, "Freedom of the Seas", November 29, 1918.

⁶⁰ADM 116/1772: Memorandum, "Freedom of the Seas", December 21, 1918.

⁶¹ADM 116/1852: Board Discussions on the Peace Settlement, November 9, 1918.

The First Sea Lord contended:

the crux of the matter, as far as we are concerned, is the proposal with regard to "Freedom of the Seas." Any limitation of sea-power is clearly to our disadvantage and should be strongly opposed.⁵²

Britain's two leading admirals also held similar views as to the future of the submarine. Beatty advocated complete elimination, recommending that:

Great Britain should take a definite standpoint in the Peace Conference that submarine warfare should be abolished, and the building of submarines should be definitively prohibited by International Law and the League of Nations.⁶³

The Admiralty also hoped to eliminate Germany as a significant naval power. The Board wanted to strip Germany of her colonies and to sink all German submarines, interned vessels, and her nine remaining capital ships.⁶⁴

As far as naval arms limitation was concerned, the Admiralty remained ambivalent. Wemyss, according to his wife, believed that the League would "sink into a mere debating society more likely to breed wars than prevent them."⁵⁵ The Board violently objected to any arrangements

⁵²Admiral Wemyss, as recorded in Beatty MSS: "Notes on Naval Interests Connected with the Peace Settlement", December 1918.

⁶³Beatty MSS: "Notes on Naval Interests Connected with the Peace Settlement", December 1918.

⁵⁴ADM 116/1861: Admiralty Memorandum, "Admiralty Policy in Relation to the Peace Settlement", January 6, 1919.

⁵⁵Wester Wymess, Wester Wymess, 410.

which would "place in the hands of some international tribunal the responsibility of determining what force is required for the protection of the Empire." The Admiralty tentatively supported naval arms reductions (Wilson's Point IV) so long as the Royal Navy maintained "adequate superiority for reasonably possible contingencies." The Board suggested, as a basis for determining relative naval strength and apportioning reductions, using the value of overseas trade, a method which would maintain the "predominant position" of the Royal Navy. The Board did not believe, however, that the "League would ration the arms of other nations and let Britain curb herself" and thus concluded that arms limitation under the auspices of the League was probably not feasible.⁶⁶

The British government seemed far more concerned with rapid demobilization of the wartime navy than with the future of blockade or submarines. Hankey, on November 22nd, predicted that the Admiralty would "become a sideshow in 3 months."⁶⁷ The next day, Chancellor of the Exchequer Andrew Bonar Law wrote to Sir Eric Geddes, strongly urging the First Lord to reduce costs: "I am most anxious that the cutting down of unnecessary expenditure should take place at

⁶⁶ADM 116/1772: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Aspects of a League of Nations and Limitation of Armaments", December 23, 1918; ADM 116/1863: Naval Sections Paris Records - League of Nations, undated.

⁶⁷Roskill, Hankey, Vol II, 22.

once."⁶⁸ Only Winston Churchill, at that time Minister of Munitions, sounded a note of warning:

Nothing in the world, nothing that you may think of, or dream of, or anyone may tell you, no arguments, however specious, no appeals, however seductive, must lead [Britain] to abandon that naval supremacy on which the life of our country depends.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, within a month the Board of Admiralty learned that the navy's wartime unlimited vote of credit ended with the fiscal year on March 31, 1919 and that they needed the blessing of the Treasury before spending money on new warship construction.⁷⁰ The Admiralty Board therefore decided not to continue with the construction of their newest class of battle cruisers.⁷¹

While the British government was reducing the size of the Royal Navy, the Wilson Administration laid a naval building program before Congress. At the end of the war, the United States possessed a navy inferior to that of Great Britain: 16 dreadnoughts against 42 capital ships (battleships and battle cruisers).⁷² Due to the need for

⁶⁸ADM 116/1809: Bonar Law to Geddes, November 23, 1918.

⁶⁹Winston Churchill, as recorded in Klatchko, Admiral Benson, 136.

⁷⁰Roskill, Naval Policy, 104.

⁷¹ADM 116/1772: Admiralty Memorandum re Battle Cruiser Program, January 14, 1919.

⁷²Sprouts, New Order, 51. Roskill, Naval Policy, 71, credits the Royal Navy with a total of 70 capital ships, including an unspecified number of pre-dreadnought vintage.

convoy escorts, the United States had temporarily delayed work on its 1916 program of 10 battleships and 6 battle cruisers, together with 3 battleships authorized in 1914-15.⁷³ Completion of these vessels would provide America with superiority in modern capital ships by 1924, as Britain's fleet included many older battleships.⁷⁴ The 1918 program provided for an additional 10 battleships and 6 battle cruisers over a three-year period. It also included a clause that allowed Wilson to cancel the program in the event of diplomatic agreement.⁷⁵ Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels explained to the House Naval Affairs Committee that Wilson supported the fleet because its authorization would help him at the upcoming peace conference.⁷⁶

⁷³Admiral Benson opposed these delays, arguing that the United States could "expect the future to give us more potential enemies than potential friends so that our safety must lie in our own resources." See Trask, Captains and Cabinets, 48.

⁷⁴Admiral Benson fervently hoped that regardless of the outcome of the peace conference, the United States would build a navy "equal to or superior to that of any other country." See Klatchko, Admiral Benson, 130.

⁷⁵Sprouts, New Order, 58n. The United States Navy Board, which originally proposed 12 battleships and 16 battle cruisers, viewed "the British Navy as the maximum possible force which we must be prepared to meet." See Trask, Captains and Cabinets, 290.

⁷⁶Wilson earlier told Benson that he wanted "to go into the Peace conference armed with as many weapons as my pockets will hold so as to compel justice." See Trask, Captains and Cabinets, 310.

The 1918 program pointed up a contradiction in Wilson's position. In the Fourteen Points, he publicly called for national armaments to be "reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety."⁷⁷ At the same time, he recognized the potential value of a maritime police force.⁷⁸ He also wanted to reduce the preeminence of the Royal Navy. The meeting of the Supreme War Council with Colonel House had already demonstrated his willingness to use the size of the American Fleet as a bargaining chip. Historian Mary Klatchko concludes that Wilson "intended to use the naval building program as leverage during negotiations in Paris."⁷⁹

In Paris, the issue of freedom of the seas caused little problem. Wilson's vision of the post-war world rested upon establishment of a League of Nations. He understood the intensity of Britain's commitment to blockade, and he wanted to avoid a battle with London.⁸⁰ He also believed that the establishment of the League would greatly reduce the importance of the issue of freedom of the

⁷⁷Point IV, as recorded in Grenville, International Treaties, 57.

⁷⁸Balfour MSS: Derby to Balfour, December 20/23, 1918.

⁷⁹Klatchko, Admiral Benson, 132.

⁸⁰The Times, for instance, declared on December 11, 1918: "This war could not have been won for civilization but for the British sea power. There can therefore be no question, so far as this country is concerned, of diminishing the sharpness of the weapon that has given us the victory in this war." See Ray Baker, Woodrow Wilson and World Settlement. (Garden City, NY, 1922), 381.

seas.⁸¹ Furthermore, his own naval advisor, Benson, shared Beatty's view that legal restrictions on sea power would operate only in peacetime.⁸² When Lloyd George suggested that "the matter could be left for further consideration after the League of Nations has been established and proved in its capacity in actual working," the President agreed.⁸³ American legal expert David Hunter Miller subsequently accepted Australian Prime Minister William Hughes' suggestion to drop from the draft covenant of the League the implication that the Permanent Court of International Justice might exercise jurisdiction over freedom of the seas.⁸⁴ When Miller presented the revised draft covenant of the League of Nations to the Peace Conference on February 14, 1919, it contained no reference to freedom of the seas.⁸⁵

⁸¹In September 1919, Wilson used some verbal prestidigitation to explain the absence of freedom of the seas at Paris: "One of the principles I went to Paris most insisting on was the freedom of the seas. Now, the freedom of the seas means the definition of the rights of neutrals to use the seas when other nations are at war, but under the League of Nations there are no neutrals, and, therefore...by the very thing that I was advocating it became unnecessary to define freedom of the seas." See Buehrig, Woodrow Wilson, 262-63.

⁸²Dingman, Pacific, 76-77.

⁸³David Lloyd George, as recorded in Maurice Hankey, The Supreme Control at the Paris Peace Conference 1919 (London, 1963), 16.

⁸⁴Egerton, League of Nations, 127.

⁸⁵For the complete text of the compromise draft, see Baker, World Settlement, Vol III, 144-151.

Secondary matters, however, proved more difficult to resolve.

The "naval battle of Paris" focused primarily upon the American program of naval expansion. First Lord of the Admiralty Walter Long, who replaced Sir Eric Geddes on January 16, 1919, expressed the Admiralty's concern over the American naval building program to the Prime Minister in late February:

The Navy...is the very foundation of our existence as a free people, and we cannot afford to trifle with our Naval Strength. It may be that the U.S.A. are bluffing, but we cannot, I submit, presume that this is the case,⁸⁶ and therefore I recommend diplomatic action.

British apprehension over the American threat to British naval superiority was not limited to the Admiralty. Lloyd George's assistants in Paris, Hankey and Philip Kerr, portrayed an Anglo-American naval limitation agreement as a prerequisite for the effective operation of the League:

The first condition of success for the League of Nations is...a firm understanding between the British Empire and the United States of America...that there will be no competitive building up of fleets.⁸⁷

They advised making British acceptance of the League provisional upon American willingness to accept naval arms limitation.

⁸⁶Walter Long, as recorded in Marder, Scapa Flow, Vol V, 230.

⁸⁷Hankey/Kerr memorandum, as recorded in Egerton, League of Nations, 158.

Lloyd George accepted their recommendation to use the League as a means of forcing the United States to make naval concessions. Robert, Viscount Cecil, the head of the League of Nations section within the Foreign Office, explained to Lloyd George that Wilson required an amendment to the League covenant protecting the Monroe Doctrine in order to overcome opposition within the United States Senate. On March 26th, the Prime Minister explained to Cecil that he was "anxious to induce the Americans to give up their plans of building ships against the British" and ordered him to veto the inclusion of the Monroe Doctrine in the covenant of the League.⁸⁸ Cecil informed House the following day that British acceptance of the League covenant depended upon a naval arrangement.

The civil and professional heads of the respective services proved unable to reach agreement. The dispute nearly reached the point of fisticuffs in late March when Admiral Wemyss paid an unscheduled visit upon Secretary Daniels to discuss the 1918 program. Admiral Benson arrived and felt burdened to correct what he considered as Wemyss' disregard of diplomatic etiquette. Daniels, some years later, described the confrontation:

I never saw two men of their high standing so infuriated as Admiral Benson and Admiral Wemyss...They exchanged such bitter comments that at one time I feared they would pass the bounds

⁸⁸Robert, Viscount Cecil as recorded in Egerton, League of Nations, 161.

and have an altercation.⁸⁹

Daniels and Long subsequently struggled to reconcile the British aim of naval superiority with the American goal of naval parity. Daniels, who claimed that "the peace of the world demanded equality of naval strength" between Britain and the United States, suggested that passage of the League covenant might render the 1918 naval building program superfluous.⁹⁰ Long responded by stating that the existing American building programs precluded British support for the League.⁹¹ Benson then went so far as to assert that British attempts to maintain naval superiority would lead to war.⁹²

Poor personal relations between Lloyd George and Wilson complicated attempts to resolve the Anglo-American naval conflict. Upset with Wilson's condemnation of British naval practices early in the war, the Prime Minister described the American President as "so stupidly unpleasant to both sides that statesmen of the fighting alliances were never quite

⁸⁹Josephus Daniels, as recorded in Klatchko, Admiral Benson, 144.

⁹⁰Sprouts, New Order, 65. On January 4, 1918, Daniels told Wilson that if the Peace Conference failed, the United States would need the greatest navy in the world. See Seth Tillman, Anglo-American Relations at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 (Princeton, 1961), 288.

⁹¹Marder, Scapa Flow, V, 231.

⁹²Klatchko, Admiral Benson, 147.

sure where his sympathies lay."⁹³ Wilson, in turn, complained to Daniels that "I will come out of the war hating the English."⁹⁴ The President offended his British counterpart at a state dinner at Buckingham Palace in December 1918, when he failed to pay tribute to the Royal Navy.⁹⁵ During the peace conference, Lloyd George became annoyed, according to his confidential secretary, with the President's habits of returning to issues which Lloyd George regarded as settled and "preaching the gospel of the League, while increasing army & navy."⁹⁶ Lloyd George thus bypassed Wilson and turned to Daniels in an attempt to resolve the naval controversy.

On April 1st, Lloyd George and Daniels met over breakfast to try to ameliorate the Anglo-American tension. The Prime Minister pointedly suggested that the United States "ought to stop work on your cruisers and dreadnoughts

⁹³David Lloyd George, as recorded in Walworth, America's Moment, 5. Wilson, for example, annulled an arrangement concluded by Colonel House and Arthur Balfour whereby the United States would forego the construction of capital ships during the war in return for an option to buy British ships at the conclusion of hostilities. Balfour MSS: Cabinet Memoranda, 1914-18.

⁹⁴Woodrow Wilson, as recorded by Trask, Captains and Cabinets, 283-84.

⁹⁵Lloyd George, Memoirs of the Peace Conference, Vol I, 113, called the speech a "blunder."

⁹⁶Frances Stevenson, as recorded in Taylor, Lloyd George: A Diary, 172-175.

if you really believe in the League of Nations."⁹⁷ Daniels explained that the United States Navy required the new ships to fulfill its extensive responsibilities which, he claimed, exceeded those of the Royal Navy. Lloyd George heatedly disagreed, and the meeting ended in an impasse.⁹⁸ Wilson's call, on April 6th, for the George Washington to take him back to the United States made clear to both sides that room for maneuver was limited.

Cecil and Colonel House, who shared a fierce determination to reach agreement, finally found an appropriate formula. Cecil wrote a letter to House on April 8th. He described the American 1918 program as "wholly inconsistent with the conception of the League of Nations" and as leading "to a competition in arms." He next asked House to recognize that "the British sentiment about sea power...[was] an article of faith with every British statesman."⁹⁹ Cecil then proposed that, in exchange for support on the League of Nations, America should agree to abandon the new naval program and to consult annually with the British government concerning relative naval strength. House, with Wilson's approval, agreed the following day to

⁹⁷David Lloyd George, as recorded in Tillman Anglo-American Relations, 291.

⁹⁸Marder, Scapa Flow, Vol V, 233.

⁹⁹Robert, Viscount Cecil as recorded in Seymour, Intimate Papers, Vol IV, 418-19.

abandon or modify the 1918 program, without mentioning the 1916 program. Upon further discussion, House agreed to postpone construction under the 1916 program on ships not yet begun until the signing of the peace treaty.¹⁰⁰ As a result of the Cecil-House compromise, Britain maintained her existing naval superiority, while the United States retained the right to achieve parity through completion of the 1916 program.

The potential naval competition between America and Britain complicated the disposition of German naval resources. Britain originally desired the wholesale elimination of Germany's naval strength. The Admiralty recommended that all German colonial possessions be retained by the Allied Powers and that all battleships, battle cruisers, and submarines, together with most of the German auxiliary vessels "be sunk in deep water within three months of the signing of the Peace Treaty."¹⁰¹ In Paris, Benson concurred on the grounds that distribution of the German naval assets "makes it impossible during many years to come for the American Navy to overtake the British Navy."¹⁰² France, however, indicated a desire to retain a share of the

¹⁰⁰Egerton, League of Nations, 162. In May, President Wilson withdrew his support for the 1918 program.

¹⁰¹ADM 116/1772: Admiralty Memorandum, "Disposal of Enemy Ships", January 6, 1919.

¹⁰²Baker, Woodrow Wilson, Vol III, 205.

High Seas Fleet as compensation for construction prevented by the war. House, Lloyd George, and Clemenceau accepted partition of the German fleet on March 7th, under the condition that Britain, Japan, and the United States would sink their shares.¹⁰³

This compromise quickly broke down. Lloyd George had agreed to sink the British share on the understanding that the United States would cease building against Britain.¹⁰⁴ Subsequent discussions revealed that the American delegation did not share this appreciation. Long then observed:

If the United States were determined to proceed with their huge program, we should have to reconsider our position, and might be obliged to utilize our share for the purpose for which they were built.¹⁰⁵

On April 25th, Wilson, Lloyd George, and Clemenceau again met to discuss the future of the captured German vessels, but they were unable to find a formula on which they could agree. When German sailors of the interned High Seas Fleet scuttled their ships on June 21, 1919, they effectively ended the distribution question.

The final question of significance to be addressed at Paris involved the future of the submarine. The Admiralty favored "universal prohibition against the building of

¹⁰³Seymour, Intimate Papers, Vol IV, 356-58.

¹⁰⁴Roskill, Naval Policy, 264.

¹⁰⁵Walter Long, as recorded by Marder, Scapa Flow, Vol V, 265.

submarines, together with the general destruction of existing submarines under international auspices."¹⁰⁶ During the course of the peace conference, the British had persuaded Benson and Daniels to support abolition.¹⁰⁷ The Allied naval delegates considered the suppression of submarine warfare on May 1st. At that meeting, the French again proved an impediment to Anglo-American cooperation. Viewing the submarine as a weapon for weaker naval powers, they opposed any limitation on the relatively inexpensive alternative to the capital ship. Minister of Marine Leygues argued that "there is no treacherous weapon, there can only be treachery in the way the weapon is used."¹⁰⁸ In the face of French intransigence, the Admiralty failed to secure the abolition of the submarine.

The delegates at the peace conference terminated the "naval battle of Paris." Wilson abandoned both his notion of freedom of the seas and the 1918 program in return for British acceptance of a League covenant which recognized the Monroe Doctrine. The scuttling of the High Seas Fleet obviated disagreement over the distribution of German ships. Nonetheless, the conference compromises represented a truce,

¹⁰⁶ADM 116/1772: Admiralty Memorandum, "Freedom of the seas: The Use of Mines and Submarines in War", January 21, 1919.

¹⁰⁷Roskill, Naval Policy, 92.

¹⁰⁸Georges Leygues, as recorded in Marder, Scapa Flow, Vol V, 258.

not a treaty. With the relative strengths of the Anglo-American navies still unresolved and the submarine still considered a legitimate weapon of war, Britain struggled to determine a post-war naval policy.

CHAPTER 5

TOWARDS A NATIONAL POLICY, 1919-1920

In the aftermath of the First World War, the British government sought to determine an appropriate naval policy. The Lloyd George ministry found itself in a milieu that differed from its pre-war counterpart in two important aspects: the British populace had developed new views on the relative importance of armaments and social services, while the costs of the war had adversely affected the balance of His Majesty's Exchequer. The Cabinet alternated emphasis between economy and security. In August 1919, it announced a drastic reduction in expenditure and ordered the fighting services to base their estimates on the assumption of no major war for ten years. With apparent disregard for budgetary consequences, however, the First Lord of the Admiralty announced in March 1920 the government's intention to maintain a navy at least equal in strength to any other. For nearly two years, the government sought a balance between the advocates of sea power and the proponents of "Treasury control."

The Great War accelerated a trend in British domestic opinion that the Boer War had initiated: a retreat from the martial bellicosity of the late Victorian period. The butcher's bill for Britain exceeded three-quarters of a

million dead and double that number wounded.¹ The officer corps suffered disproportionate losses, and neither the royal household nor the Cabinet escaped sacrifice.² This terrible loss seared the public consciousness.³ In the fall of 1918, for example, one of the magazines of the British Expeditionary Force in France labelled war as "the vilest disaster that can befall mankind."⁴ One reflection of this revulsion against war was a growing willingness to see law replace force majeure as the ultimate arbiter in international relations.⁵

This view found particular favor with the British Left. A coalition of Liberals and members of the Independent

¹A.J.P. Taylor, English History 1914-1945 (New York, 1965), 120.

²Deaths from the entourage of George V included three aides-de-camp, plus the only son of Sir Arthur Bigge, the King's Private Secretary, while Andrew Bonar Law lost two sons, Herbert Asquith sacrificed two nephews and oldest son Raymond, and Cabinet Secretary Sir Maurice Hankey parted with his brother Donald. See Nicolson, King George V, 253.

³Paul Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory (New York, 1975), passim, relies on the works of Robert Graves and Sigfried Sassoon, among others. Alfred Haverhurst, Britain in Transition: The Twentieth Century (Chicago, 1979), 152-53, develops in related fashion the concept of a "lost generation," which A.J.P. Taylor points out produced three Prime Ministers and, moreover, lost fewer men to the war than the anticipated figure for emigration, running at 300,000 per year before the war.

⁴The Wipers Times, as recorded in Wilson, Myriad Faces, 756.

⁵Gerda Crosby, Disarmament and Peace in British Politics 1914-1919 (Cambridge, 1957), 95.

Labour Party formed the Union of Democratic Control (U.D.C.) in November 1914 in opposition to the British war effort. The U.D.C. advocated a supranational organization for the enforcement of international law combined with dramatic reduction of armaments.⁶ At the conclusion of hostilities, the Labour Party viewed armaments as a major cause of international conflict.⁷ According to Paul Kennedy, a coalition of organizations, including the Union of Democratic Control, the League of Nations Union, the National Peace Council, and the Peace Pledge Union, sought to impart to the public the belief that:

the pacific settlement of all disputes, the rule of law rather than the rule of force, the condemnation of those old-fashioned and patriotic sentiments, the turning of swords into plowshares and, above all, the belief in the sanctity and efficacy of an international 'public opinion'...would deter aggressors by moral suasion alone.⁸

The League of Nations Union, through seventy public rallies held across the nation on the anniversary of the armistice,

⁶Crosby, Disarmament, 17.

⁷Kenneth Miller, Socialism and Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice (The Hague, 1967), 106. Sir Edward Grey, Liberal Foreign Secretary from 1905-1916, later blamed the outbreak of the Great War on the pre-war arms race: "Great armaments lead inevitably to war. If there are armaments on one side there must be armaments on other sides. While one nation arms, other nations cannot tempt it to aggression by remaining defenceless....The enormous growth of armaments in Europe, the sense of insecurity and fear caused by them--it was these that made war inevitable." See Kennedy, Strategy and Diplomacy, 165.

⁸Kennedy, Strategy and Diplomacy, 26.

became a leading pressure group on behalf of a new direction in British foreign affairs.⁹

Such convictions eroded the previous position of the Navy as the guarantor of British national security. Changes in public opinion affected popular perception of the fleet in two ways. First, advocates of international authority considered the British Navy a potential stumbling block to the success of the League. David, Baron Davies, for example, an ardent supporter of the League, argued that "the prevention of war depends upon the ability of the League to secure justice" and "that justice cannot be achieved without disarmament." In his opinion, Britain's ratification of the Versailles Treaty severely restricted the scope of the navy, which could best be used as part of an international police force under the auspices of the League. Davies asserted that "it is not, however, enough to sheath the sword: it must be handed over for safe keeping to an international authority."¹⁰ Second, a union of Radicals and Labourites, such as Ramsay MacDonald, who argued against the utility and morality of national armed forces, also tended to oppose the notion that any people could hold another in subjugation.¹¹

⁹Egerton, League of Nations, 175.

¹⁰David Davies, The Problem of the Twentieth Century: A Study in International Relationships (London, 1930), 54, 646-49.

¹¹A.P. Thornton, The Imperial Idea and Its Enemies (Garden City, NY, 1959), 302.

As the defense of the British Empire constituted one of the primary justifications for the maintenance of the Royal Navy, the rising strength of anti-imperialist sentiment signified, in some measure, a decline in support for naval predominance.

While popular opinion, particularly among the Left, became increasingly enamored with the notion that the arbitration of international disputes might replace war, Parliament took scant notice of the new organization. The 1918 Election produced a House of Commons that contained an unusually large number of businessmen, 260 against an average of 200, giving rise to Lloyd George's description of Commons as "the Trades Union Congress on the opposition benches and the Chamber of Congress on the government side."¹² The domestic and commercial orientation of Commons led one historian to describe it as "certainly one of the most insular and ignorant in British history."¹³ The lack of concern with foreign policy (Ireland excepted) in the House left such policy in the hands of the Lloyd George ministry.

¹²David Lloyd George, as recorded in T.O. Lloyd, Empire to Welfare State: English History, 1906-1967 (London, 1970), 100. Conservative Stanley Baldwin described the House of Commons as a group of "hard-faced men who looked as if they had done well out of the war." See Taylor, English History, 129.

¹³F.S. Northedge, as recorded in Havinghurst, Britain in Transition, 151. The "Coupon" election, so-called after Asquith's epithet for the letter of support issued by Lloyd George and Bonar Law to approved Coalition candidates, gave the Coalition 520 seats out of 707.

A majority of senior policy makers remained unconvinced of the soundness of the public's faith in the League of Nations.¹⁴ Eustace Percy of the Foreign Office felt that the League would disrupt economic cooperation within the British Empire.¹⁵ Leo Amery worried about the undue influence of small states, pointing to the prospect of "Great Britain and the United States together being outvoted by a combination of Liberia, Montenegro, and Guatemala."¹⁶ Sir Eyre Crowe, who rose from assistant under-secretary to permanent-undersecretary of the Foreign Office in 1920, believed that unwarranted aggression in Europe could not be prevented by economic blockade or boycott--the methods of collective security--but only by "real military preponderance," which included numbers, cohesion, efficiency, and geographical location (i.e., the balance of power).¹⁷ The reservations held by most diplomats and servicemen stemmed from similar

¹⁴Lord Cecil remained the only senior British official who vigorously supported the League; his most powerful ally was General Jan Christian Smuts of South Africa, who joined the Imperial War Cabinet in July 1917. After these two, one must look to such relatively obscure civil servants as Arthur Salter and Frank Walters. See Egerton, League of Nations, 177.

¹⁵Beloff, Imperial Sunset, 292-93.

¹⁶Leo Amery, War and Peace 1914-1929, 162.

¹⁷Sir Eyre Crowe, as recorded in Barnett, Collapse of British Power, 245. Crowe's 1907 memorandum on the balance of power remains the classic application of that doctrine to British policy. See Richmond, Statesmen and Sea Power, 355-56.

concerns with the League's inability to enforce its decrees on recalcitrant states.¹⁸ Chief of the Imperial General Staff Sir Henry Wilson, for example, declared that "to build on the League was to build on shifting sands."¹⁹

Sir Maurice Hankey, the secretary to the Cabinet, regarded the League in a manner representative of many other leading members of the Coalition government. During the war, he criticized Lord Robert Cecil's proposals for a League of Nations on the grounds that it would "create a sense of security which is wholly fictitious." He continued prophetically that the League:

will only result in failure and the longer that failure is postponed the more certain it is that this country will have been lulled to sleep. It will put a very strong lever into the hands of the well-meaning idealists who are to be found in almost every Government, who deprecate expenditure on armaments, and, in the course of time, it will almost certainly result in this nation being caught at a disadvantage.²⁰

Later, he decided that a League based on the Supreme War Council might serve as a useful clearinghouse for ministerial exchanges, but he never believed it could substitute for military preparedness. He therefore declined

¹⁸Beloff, Imperial Sunset, 295. Even Lord Davies, one of the League's most ardent supporters, worried about this problem. See Davies, The Problem of the Twentieth Century, 54.

¹⁹General Wilson, as recorded in Egerton, League of Nations, 159.

²⁰Balfour MSS: 49704, Hankey to Balfour, May 25, 1916.

an appointment as the League's first secretary general after a survey of Britain's leading statesmen, including an extensive interview with the Prime Minister, convinced him that the fledgling organization would prove ineffective.²¹

The Cabinet itself reflected the traditional British appreciation for the role of force in international relations.²² In 1917, the Cabinet discussed the future of the League, guided by papers from Lord Robert Cecil and Sir Eyre Crowe. Thomas Jones, one of Hankey's assistant Cabinet Secretaries, recorded the following discussion of the League:

The members ranged between those who hope for much and those who hope for little. The latter fear danger of being lulled into false security by a League, and the danger of comprehensive and ambitious projects. Are you going to have a general conference to interfere in the affairs of the world? Think of the agenda and what a field day the small Powers will have. Even the Hague Conferences have led to animosities. Conferences will lead to the nursing of grievances, and to instability. Who will be our next enemy?²³

The Cabinet shared Hankey's opinion that while the League

²¹Egerton, League of Nations, 167-68.

²²The Coalition Cabinet, formed in January 1919, included Prime Minister David Lloyd George; Lord President Arthur Balfour; Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon; Lord Privy Seal Andrew Bonar Law; Chancellor of the Exchequer Austen Chamberlain; Colonial Secretary Lord Milner; Secretary for War and Air Winston Churchill; First Lord of the Admiralty Walter Long; and Minister of Transport Sir Eric Geddes. Taylor, English History, 646, lists the complete Cabinet.

²³Thomas Jones, as recorded in Keith Middlemas, ed, Whitehall Diary, I: 1916-1925 (London, 1969), 32-33.

might serve a useful function, it was no substitute for military preparedness. One British historian regards the Lloyd George government as among the last in which:

Britain's policies were decided by a select group of aristocrats, country squires and men of commerce, who argued without much concern for the views of the masses about the 'national interest' and who usually displayed a wish to preserve that interest energetically, if need be by armed force.²⁴

Lloyd George, for example, ordered imperial forces to support the Greek expedition to Turkey. He wrote: "I certainly meant to fight and I was certain we would win."²⁵

Winston Churchill, in a similar vein, wanted Britain to intervene "thoroughly with large forces, abundantly supplied with mechanical appliances" against the Bolsheviks.²⁶

Churchill hated Russian Communism, which he believed had the potential to cause "universal collapse and anarchy

²⁴Kennedy, Naval Mastery, 271. Wilson, Myriad Faces, 757, shares Kennedy's view that Parliament rejected the public's repudiation of force as a legitimate tool of foreign policy.

²⁵David Lloyd George, as recorded in F.S. Northedge, The Troubled Giant: Britain Among the Great Powers 1916-1939 (New York, 1966), 151. The Greek occupation of Smyrna in 1919 inspired Turkish resistance under Mustapha Kemal. When Kemalist forces routed the Greeks and approached Constantinople, Lloyd George directed land and naval forces to Chanak to keep the Turks in Asia.

²⁶Winston Churchill, as recorded in William Manchester, The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill: Visions of Glory, 1874-1932 (New York, 1983), 679.

throughout Europe and Asia."²⁷ More compelling for men of their character was the state of British national finance.

The precise impact of the Great War on the British economy remains unclear. That the war brought some distinct gains can hardly be denied. An endless stream of orders from the Ministry of Munitions, combined with the loss of 5.7 million men mobilized in the fighting services, forced the industrial sector towards greater efficiency: the standardization of components, the recycling of metals, the modification of factory interiors, up-to-date accounting methods, increased use of unskilled labour, and the implementation of new processes discovered under the impetus of wartime requirements.²⁸ The British shipbuilding industry, for example, adapted to merchant vessel construction a system of automatic welding developed for warships, whose rivets had tended to work loose under the vibration of naval gunfire.²⁹ Increased cooperation between firms multiplied the impact of each new development,

²⁷Winston Churchill, as recorded in Kenneth Young, Churchill & Beaverbrook: A Study in Friendship (London, 1966), 55. Lloyd George appointed Churchill Minister of Munitions in July 1917, despite the nearly universal opposition to the return of the man responsible for the Dardanelles fiasco, primarily out of fear that Churchill, if left out of the government, would combine with Sir Edward Carson to sweep Lloyd George from office. See Rowland, David Lloyd George, 407-09.

²⁸Pollard, British Economy, 53-62.

²⁹Wilson, Myriad Faces, 782-83.

according to economic historian R.H. Tawney, "by breaking down trade jealousies and secrecies and accustoming firms engaged in the same industry to joint action."³⁰ The British government, furthermore, aggressively supported new or previously insignificant industries, such as aircraft, dye stuffs and optics, in its drive for autarky. British industry, as a result, emerged from the war with its productive capacity enhanced.³¹

The impact of the war was not, however, entirely beneficial. Britain lost the potential contributions of over two million workers killed or maimed during the conflict. Rolling stock and physical plant suffered deterioration due to inadequate maintenance. Additionally, some of the new construction palliated wartime requirements without addressing long-term needs. New steel mills, for example, were built in existing industrial centers, such as Cumberland and Sheffield, rather than in the vicinity of the iron ore fields, where transportation costs, and hence production costs, would have been reduced.³² Wartime expansion, according to economic historian Duncan Burn, "put new obstacles in the way of radical adaptation to changed

³⁰R.H. Tawney, as recorded in Pollard, British Economy, 55.

³¹Lloyd, Empire to Welfare State, 440 (chart), reveals that the total value of British industrial production in 1920 surpassed that of any previous year.

³²Taylor, English History, 122.

circumstances of raw-material supply, technique, and competition" and thus reinforced some of the ingrained inefficiencies of British industry.³³

Of greater import to Britain's economic future, the war proved detrimental to her position as a supplier of finished goods on the international market. During the war, British shops and British shipping diverted their efforts from customary commercial orders in order to supply the incessant demands of the armed services. Developing nations, finding Britain unable to satisfy their needs, turned to alternative sources, such as Japan or the United States. Britain's share of the world's shipping construction, for example, fell from 58.7% in 1909-14 to 35% in 1920.³⁴ In related fashion, the wartime demand for military and naval armaments stimulated world-wide expansion in steelworks.³⁵ British staple industries after the war thus found themselves faced with markets characterized by over-capacity. Yet, from the Armistice until the spring of 1920, a post-war boom, stimulated by the pent-up demands of domestic consumption, masked the structural weaknesses of the British economy.³⁶

³³Duncan Burn, as recorded in Wilson, Myriad Faces, 790.

³⁴Kennedy, Naval Mastery, 260.

³⁵Pollard, British Economy, 57, notes that during the war the steel-making capacity of both Britain and the United States increased by 50%.

³⁶Havinghurst, Britain in Transition, 158.

The war did surprisingly little damage to Britain's favorable position with regard to capital investment abroad. Before the war, Britain invested in foreign ventures over £150 millions per year. By 1914, British overseas investments exceeded £4,000 millions, of which the share in the United States (£850 millions) alone produced an annual income of about £85 millions. During the course of the war, on government urging, private investors liquidated some £550 millions, a figure partially offset by £250 millions of new investment, so the net reduction totalled only £300 millions.³⁷ The British government, the financial mainstay of the Allied coalition, lent £1,741 millions to co-belligerents: £171 millions within the Empire, £412.5 millions to Italy, £434.5 millions to France, and £568 millions to Russia.³⁸ Against these loans she borrowed £1,365 millions, of which £1,027 millions came from the United States.³⁹ Britain thus raised more than the cost of her own war effort from internal resources, as the net loans to her Allies slightly exceeded the sale of foreign securities.

³⁷Pollard, British Economy, 72; Taylor, English History, 123.

³⁸The Bolshevik government subsequently repudiated the debt contracted by the tsarist regime.

³⁹Pollard, British Economy, 74; Taylor, English History, 123, lists British lending as £1,825 millions and British borrowing as £1,340 millions.

The greatest and most detrimental impact of the war with respect to finance involved a massive increase in the size of the National Debt. To raise the revenues necessary to support imperial forces in the field, the Asquith ministry sought to augment both tax assessments and government borrowing. After an initial attempt to raise the duty on beer and tea, the Exchequer relied primarily on increases in direct taxes, including income tax, supertax, and excess profits duty, to render the necessary income.⁴⁰ The yield from these taxes increased dramatically, from £94 millions in 1913-14 to £721 millions in 1919-20.⁴¹ Nonetheless, tax revenues paled in comparison to the expenses of the war, which cost Britain about £7,500 millions.⁴² Britain raised only 30.5% of her income through

⁴⁰Taxation would have been higher except for the influence of Chancellor of the Exchequer Andrew Bonar Law. Civil servant J.C.C. Davidson explained that "McKenna and Lloyd George had both been exponents of higher taxation, but with Bonar the policy changed and taxation was held at a steady level." See Robert Rhodes James, ed, Memoirs of a Conservative: J.C.C. Davidson's Memoirs and Papers, 1910-1937 (New York, 1970), 52.

⁴¹Pollard, British Economy, 64, notes that income tax rates rose from 1s. 2d. in the pound in 1913-14 to 6s. by 1918-19, while the number of taxpayers increased from 1.2 million to 7.8 million in the same period.

⁴²Henry Grady, British War Finance 1914-1919 (New York, 1968), 122-23. Grady lists total expenditure from August 1914 through September 1919 as £10,271 millions and then subtracts £1,000 millions for estimated normal expenditures, £870 millions for recoverable Allied loans, £221 millions for Imperial obligations, £425 millions for war stocks, and £240 millions of tax arrears.

taxation between August 1, 1914 and September 30th, 1919.⁴³ At that moment, the National Debt, which before the war totalled about £650 millions, thus approached £7,800 millions.⁴⁴ The service of the National Debt, which consumed about 14% of the pre-war budget, swallowed two-fifths of Britain's post-war tax revenues.⁴⁵

At a time when the cost of the war strained the national Exchequer, Britain found that peace brought with it additional expenses. During the 1918 Election, Lloyd George himself promised "to make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in."⁴⁶ The public then demanded that the government assume responsibility for an increased array of social services, such as public education and subsidized housing.⁴⁷

⁴³Grady, War Finance, 75; Bunselmeyer, Cost of the War, 137, gives a figure of 28% through 1918. Grady, War Finance, 121; and Pollard, British Economy, 66-67, describe the mechanisms (Treasury bills, War Bonds, and Ways and Means Advances) through which the Treasury funded the debt.

⁴⁴Grady, War Finance, 123; Pollard, British Economy, 66, 201; and Kennedy, Strategy and Diplomacy, 97, treat the post-war Debt somewhat differently. Pollard notes the Debt reached a maximum of £7,830 millions in March 1920, while Kennedy simply lists the Debt as £7,400 millions.

⁴⁵Taylor, English History, 124; Pollard, British Economy, 201. Taylor argues that the Debt "did not diminish the wealth of the community at all," as it merely transferred wealth from those who paid taxes to the holders (approximately 17 million) of War Loans.

⁴⁶David Lloyd George, as recorded in Rowland, David Lloyd George, 467.

⁴⁷Lloyd, Empire to Welfare State, 105-10. The Labour Party supported these demands, but the Asquithian wing of the Liberal Party did not.

Popular dissatisfaction peaked in May 1919, when a mob of ex-servicemen attempted to storm the House of Commons. The Lloyd George ministry hastily announced plans for 300,000 new homes, with a supplemental program of public relief.⁴⁸ The funding of various social services, which in 1914 consumed about 4% of Britain's gross national product, required double that level of pecuniary resources during the interwar years.⁴⁹

The Cabinet adopted a two-fold approach to the budget deficit. The Lloyd George ministry moved to increase tax revenues while slashing governmental expenditures.⁵⁰ Successive Chancellors of the Exchequer adopted "anti-waste" campaigns to eliminate unnecessary expenses. Particularly lucrative marks for Treasury knives were the service estimates, described by one historian as "clearly the Number One target for public and politicians alike."⁵¹ Fortunately

⁴⁸Rowland, David Lloyd George, 510.

⁴⁹Wilson, Myriad Faces, 800.

⁵⁰Grady, War Finance, 284. Wilson, Myriad Faces, 799-800, notes that the war made "available to the central government a much larger proportion of the community's wealth than had previously been at its disposal." The Labour Party manifesto of December 1918 championed "heavier taxation of big incomes" and "a levy on capital." See Bunselmeyer, Cost of the War, 138.

⁵¹Kennedy, Naval Mastery, 270. Kennedy notes that the Gladstonian economic theory then prevalent at the Treasury regarded as anathema the deficit spending which in the following decade reduced unemployment and stimulated new industrial techniques in Britain, Germany, and the United States.

for the senior service, the Prime Minister considered the Army Estimates as most suitable for reduction. He directed Churchill to cut the War Office Estimate on the grounds that:

the highest expenditure is still military...[and] the largest immediate reductions which could be affected without damage to the public welfare are foreseeable in the activities controlled by your department."⁵²

Nonetheless, the Navy also faced the cuts which traditionally followed the conclusion of hostilities.

The British government at the conclusion of the Great War thus moved quickly to try to reduce expenditure linked to the Royal Navy. On November 23, 1918, Chancellor of the Exchequer Andrew Bonar Law wrote a semi-formal letter to Sir Eric Geddes, the First Lord of the Admiralty. Bonar Law strongly urged Geddes to reduce costs, adding: "I am most anxious that the cutting down of unnecessary expenditure should take place at once."⁵³ Within a month, the Board of Admiralty learned that the navy's wartime unlimited vote of credit would end with the fiscal year on March 31, 1919 and that pending the 1919-20 estimates they would need the blessing of the Treasury before spending money on new

⁵²David Lloyd George, as recorded in Rowland, David Lloyd George, 502-03.

⁵³ADM 116/1809: Bonar Law to Geddes, November 23, 1918. The Revised Statement of Revenue and Expenditure for 1919-20, released the same day, revealed an estimated deficit of £474 millions.

warship construction.⁵⁴ In March 1919, Bonar Law warned Churchill that the public must be convinced that Britain could not afford a big army and navy and jokingly suggested that the combined service estimates might be reduced to £20 millions per year.⁵⁵

The Admiralty cooperated after a fashion. First Lord Geddes, the day before Bonar Law's request, suggested reducing the size of the Royal Navy by a "20% cut on manpower on the pre-War numbers."⁵⁶ The Board subsequently agreed to reduce the number of naval personnel on active duty from 148,000 officers and other ranks to a combined strength of 136,000.⁵⁷ The Admiralty next concurred with the cancellation of three new battle cruisers--sister ships to the Hood--already under construction in March 1919.⁵⁸ In May, as they met to consider the Navy Estimates for 1919-

⁵⁴Roskill, Naval Policy, 104.

⁵⁵Middlemas, Whitehall Diary, 82. Bonar Law may have been trying to needle Churchill, as the two were on very poor terms about this time. In fact, Bonar Law suggested to Churchill, in front of the Cabinet, that he resign. See Young, Churchill & Beaverbrook, 57-58.

⁵⁶ADM 116/1605: Geddes Memorandum, November 22, 1918

⁵⁷ADM 167/56: Board Minute 629, February 6, 1919.

⁵⁸ADM 167/53: Board Minutes 553, December 28, 1919; Minute 658, February 27, 1919; and Minute 676, March 6, 1919; ADM 116/1773: Admiralty Memorandum "Battle Cruiser Programme", March 13, 1919. Reasons for cancellation included the destruction of the German fleet, the need to use the slips that the cruisers occupied for merchant construction, and their outdated (pre-Jutland) design.

1920, the members of the Admiralty Board recognized the need to establish, in conjunction with the Cabinet, a post-war naval policy. They agreed that "it should be possible in coming years to reduce the Fleet below its 1914 strength."⁵⁹ For the present, however, "in view of the current uncertainties of the International situation," Britain's naval leadership felt the need to maintain "a relatively strong fleet in a state of readiness for action."⁶⁰ The Admiralty thus proposed a fleet of twenty-two capital ships in full commission, supported by nineteen more in various degrees of reserve. Walter Long, who replaced Sir Eric Geddes as First Lord in January 1919, submitted the Navy Estimates for 1919-1920.⁶¹ In June, he asked the Cabinet for £171 millions, more than three times the highest pre-war estimate.

The Navy Estimates provoked a Cabinet quarrel in July. Long presented his colleagues with a paper that stressed the

⁵⁹ADM 167/56: Board Minute 802, May 29, 1919.

⁶⁰ADM 116/1773: Admiralty Memorandum on Fleet Strength, June 19, 1919. Britain at that time had armed forces operating in Russia, the Middle East, India, and Ireland. See Anthony Clayton, The British Empire As a Superpower 1919-39 (Athens, GA, 1986), 45-249, for a detailed discussion of British interventions world-wide.

⁶¹A Conservative politician who held his first Cabinet post, President of the Board of Agriculture, in 1895, Long nearly captured the party leadership in 1911. After supporting Lloyd George during the resignation of Asquith in 1916, he became Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1916-19.

importance of command of the seas and described the Navy as "the cheapest and most efficient police force that the Empire can possess."⁶² The First Lord then explained that the swollen size of the estimate resulted from two causes: non-recurrent wartime expenses (£75 millions) and pay increases previously sanctioned by the Cabinet (£45 millions), implying that he was operating the Navy on roughly the same budget as required by the pre-war fleet (£51 millions).⁶³

Austen Chamberlain, who replaced Bonar Law as Chancellor of the Exchequer, then submitted a memorandum attacking the navy's failure to accept greater reductions.⁶⁴

⁶²Long later admitted that identifying the force against which Britain should build was "a very difficult, indeed...almost an impossible question." He contended that the duty of the Admiralty was not "to search for possible enemies," but instead to provide "a Navy, sufficient in strength, and efficient for any duty which it may reasonably be called upon to perform." See Walter Long, Memories (London, 1923), 269.

⁶³ADM 116/1773: Admiralty Memorandum, "Navy Estimates, 1919-20", July 5, 1919. The Admiralty normally began work on the Estimates in the early summer and submitted them to the Treasury in December; the Cabinet discussed the figures in January and the First Lord of the Admiralty presented them to the House of Commons early in March in preparation for the ensuing financial year, which runs from April 1st to March 31st. See Roskill, Naval Policy, 204-09, for a complete discussion of the process of developing of the Estimates.

⁶⁴During the naval scare of 1908 (see pp. 48-51 above), Chamberlain assured the Second Sea Lord that "if the Naval Lords stand firm, and are prepared to resign together, they will get their way." See Sir Charles Petrie, The Life and Letters of Austen Chamberlain (London, 1940), Volume I, 224.

He argued that only Japan and the United States possessed sufficient naval strength to threaten Great Britain and, given Britain's existing superiority in capital ships, that placing more ships into reserve would not endanger her national interests. The Chancellor recommended that £110 millions be cut from the Navy Estimates.⁶⁵

The issue remained temporarily undecided, however, because Number 10 Downing Street sat empty at the time these papers were submitted. Lloyd George spent 5-18 July visiting his constituency in Criccieth, Wales.⁶⁶ Assistant Cabinet Secretary Thomas Jones, in Hankey's absence, thus decided to delay consideration of the Navy Estimates by the Cabinet until the Prime Minister's return, as the Admiralty and Treasury memoranda raised issues "of the first importance."⁶⁷

Cabinet Secretary Maurice Hankey then provided Lloyd George an important analysis of Britain's strategic position in 1919. Hankey, who had accompanied the Prime Minister to Criccieth for a conference on the coal industry, prepared

⁶⁵MacDonald, "Post-War Naval Policy", 197; Dingman, Pacific, 108.

⁶⁶During the Prime Minister's visit to Wales, Churchill pressed the case for the creation of a unified Ministry of Defence. See Rowland, David Lloyd George, 511.

⁶⁷Middlemas, Whitehall Diary, 89. Jones sided with Chamberlain: "The crux of the matter--as it seems to me--is, having squashed Germany are we now going to start building against America? It is clearly in the minds of the Sea Lords."

for the latter an essay entitled "Towards a National Policy, July 1919." He launched his appraisal by addressing domestic policy. He focused on "our dependence on imports" and the war's detrimental impact on Britain's ability to maintain a favorable balance of payments. He then urged that:

non-productive employment of man-power and expenditure, such as is involved by naval, military, and air effort, must be reduced within the narrowest limits consistent with national safety.⁶⁸

With this line of reasoning the Cabinet Secretary foreshadowed Sir Thomas Inskip's argument that the economy was Britain's "fourth arm of defence."⁶⁹

Next, Hankey gave his attention to British foreign policy. He began with his evaluation of the League of Nations. He declared that Britain would have to support the League, but that it remained "an experiment on the success of which we cannot yet afford to base our national security." The only potential threat he could see from Europe rested in a possible combination of Germany and Russia, which he judged as far distant and, with proper policy, preventable. Hankey maintained that Japan lacked "the mineral and manufacturing resources to sustain war with

⁶⁸CAB 21/159: Hankey Memorandum, "Towards a National Policy, July 1919", July 17, 1919.

⁶⁹Sir Thomas Inskip, as recorded in Kennedy, Strategy and Diplomacy, 100-01.

a Great Power on the modern scale" and indicated that Britain should seek to reduce tensions between Japan and China. Having eliminated all other threats, the Secretary turned to "the most powerful nation in the world," the United States.⁷⁰

Hankey considered war with the United States "almost unthinkable." American military and economic strength meant that "it is quite impossible that we could make successful war against her," while the lack of antagonism towards the United States in British policy-making circles rendered improbable the onset of hostilities between the Atlantic powers. Although he considered war with the United States "the maximum danger" that Britain might face," Hankey believed it to be "an extremely remote contingency."⁷¹

The Cabinet Secretary nonetheless displayed a marked disinclination to base British national security on the basis of Anglo-American cooperation. He pointed out the "antagonism towards the British Empire among important elements in the United States."⁷² Hankey insisted that the Royal Navy "should not be allowed to sink below the level of the United States fleet" lest some "truculent, overbearing

⁷⁰CAB 21/159: Hankey Memorandum, "Towards a National Policy, July 1919", July 17, 1919.

⁷¹CAB 21/159: Hankey Memorandum, "Towards a National Policy, July 1919", July 17, 1919.

⁷²CAB 21/159: Hankey Memorandum, "Towards a National Policy, July 1919", July 17, 1919.

and anti-British president" subject Britain to "unbearable pressure." To reconcile his desire for "real savings in Navy estimates" with his determination not to abandon "general command of the sea to the United States," he urged that "no opportunity be lost to induce the United States to abate their armaments in accord with us." Hankey then suggested that the first step in naval disarmament:

should be to invite all the Naval Powers to concert a scheme, reducing to an absolute minimum the number of ships in commission and in immediate reserve, thereby reducing personnel to the lowest possible limit.

As an interim measure, he advocated as public policy a Two Power Standard of naval strength "excluding the United States" which would both protect Britain against the remote yet dangerous possibility of war with America and avoid offending "the mass of public opinion."⁷³

Hankey's analysis contained two interesting implications. First, his discussion of naval disarmament involved the downgrading of capital ships from full commission status into various degrees of reserve, rather than destruction. This treatment would enable Britain, in the event of future threat, to rapidly regain her existing naval superiority over all nations not signatory to the arms control agreement. Second, he above all sought to avoid provoking the United States into a naval competition, which

⁷³CAB 21/159: Hankey Memorandum, "Towards a National Policy, July 1919", July 17, 1919.

would have forced a choice between naval supremacy and economy. Yet he gave no direct indication of priority between those goals. Surely he realized that naval disarmament required Washington's active cooperation, something in short supply during the Wilson Administration. His differentiation between "published policy" and national policy which "could never be alluded to in public, and should only be spoken in the most secret and intimate conversations" indicates that he was willing to run considerable risks of antagonizing the United States.⁷⁴

On July 16th, the First Lord warned his colleagues of the Admiralty Board that when the Cabinet debate resumed upon the Prime Minister's return to London, the government would probably press for severe reductions. He explained that he was prepared to propose that the Cabinet arrange a vote on account (temporary spending authority) of £70 millions to carry the service through December, until which time the Admiralty would search for further reductions.⁷⁵ Despite the expected assault from the Treasury, Long convinced his ministerial associates to approve a revised Estimate of £171 millions.⁷⁶ When the First Lord presented

⁷⁴CAB 21/159: Hankey Memorandum, "Towards a National Policy, July 1919", July 17, 1919.

⁷⁵ADM 167/56: Board Minute 871, July 16, 1919.

⁷⁶CAB 27/71-72: Finance Committee Memorandum 23, November 11, 1919.

the Estimates to the House of Commons on July 24th, he avoided mentioning rivalry with America or even articulating a naval strategy and instead emphasized the process of demobilization.⁷⁷ A week later, Long informed his fellow members of the Board of Admiralty that the Cabinet had indeed pressed for "most drastic reductions in expenditure," for which purpose the Board would establish a Committee on Naval Expenditure.⁷⁸ Following a recommendation of the previous First Lord, the Admiralty would also establish a "strong, critical, and...independently-minded" commission, known as the Post-War Questions Committee, to consider the lessons of the war for the navy of the future.⁷⁹ Admiralty House, in the summer of 1919, looked to the future with the knowledge that sacrifices would have to be made but nonetheless with confidence that the Navy could control its own destiny.

Lloyd George, however, had other plans. He attempted to pursue Hankey's recommendation "to induce the United States to abate their naval armaments in accord with us." He arranged for Lord Haldane to ask former Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, recently elevated to the peerage as 1st

⁷⁷Parliamentary Debates, Commons, vol. 118, cols. 1597-1609.

⁷⁸ADM 167/56: Board Minute 890, July 31, 1919. Long may have been influenced by a second missive from the Treasury demanding reduction of the service estimates.

⁷⁹ADM 167/57: First Lord Memorandum, December 17, 1918.

Viscount Grey of Fallodan, to serve as an envoy to Washington. Haldane and Grey discussed the idea with Colonel House, who sent to the failing Wilson the following record of Grey's proposal:

That in no circumstances would Great Britain build against the United States no matter how many keels we laid. However, England would hold herself free to build against any European Power in any quantity that seemed to her best. On the other hand, the United States could exercise her own judgment about building...

Grey further shared with House his belief that war between Britain and the United States was "inconceivable."⁸⁰ He decided to agree to the Prime Minister's request, providing the Cabinet pursued a naval policy which included reduction in the estimates and avoided any reference to rivalry with America. Lloyd George, before consulting the Cabinet, concurred.⁸¹

On August 11th, the Prime Minister met with the War Cabinet Finance Committee, which included Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons Andrew Bonar Law, Chancellor of the Exchequer Austen Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary Alfred, Viscount Milner, and, of course, the

⁸⁰Lord Grey, as recorded in Seymour, Intimate Papers, IV, 496. Grey's scheme, which implied that both Britain and the United States would refrain from considering the other's navy in their calculations, provided no indication of what to do in case this happy state of affairs failed to materialize.

⁸¹MacDonald, "Lloyd George and Post-War Naval Policy", 203-06.

ubiquitous Hankey. This meeting represented the nadir of the influence of the advocates of sea power. The Finance Committee, in the absence of the responsible civil and professional heads of the Royal Navy, considered ways to reduce naval expenditure. They discussed halting naval construction and reducing "the number of ships in commission at least to the pre-war standard." Recognizing the adverse effect on public opinion if the United States were to maintain a larger fleet than Britain, the Committee proposed approaching the United States government "with a view to an arrangement for a reduction of the number of ships maintained in commission." They also established a series of guidelines for the formulation of future service estimates, the most important of which directed the fighting services to "proceed on the assumption that no great war is to be anticipated within the next ten years." The Finance Committee further agreed that the services ought to be able to frame estimates at a combined figure of £135 millions, of which £60 millions would be earmarked for the navy.⁸² These momentous decisions, reached without the benefit of naval counsel, would occupy the full Cabinet four days later.

Before the Cabinet could consider the decisions reached by the Finance Committee, however, the First Lord submitted a paper concerning "Post-war Naval Policy." Long requested

⁸²CAB 27/71: Finance Committee Minute 2, August 11, 1919.

the Cabinet to declare a naval policy "as regards supremacy of the seas: a) over the United States of America or b) over any probable combination." He implied clearly that supremacy resulted from possession of the world's strongest fleet. The First Lord then addressed the policy of "showing the flag," abandoned before the war in the face of the German threat. The deployment of additional light cruisers, Long suggested, would prove beneficial to British trading interests.⁸³ Finally, Long requested for planning purposes "the period of time during which we may reckon on immunity from war with a Great Power?"⁸⁴

The Cabinet gave scant consideration to the Admiralty's petition for the command of the seas. Instead, the Lloyd George ministry quickly reached a series of decisions that reflected the findings of the Finance Committee. The Cabinet agreed that "for framing revised Estimates...the British Empire will not be engaged in any great war during the next ten years."⁸⁵ The Cabinet then added the stipulation that "no alteration should be made without

⁸³Long later described the policy of "showing the flag" by means of independent cruisers and small squadrons as "the most potent influence which can be used to maintain the great position of our Empire, and to secure peace, progress and good trade." See Long, Memories, 283.

⁸⁴ADM 116/1774: Admiralty Memorandum, "Post-War Naval Policy", August 12, 1919.

⁸⁵The "ten year rule" was repeatedly extended and in 1929 made self-perpetuating. See Roskill, Naval Policy, 215.

Cabinet authority in the pre-war standard governing the size of the Navy." The government also established a spending limit of £60 millions on the Navy's Estimates. As a logical extension of the cap on the service estimates and the "ten year rule," the Cabinet concluded that "no new naval construction should be undertaken."⁸⁶ These decisions, fulfilling the conditions laid down by Lord Grey, enabled the British government to explore more fully the possibility of a naval accord with the United States.

The Lloyd George ministry moved promptly to facilitate Lord Grey's mission to Washington. Less than a week after promulgating the "ten year rule," the Cabinet approved the terms of his instructions. The letter maintained that the British government, as it had before the war, sought to avoid rivalry with the United States. As proof, the instructions noted that "the strength of the British Navy next year will be based upon a standard of security that does not take account of the United States Navy as a possible enemy."⁸⁷ In late September, Lord Grey sailed for Washington, where he quickly discovered that President Wilson's illness precluded any meeting between the two, let alone extended discussion of an naval arms limitation

⁸⁶ADM 167/56: War Cabinet Minute 616A, August 15, 1919.

⁸⁷Rohan Butler and J.P.T. Bury, eds, Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939 (London, 1966), 1st Series, Volume V, No. 360, 998.

agreement.⁸⁸ Grey relayed the unfortunate news to Lloyd George: "Within a week...of my arrival, the reason for my coming has disappeared. For some time, with no one to take the place of the President, there will be chaos in American policy."⁸⁹ Thus died any hope of an Anglo-American naval accord, at least until another president assumed office in 1921.

Lloyd George accepted another of Hankey's recommendations by instituting a series of reforms designed to restore the Treasury to its pre-war preeminence.⁹⁰ The Prime Minister, who disliked the unwieldy size of the full Cabinet, utilized the Finance Committee to dictate national policy through the management of pecuniary resources. Under the auspices of "Treasury control," the spending departments detailed officers to the Treasury to develop retrenchment programs.⁹¹ More significantly, they had to justify all

⁸⁸Seymour, Intimate Papers, IV, 499-500.

⁸⁹Lord Grey, as recorded in MacDonald, "Post-War Naval Policy", 209.

⁹⁰The Chancellor of the Exchequer bears the responsibility to insure that spending departments disbursed the moneys allocated by the House of Commons for the appropriate purposes and in a frugal manner. Higham, Armed Forces, 278-79, notes that "just as in production and in contractual arrangements there are cycles of equilibrium and disturbance, so in treasury control. In wartime the Navy, for instance, could spend its annual peacetime budget in six days, but the instant the Armistice was announced, the Treasury leaped, and by mid-1919 was proudly explaining how it resumed supreme command."

⁹¹Dingman, Pacific, 107.

expenditures to internal representatives of the Treasury.⁹² That ministry, according to Roskill, "had only to declare a proposal ran counter to the Ten Year Rule to render it nugatory."⁹³ Secretary of the Treasury Warren Fisher, who controlled these budgetary commissars, thought the Treasury should determine the funds available for each department.⁹⁴

In September, the Chancellor of the Exchequer provided the Finance Committee an analysis of national expenditure. The Treasury divided the total budget of £1,490 millions into four categories: irreducible - £518 millions; fighting services - £503 millions; loans and subsidies - £326 millions; and other costs - £143 millions. The memorandum noted that "expenditure will almost certainly exceed the £1,500 millions already voted for this year."⁹⁵ The Treasury identified the fighting forces as the primary field for

⁹²CAB 27/71-72: Finance Committee Minute 3, August 20, 1919. At its second meeting, the Committee decided that the Treasury should prepare an analysis of the spending of the various departments; that the departments should justify their expenditures; and that the Treasury should indicate where savings could be realized.

⁹³Roskill, Naval Policy, 211-15. This practice contributed to the marked antagonism with which both the naval and civilian members of the Admiralty viewed the Treasury during the inter-war period. The Board objected to bearing the responsibility for naval defense without even the opportunity to explain to Parliament why funds were not available to remedy known deficiencies.

⁹⁴Higham, Armed Forces, 123-24.

⁹⁵CAB 27/71-72: Treasury memorandum re National Expenditure, September 20, 1919.

retrenchment and declared that "it is imperative to fix the peace strength of the forces, to impose limits of numbers and expenditure, and to hasten demobilization." The Chancellor's analysis included a review of the state of the Exchequer. A projected deficit of £250 millions for 1919-1920 would increase the National Debt from £7,435 millions to £7,685 million on March 31st, 1920. A smaller deficit projected for the following year would increase the Debt to £7,885 millions.⁹⁶

Turning to the Royal Navy, the paper noted that projected expenditure for 1919-20 (£171 millions) exceeded the March figures (£149 millions) by more than £21 millions. It then claimed that financial exigencies mandated deep cuts in the size of the fleet:

Prima facie it is difficult to understand what menace to the external security of this country or to the freedom of the seas exists comparable in gravity to the financial danger. If this be admitted it should surely be possible to make-- without losing command of the sea--very large reductions of ships in commission and a more rapid demobilization of superfluous personnel.⁹⁷

The Treasury analysis then changed focus from the number of ships needed in the post-war fleet to an attack on the capital ship, questioning "whether capital ships are ever in

⁹⁶CAB 27/71-72: Treasury memorandum re National Expenditure, September 20, 1919. Although the naval annex was unsigned, it was probably prepared by G.L. Barstow, the Treasury's Controller of Supply Services and naval expert.

⁹⁷CAB 27/71-72: Treasury memorandum re National Expenditure, September 20, 1919.

the future going to repay the cost of maintaining them." The memorandum baldly asserted that such vessels "are not likely to be required to repel invasion." With somewhat greater justification, the Treasury paper stated that capital ships "are probably vulnerable to torpedo attack by submarine, motor boat or aircraft" and added that "their value in diplomacy would probably be seriously discounted by their vulnerability."⁹⁸ This initial criticism of the capital ship, however valid, lacked the imprimatur of naval expertise and utterly failed to impress the naval staff.

Coming after a naval budget "victory" in July, the Cabinet eruption of August 15th combined with the subsequent rumblings of the Finance Committee must have struck Admiralty House like a broadside from the Hood.⁹⁹ At a meeting on August 18th, the First Lord explained to his co-workers on the Board that Lloyd George intended in the directive that "no alteration should be made...in the pre-war standard governing the size of the Navy" to exclude comparison with the fleet of the United States.¹⁰⁰ The Board

⁹⁸CAB 27/71-72: Treasury memorandum re National Expenditure, September 20, 1919.

⁹⁹The First Lord subsequently wrote to Admiral Beatty that "in consequence of the changed conditions resulting from the defeat of Germany and the heavy financial burden we have to bear, it is necessary to effect great economies in the estimates." See Charles Petrie, Walter Long and His Times (London, 1936), 226.

¹⁰⁰ADM 167/56: Board Minute 924, August 18, 1919.

members concluded that the "ten years rule" rendered superfluous new building programs for the next six years and agreed to stop work on all ships not due for completion before November 1919. Then they mapped out damage control operations. Financial Secretary Thomas MacNamara undertook to try to prevent the Prime Minister from announcing any definite estimate to the House. The Board also agreed to prepare a memorandum to the Cabinet showing how the navy would comply with the decisions of August 15th and the consequences thereof.¹⁰¹

The Board finally produced the memorandum on October 24, 1919. The Admiralty determined that the minimum fleet consonant with safety would include sixteen battleships and four battle cruisers in full commission and thirteen battleships and three battle cruisers in reserve. Such a fleet would consist of 126,000 sailors and cost £75 millions in 1920-21.¹⁰² The paper revealed the Admiralty's continuing faith in the doctrines of sea power. The planned reductions would leave Britain "supreme in European waters" but relinquish overall maritime superiority. Without a building program, Britain would fall to the position of second naval power by the end of 1923. The Board then invoked the logic

¹⁰¹ADM 167/56: Board Minute 924, August 18, 1919.

¹⁰²The Board explained the sum as £58-59 millions, plus £12 millions for "dead-weight" wartime expenditure and £4-5 millions for separation allowances currently established.

of Mahan:

The Board believes...that Britain owes her leading position among the nations to her long-maintained pre-eminence upon the sea. They believe this preeminence cannot be relinquished without her ability to hold her position being profoundly affected, with all that position involves in respect of prestige, authority, and commercial advantage.

The Admiralty touted the benefits of sea power and urged that Britain's command of the sea "should not be sacrificed."¹⁰³

The Board, worried about the growing challenge of the American fleet, believed that Britain had two alternatives: to induce the United States to modify their 1916 program or to undertake a program of construction within twelve months. The naval staff then attacked the notion that the United States played no part in pre-war "comparisons of Naval strength." Instead, the Board contended:

All that was ever laid down by any Government was that in applying the "Two Power-Standard" the United States, owing to their distance from Europe, should not be counted as one of the two principal powers against whose combination we were providing.¹⁰⁴

The Admiralty clearly demonstrated their faith in the capital ship and their reluctance to ignore developments across the Atlantic. From the perspective of the Board,

¹⁰³ADM 116/1774: Admiralty Memorandum "Naval Policy and Expenditure", October 24, 1919.

¹⁰⁴ADM 116/1774: Admiralty Memorandum "Naval Policy and Expenditure", October 24, 1919.

Britain needed new capital ships because America was building them.

The Lloyd George ministry proved unable to produce a unified naval policy in 1919. The Treasury made only too clear the need to reduce expenditure, particularly the naval budget. Lord Grey's mission to Washington established the futility of negotiations with the United States. The Admiralty's memorandum on "Naval Policy and Expenditure" demonstrated the Board's unwillingness to contemplate a surrender of naval superiority to the United States or a fleet based on anything other than the capital ship. Lloyd George, despite the Chancellor's insistence that Admiralty House refused to obey the directives of the Finance Committee, had no desire to incur the political liability of surrendering Britain's traditional command of the seas.¹⁰⁵ News from America suggested a way to break the deadlock.

In late November, the Finance Committee received reports, unconfirmed by the Admiralty, that the United States Navy had been demobilizing at an unexpectedly rapid rate. While proclaiming that "the standard of the United States was not the standard by which our fleet had to be reckoned," the members of Lloyd George's inner circle

¹⁰⁵CAB 27/71-72: Finance Committee Memorandum 22, October 29, 1919. The Finance Committee decided not to announce the "ten year rule" in Parliament. See also Dingman, Pacific, 110; MacDonald, "Post-War Naval Policy", 206-08.

admitted that significant changes in the size of that force "would not be without influence on our own measures." They instructed Lord Grey to determine the actual state of the American demobilization and intended building program.¹⁰⁶

Awaiting his reply, the Finance Committee took up some unfinished business with the First Lord, attending by special invitation. One of the committee members asked Long "whether the time for the abolition of large ships was not approaching." The First Lord replied that the Sea Lords unanimously disagreed, but the issue was being studied (apparently in reference to the Post-War Questions Committee). The Finance Committee then discussed the Admiralty's revised Navy Estimates for 1919-20.¹⁰⁷ Subject to some trifling conclusions, the economic council accepted the new figure of £158 millions.¹⁰⁸ The Finance Committee's acceptance of a reduction of only £13 millions from the July Estimates is evidence of the quality work put forth by the Admiralty's Committee on Naval Expenditure and of the failure to consider adequately wartime residues in their decree of £60 millions annually for the Navy.

¹⁰⁶CAB 27/71-72: Finance Committee Minute 16, November 24, 1919.

¹⁰⁷CAB 27-71/72: Finance Committee Memoranda 29, October 31, 1919 and 23, November 11, 1919, contain the revised Navy Estimates and the Treasury analysis thereof, respectively.

¹⁰⁸CAB 27/71-72: Finance Committee Minute 16, November 24, 1919.

Grey's response, three days later, proved a disappointment. The envoy stated that the United States Navy intended to maintain a large fleet: sixteen modern battleships, twenty-five older battleships, and eight armoured cruisers. Man-power shortages (107,400 men against an authorization of 177,500) temporarily weakened the American fleet, leading Grey to comment: "The United States Navy cannot in its present state be raised to a really efficient state for at least a year."¹⁰⁹ He then admitted his inability to elicit any sort of assurance as to the nature of future American naval policy. Grey's failure ruled out any possibility that the Admiralty might voluntarily cooperate with the Finance Committee's plans for retrenchment.

The First Lord presented the revised Estimates to Parliament in a cautious manner. Speaking on December 10, 1919, Long made no major pronouncements on the future of the Royal Navy, but instead presented the figure of £158 millions as a compromise between the Government's desire to economize and the need to conclude wartime obligations. In response to questions from the floor, he promised to expound more fully with the 1920-21 Estimates in March.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹CAB 27/71-72: Finance Committee Memorandum 38, January 26, 1920; Documents in British Foreign Policy, V, No. 412, 1038-39.

¹¹⁰Parliamentary Debates, Commons, vol. 122, cols. 1367-1497.

Admiral David Beatty then threatened to destroy the Cabinet's fragile consensus on naval policy.¹¹¹ Lloyd George had satisfied both the Treasury and the Admiralty as long as the naval superiority with which Britain had emerged from the Great War obviated the need for new naval construction. But Beatty, who replaced Admiral Wemyss as First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff in November 1919, worried about the inexorable growth of the United States Navy.¹¹² Learning of the American proposals, he prepared in January 1920 a paper on naval policy which argued that Britain had two alternatives:

- a) For a definitive approach to be made by the British Government to the Government of the United States with a view to a limitation of Naval Armaments: or b) Ourselves to embark on a further building program which will insure that we are at least equal in material strength to the United States Navy as at present budgeted for.¹¹³

He then convinced the Board to call upon the First Lord to prepare a memorandum concerning the size of the fleet for

¹¹¹Before he assumed office, Beatty assured Long: "I fully understand the necessity of effecting great economies and that the naval estimates have to be considerably reduced to meet the altered circumstances." See Petrie, Walter Long, 227.

¹¹²Sprouts, New Order, 73-79, discuss the progress of American naval construction, 1919-1920. In December 1919, the United States Navy Department requested two battleships and one battle cruiser to be laid down within the fiscal year, a considerable advancement over the 1916 authorizations.

¹¹³ADM 116/1677: Chief of Naval Staff Memorandum, "Naval Policy", January 7, 1920.

the Cabinet.¹¹⁴ Beatty next persuaded Long to incorporate much of the First Sea Lord's paper into the First Lord's communication to the Cabinet.

Long, however, decided not to include funding for a program of capital ship construction in the Navy Estimates for 1920-21. Instead, he reiterated the warning of the previous October that continued expansion of the American fleet would require either an arms accord or a British program of capital ship construction if Britain were to avoid losing command of the sea.¹¹⁵ The First Lord's decision not to include a building program undoubtedly reflected the fact that Britain still had about a year before new construction would be critical. It may also have reflected his desire to place on record, well in advance of potential budgetary conflict, the naval staff's appreciation of the battleship and the battle cruiser.

In the spring of 1920, the Admiralty publicly affirmed its faith in the capital ship. In the preparation of the Navy Estimates for 1920-21, the First Lord rebuffed the Chancellor's efforts to put more capital ships in reserve.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ADM 167/60: Board Minute 1117, January 14, 1920.

¹¹⁵ADM 116/1775: First Lord Memorandum, "Naval Estimates and Naval Policy", February 13, 1920.

¹¹⁶ADM 167/60: Board Minute 1154, February 18, 1920. Long compromised by reducing the amount of fuel oil the Navy planned to stockpile that year. See CAB 27/71-72: Finance Committee Memorandum 43: February 20, 1920.

His stance was strengthened by the conclusions of the Post-War Questions Committee. That group examined "the military uses and values of the different types of vessels" and concluded that "nothing has happened to displace the Battleship from her position."¹¹⁷ The First Lord's request for £84 millions without any provision for new construction sailed smoothly through the Cabinet. Long used the accompanying White Paper to identify the capital ship as "the unit on which sea power is to be built up."¹¹⁸ The First Lord then made his case before the House of Commons.

Speaking at Westminster on March 17th, Long unequivocally pronounced the capital ship to be the bedrock of British naval policy. He affirmed the government's adherence to a One Power Standard, whereby the strength of the Royal Navy--meaning the number of capital ships in full commission--"should not be inferior in strength to the navy of any other Power."¹¹⁹ He immediately sought to downplay the possibility of rivalry with the United States by announcing that "the idea of competition in armaments...is

¹¹⁷ADM 1/8586/70: Interim Report of the Post-War Questions Committee, December 22, 1919.

¹¹⁸Beatty MSS: Naval Estimates, March 12, 1920. Beatty argued that the "abandonment of the capital ship...would leave the British nation destitute of sea power."

¹¹⁹Parliamentary Debates, Commons, vol. 126, cols. 2296-2347; 2442-2550. Long's budget speech, without the subsequent debate, can also be found in Petrie, Walter Long, 258-277.

repugnant to us all." The First Lord concluded his presentation by rebutting the notion that "the day of the capital ship is over." Long stated that his naval advisors, along with their counterparts in every other great naval country, believed that the capital ship, in time of war:

would prove again, as it has proved before, to be the predominant factor in naval warfare, and that in the end the weight of metal would tell, and that therefore the big ship must, at all events for some time to come, be preserved as an important part of our naval equipment.

He further dismissed the possibility that the Air Force could as yet fulfill the functions of the Navy, and added that for the proper training of officers and seamen, "the big ship is absolutely essential."¹²⁰

Subsequent to the approval of the Navy Estimates for 1920-21, Beatty resumed his efforts to preserve Britain's precarious maritime supremacy. In late March, in a speech to the Highland Society, the First Sea Lord cautioned against budgetary savings at the expense of naval strength. He said: "The economical side requires a note of warning. You cannot have a valuable thing without paying for it."¹²¹ In July, Beatty introduced a new line of argument. He contended that the Hood, in a manner similar to the

¹²⁰Parliamentary Debates, Commons, vol. 126, cols. 2296-2347; 2442-2550. Long's budget speech, without the subsequent debate, can also be found in Petrie, Walter Long, 258-277.

¹²¹Admiral Beatty, as recorded in Chalmers, Life and Letters of David Beatty, 359.

Dreadnought, had established a new standard of naval strength. To compare properly the Royal Navy to its Atlantic rival, he wrote:

It is not sufficient to consider total numbers. The far more important consideration is the comparison between the respective numbers laid down as a result of the Battle of Jutland.

The First Sea Lord then advanced the idea of "replacement based on war experience" as a means to avoid open competition with the United States. Beatty suggested 15 years as a life-span for vessels completed before the war and twenty for post-Jutland ships. On that basis, he calculated that Britain required four new capital ships in 1921 with a further four in 1922.¹²² The First Lord relayed Beatty's arguments to the Cabinet, warning that American naval construction threatened Britain with "a position of absolute and marked inferiority at sea by the 1924." Long even went so far as to suggest providing naval contractors with confidential warning, "such warning of course not binding."¹²³ For the first time since the Armistice, Admiralty House formally requested a program of capital ship construction.

In the summer of 1920, the Cabinet remained divided over the issue of naval policy. The advocates of sea power

¹²²ADM 1/8602/54: Beatty Memorandum, July 8, 1920.

¹²³ADM 116/1775: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Construction", July 23, 1920.

demanded a fleet not less than that of the other leading naval power, the United States. The Admiralty argued that American progress on the 1916 program constituted a grave threat to Britain's maritime supremacy. Therefore, in order to maintain the One Power Standard, Britain required either a program of naval expansion or an arms limitation agreement with the United States. The physical condition of President Wilson precluded agreement with Washington. The proponents of "Treasury control" forbade costly new construction programs. The two planks of British naval policy no longer seemed compatible.

CHAPTER 6

THE PARTICULAR WEAPON

In the winter of 1920-21, the British government continued its search for a naval policy. As the British naval community reviewed the lessons of the war in 1919-20, the "Jutland controversy" and its aftermath damaged the reputation of the Admiralty. In December 1920, Lloyd George established a committee to investigate the appropriate type of vessel for the future of the Royal Navy. During the course of that investigation, several committee members revealed a marked reluctance to accept the testimony of the Admiralty's expert witnesses. The conclusions of the committee, which issued two opposing reports, demonstrated the government's loss of confidence in the value of the capital ship.

Post-war study of the Battle of Jutland led to the "Jutland controversy," which still continues today. The origins of the controversy are two-fold. First, the technology available in 1916 for plotting the movement of ships appears primitive by modern standards.¹ Thus, wide disagreement existed and continues to exist over the actual and relative position of ships at various times during the battle. Admiral Jellicoe, in his own account of the battle, stated that "the conflicting reports [of the positions of various ships] added greatly to the perplexity of the

¹Roskill, Last Naval Hero, 322-23.

situation."² Second, the overwhelming majority of the British naval community regarded the battle, in the words of one of Jellicoe's biographers, as "a big disappointment after the high expectations that had been entertained of the long-awaited meeting with the High Seas Fleet."³ Not unnaturally, the leading participants became concerned to portray their own actions in the most favorable light. The Jutland controversy, therefore, involved not only the conduct of the battle but also the degree to which the protagonists sought to influence its historiography.

Admiral John Jellicoe, who commanded the Grand Fleet during the battle of Jutland, initiated the battle's post-war review. In February 1919, he published The Grand Fleet, 1914-16: Its Creation, Development, and Work, in which he explained his unwillingness to close with the High Seas Fleet for fear of losing command of the North Sea. Jellicoe revealed a longstanding concern with the possibility of a torpedo attack by German destroyers against the Grand Fleet. The admiral explained that "the element of chance enters very largely into torpedo warfare" and noted that "our enemy was almost certain to possess a very considerable superiority over us in the number of destroyers likely to be

²Admiral Jellicoe, The Grand Fleet, 1914-16: Its Creation, Development, and Work (London, 1919), 344. See also Chalmers, Life and Letters of David Beatty, 265; Barnett, Swordbearers, 148.

³Patterson, Jellicoe, 135.

present during a Fleet action." He fought the Battle of Jutland not as a man determined to win, but rather as a man determined not to lose, constrained by:

the necessity for not leaving anything to chance in a Fleet action, because our Fleet was the one and only factor that was vital to the existence of the Empire, as indeed to the Allied cause.⁴
[Jellicoe's italics]

Jellicoe's cautious approach reflected his beliefs that the High Seas Fleet, under certain circumstances, had the potential to defeat the Grand Fleet and that defeat would be much more damaging to Britain than to Germany.

Carlyon Bellairs, a former naval officer turned Member of Parliament, joined the debate in the same month with The Battle of Jutland: The Sowing and The Reaping. He savagely attacked British naval leadership, claiming:

Since the British Government refused to adopt Chatham's policy in regard to the American colonies there has been no lost opportunity to equal in its consequence our failure in leadership at the Battle of Jutland.⁵

Bellairs personally blamed Jellicoe for "a narrow conformity to defensive tactics which could never achieve victory," in sharp contrast to Nelson's adage that "the boldest measures are the safest; nothing great can be achieved without risk." In summation, the ex-Commander presented an eleven-step indictment against the Admiralty, starting with "defective"

⁴Jellicoe, The Grand Fleet, 393-98.

⁵Carlyon Bellairs, The Battle of Jutland: The Sowing and the Reaping (London, 1919), xii.

preparations for war and concluding with the failure to send out the Harwich force to reinforce the Grand Fleet.⁶

From that point, the controversy over Jutland intensified, and many critics began to impute blame to either Jellicoe, for his caution, or Beatty, for his failure to keep Jellicoe better informed of the position of the High Seas Fleet.⁷ One of Beatty's biographers notes: "Self-appointed champions poured forth a stream of calumny and uninformed criticism upon one or the other of the two admirals."⁸ The effect of this public criticism, according to one of Jellicoe's biographers, was to open even wider "the schism that disputes over the action were already creating in the Navy."⁹ The division between the followers of Jellicoe and Beatty soon deepened.

⁶Carlyon Bellairs, The Battle of Jutland: The Sowing and the Reaping (London, 1919), 268, 272. The complete indictment includes: (1) defective preparations for war; (2) not being inspired by the offensive spirit; (3) failure to hold courts-martial on superior officers; (4) Jellicoe's failure to establish communications with Beatty; (5) Jellicoe's deployment to port, rather than to starboard; (6) failure to seek close action; (7) lack of British destroyer attacks; (8) the turning away of battleships from destroyer attacks; (9) failure to maintain contact with the German fleet during the night action; (10) failure to seek the German fleet the following morning; and (11) failure to send out the Harwich force.

⁷See William Jameson, The Fleet that Jack Built: Nine Men Who Made a Modern Navy (London, 1962), 205; Dingman, Pacific, 114.

⁸Chalmers, The Life and Letters of David Beatty, 266.

⁹Patterson, Jellicoe Papers, Vol II, 399.

The Jutland controversy took a decisive turn with the appointment of Admiral Beatty as First Sea Lord on November 1, 1919. In January 1919, his predecessor, Admiral Rosslyn Wemyss, perhaps influenced by the imminent publication of Jellicoe's memoirs, appointed Captain J.E.T. Harper to prepare a chronological record of the battle. On March 26, 1919, First Lord Walter Long announced to the House of Commons that Captain Harper and four subordinates had been attached to the War Staff "for the purpose of collecting from official records the narrative of the Battle of Jutland."¹⁰ Harper submitted his report on October 24, 1919, to the Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Sir Osmond de Beauvoir Brock. He decided that approval should rest with Beatty, who would assume the post of First Sea Lord in a week. On October 29th, Long promised publication of the report to the House of Commons. Beatty, however, disagreed with the findings of the Harper record, particularly the charting of various ships.¹¹ The new First Sea Lord, a firm believer in both battleships and battle cruisers, found the

¹⁰Walter Long, as recorded in Bellairs, The Reaping, xi. Bellairs suggested that Harper was not up to the task, noting that Harper had never been a staff officer and that he had served as navigating officer aboard the Royal Yacht from 1911-14 and thereafter as assistant Harbour Master at Portsmouth.

¹¹One reads with reservation the words of Beatty's biographer, Rear Admiral Chalmers, The Life and Letters of David Beatty, 267: "It is a measure of Beatty's greatness that he forbore to reply to his critics, being content to abide by the judgment of his countrymen and history."

report unduly critical of the performance of the Battle Cruiser Force during the Battle of Jutland.

Beatty ordered Harper to amend his account, thus initiating the process of official interference in the history of Jutland that excited much Parliamentary and public attention.¹² Harper made the directed changes, with the result that the report protected the reputation of the Battle Cruiser Force and hence its commander, Beatty.¹³ Long then directed Harper to cancel the changes, which appeared detrimental to Jellicoe. The harried captain tried to accommodate the First Lord. As a result, the report that went forward for printing in May 1920 was a compromise between the original narrative and the modified version that Beatty desired. The First Sea Lord pressed First Lord Long to accept further changes. He in turn consulted the Board, which on June 21st authorized a preface desired by Beatty.¹⁴

¹²The Harper report generated Parliamentary discussion on at least twenty-two occasions between 1919 and 1927, according to Roskill, Intimate Biography, 324.

¹³Harper published his own record of the Battle of Jutland and the process of official interference with his report as The Truth about Jutland in 1927. Several of Harper's papers can be found as an appendix to Patterson, Jellicoe Papers, Vol II, 458-490. Harper criticized Beatty for "attempts to neutralize the effect of the plain, unvarnished chronological Record of Facts" and described Bellairs' work as "the most unscrupulous attempt to influence the public and disparage the Official Record."

¹⁴Both the Deputy Chief of Staff and the Assistant Chief of Staff had previously served under Beatty. The text of the preface can be found in Patterson, Jellicoe Papers, Vol II, 469.

Long forwarded the edited version to Jellicoe, who objected to the alterations ordered by Beatty and strongly opposed the Admiralty's preface, which he described as "distinctly inaccurate as to facts [Jellicoe's italics]."¹⁵ The Board, under Beatty's direction, objected to Jellicoe's objections.

Long now sought to escape the crossfire of the admirals by seeking an alternative introduction from Sir Julian Corbett, the eminent naval historian. Corbett referred Long to his publishers, Messrs. Longman. In August 1920, they requested that the First Lord withhold the manuscript as detrimental to the sale of the Official History of the war, to which they possessed exclusive rights.¹⁶ The First Lord and the First Sea Lord then agreed to turn Harper's report over to Corbett to assist in his preparation of the official history. Beatty, not entirely satisfied, commissioned a fresh study of the Battle of Jutland.¹⁷

The Admiralty's conduct drew considerable notice, most of it critical. In November and December 1920, the House of Commons repeatedly requested publication of the Official Record and demanded the Government's reasons for suppressing

¹⁵Admiral Jellicoe to Long, July 5th 1920, as recorded in Patterson, Jellicoe Papers, Vol II, 406-10.

¹⁶Chalmers, The Life and Letters of David Beatty, 357-58.

¹⁷The staff appreciation prepared by Captains Kenneth and A.C. Dewar focused on the lessons of the battle, in contrast to the Harper Report, which provided strictly a description of the action.

Harper's work.¹⁸ Admiral Wemyss publicly attacked the integrity of the First Lord. The Times abused the prime minister for failing to provide the full story to the public. Arthur Pollen, a naval reformer, demanded a court-martial investigation of the conduct of the Battle of Jutland.¹⁹ The enormously influential Northcliffe press, which included The Times and the Daily Mail, even-handedly blasted Jellicoe's handling of the battle and Beatty's handling of the report.

Fleet Street, after tarnishing the Royal Navy's past and present, turned its attention to the naval warfare of the future. The press carried the letters of retired Rear Admiral Sir Percy Scott, the gunnery expert who had shocked the service in 1914 with a letter to The Times which stated that the submarine and the airplane had "driven the battleship from the sea."²⁰ Scott pronounced absolutely that the war had proven him correct: "I regarded the battleship as dead before the War, and I think her more dead now if that is possible."²¹ The Times featured the essays of Rear-

¹⁸Patterson, Jellicoe Papers, Vol II, 476-77.

¹⁹Dingman, Pacific, 115.

²⁰A copy of Scott's letter is located in Charles Domville-Fife, Submarines and Seapower (London, 1919), 71. A synopsis, together with a surprising number of replies, can be found in Scott's memoirs, Fifty Years in the Royal Navy (New York, 1919), 263-268.

²¹Scott, Fifty Years, 332. See also Kennedy, Naval Mastery, 199, 282.

Admiral Sydney Hall, who focused on the inability of capital ships to protect Britain's sea lines of communication. Hall cited Admiral Jellicoe's statement that the submarine campaign of 1917-18 placed the British people "closer to ruin than we had been for 200 years" and an Admiralty memorandum from 1910 which warned that "the really serious danger that this country has to guard against is not invasion, but interruption of trade and destruction of our merchant marine." The admiral predicted that future submarines would possess much greater range and mount guns capable of sinking merchant vessels. Against these submarine cruisers, Hall concluded that "in any naval war that can reasonably be forecast, capital ships can do nothing to assist in the protection of trade."²²

The Daily Telegraph serialized The Submarine in War by Charles Domville-Fife, a former naval officer with experience in anti-submarine warfare. In 1919, Domville-Fife published a more serious work, Submarines and Seapower, in which he predicted--similarly to Hall--the evolution of submarine cruisers with increased displacement, speed, range (surface and submerged), and armament. He then envisioned the development of wolfpack tactics, "the employment of more than one submarine in an engagement with a heavily armed

²²CAB 37/2: N.S.C. Memorandum 2 contains articles appearing in the Times from December 10-14, 1920, by Rear-Admiral S.S. Hall.

surface ship, the under-water attack being delivered from two or more points simultaneously." He also anticipated the maturation of specialized anti-submarine craft equipped with hydrophones and depth charges and emphasized the need to protect capital ships with these auxiliaries. Domville-Fife expected that "it will become a rule of naval warfare that battleships should never be without a guard of destroyers."²³

Magazines from all political persuasions joined the chorus against the capital ship: the Conservative Spectator, Labor's New Statesman, The Nation of Liberal persuasion, even C.P. Scott's Manchester Guardian, the pre-war advocate of naval supremacy.²⁴ On December 14, 1920, the Times announced that "the country has recognized during the last fortnight that the future of the Navy is foremost among the problems that confront it." After noting the Admiralty's commitment to a program of naval construction, the paper continued: "But so strong is the case for keen and expert inquiry before entering into warship construction that the government have yielded to the demand for investigation."²⁵ The genesis of that investigation had occurred a mere fifteen days previously.

²³Domville-Fife, Submarines and Sea Power, 10-11, 58-63, 77-82.

²⁴Dingman, Pacific, 115-16.

²⁵Beatty MSS 8/2: Clipping from the Times, December 14, 1920.

In the fall of 1920, the Admiralty drive for a new program of capital ship construction temporarily stalled. In July 1920, Admiral Beatty had written a memorandum calling for four replacement capital ships in 1921 and another four in 1922, upon which the First Lord had based his own missive to the Cabinet.²⁶ In August, Financial Secretary to the Admiralty Sir James Craig provided the Cabinet the projected cost of the Admiralty's construction program: £84.5 millions.²⁷ The Cabinet took scant notice of the Admiralty memorandum except to conclude there was no commitment to expenditure.²⁸ The issue of naval construction then entered a hiatus of several months.

When the Cabinet ignored their entreaties, the Board waited until November and returned to the same argument. The Admiralty submitted another memorandum calling for the construction of four capital ships in 1921-22 and another four in 1922-23. The memorandum restated the First Lord's position, taken during the presentation of the Navy

²⁶ADM 1/8602/54: Beatty Memorandum, July 8, 1920; ADM 116/1775: First Lord Memorandum, "Naval Construction", July 23, 1920.

²⁷ADM 1/8602/54: Financial Secretary Memorandum, August 10, 1920. The program included four capital ships in 1921-22, one minelayer, two carrier conversions, and completion of ancillary craft, together with four additional capital ships in 1922-23, for £81.7 millions. Additional carrier work and a floating dock brought the total to £84.5 millions.

²⁸CAB 23: C. 48(20), 7: Naval Construction, 13 August 1920.

Estimates in March 1920, that "our Navy should not be inferior in strength to the Navies of other Powers." The Board argued that the United States had increased her forces and that as a result Britain "had reached the critical time previously forecasted" when she must "act or fall behind." The argument possessed a new note of urgency. Even the prompt construction of the desired vessels, according to the Admiralty's calculations, would leave a "window of inferiority" in 1923-25 below the One Power standard.²⁹ The Director of Naval Construction, Sir Eustace Tennyson D'Eyncourt, passed this argument to Lloyd George via Lord George Riddell during the first week of November.³⁰

Two days before the completion of the Admiralty paper, the Treasury produced a memorandum of its own. Chancellor of the Exchequer Austen Chamberlain focused on the failure of the fighting services to adhere to estimates in accordance with the so-called normal year total of £135 millions established in August 1919. The Chancellor noted that the cost of the Navy depended largely upon its size, which remained the prerogative of the Admiralty. He complained that "there is no satisfactory evidence that the normal year basis is regarded by the Admiralty as the limit

²⁹ADM 116/1775: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Policy and New Construction", November 22, 1920.

³⁰George Riddell, Lord Riddell's Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock), 246.

to which Navy votes should be reduced in the near future" and also pointed out that the Navy's dockyard strength greatly exceeded pre-war figures. Chamberlain then presented opposing methods for resolving the size of the Navy Estimates: Cabinet agreement upon a specific sum or Committee of Imperial Defence (C.I.D.) determination of a scale of naval strength necessary for national defence, without regard to cost. In conclusion, the Chancellor stated that if Britain entered into a building competition with America, then "all prospects of reduction on Navy votes must disappear for an indefinite time and huge liabilities instead be contemplated."³¹

The Cabinet Finance Committee, on November 29th, surveyed the position of the Exchequer. The Treasury reported that the revised Estimates for 1920-21 were better than expected, as "the balance for redemption [of the National Debt] being slightly larger than the earlier estimate. This was due to larger receipts on miscellaneous revenue."³² Opposing this bit of good news, however, was the report that Debt redemption for 1921-22 appeared to be down from a previous estimate of £250-300 millions to about £221 millions. The Government failed to meet its "normal year"

³¹CAB 27/71+72: Finance Committee Memorandum 52: November 20, 1920.

³²CAB 27/71+72: Finance Committee Minute 28, November 29, 1920.

expenditure of £850 millions by £250 millions, as the original figure did not include subsequent expenditure decisions, such as doubling Old Age Pensions, extending Unemployment Insurance, and the increases in the Service Estimates.³³ The Admiralty paper on Naval Policy and Construction raised the possibility that the Navy Estimates, instead of falling from the £90 millions of 1920-21, might have to be increased. The Finance Committee expressed unhappiness with Service Estimates and agreed that the Treasury should prepare, as a starting point for discussion with the Fighting Services, a drastic curtailment of at least £100 millions from the present total of £255 millions.³⁴ In the wake of this meeting, the Prime Minister developed a possible resolution to the conflicting demands of economy and security.

Some time between November 29th and December 7th, 1920, David Lloyd George decided to form a committee to investigate the role of the capital ship in future naval

³³The increases in revised Service votes constituted about 10% of the total shortfall (£24.5 millions out of £250 millions):

	Original	Increase	Revised
Army	£125.0 millions	+£15.0 millions	£140.0 millions
Navy	£84.5 millions	+£5.5 millions	£90.0 millions
Air Force	£21.0 millions	+£4.0 millions	£25.0 millions
Total	£230.5 millions	+£24.5 millions	£255.0 millions

³⁴CAB 27/71+72: Finance Committee Minute 28, November 29, 1920.

operations. In this decision, he was probably influenced by Hankey, his Cabinet Secretary, who received some time before December 8th a similar proposal from Archibald Hurd, the naval correspondent of the Daily Telegraph.³⁵ The Prime Minister's course of action carried the immediate benefit of delaying major expenditure on naval construction. In addition, it held the potential for reducing the cost of the fleet if the investigation revealed that some combination of submarines, airplanes, and smaller ships could replace the capital ships which the Admiralty demanded. Such a finding, unthinkable in 1914, seemed far more reasonable in light of the Jutland controversy and the recent campaign by Scott, Hall, and others against the capital ship.

The Welsh Wizard demonstrated his vast political acumen through the manner in which he pursued his plan for a committee to investigate the capital ship. While pointing to the public debate over the value of the capital ship as a rationale for conducting a governmental inquiry, Lloyd George carefully avoided backing any specific weapons system as a better alternative. In lieu of battleships and battle cruisers, he suggested "small ships" and "lesser craft," ambiguous terms broad enough to encompass submarines, torpedo boats, destroyers, light cruisers, and even pocket

³⁵Hurd also suggested that announcement of an inquiry into the future of the capital ship might delay American and Japanese building programs. See Roskill, Hankey, Vol II, 205.

battleships.³⁶ Furthermore, the Prime Minister carefully selected the venue for the initial presentation of his proposal. Before submitting his idea to the full Cabinet, he first broached the proposition for an investigation of the capital ship in the Cabinet Finance Committee, a body far more concerned with ledger balances than with the nuances of naval construction.

In the next meeting of the Finance Committee, on December 7th in Andrew Bonar Law's room in the House of Commons, Lloyd George introduced his plan for an inquiry into the role of the capital ship. He reminded the committee, which did not contain a single representative of the fighting services, of the country's need to pay out heavy obligations with respect to maturing debt and that major reductions were possible only in the service estimates. He then addressed the Admiralty's request for a naval building program. Lloyd George expressed reservations as to whether "the experience of the Great War" supported the Navy's claims as to the value of the capital ship and proposed an inquiry.³⁷ The Prime Minister recommended to the Finance Committee that the Cabinet should release a statement to the effect that:

Great Britain did not propose to embark on a big

³⁶CAB 27/71: Finance Committee Minute 29, December 7, 1920; CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 134, December 14, 1920.

³⁷CAB 27/71: Finance Committee Minute 29, December 7, 1920.

Naval Programme without a full and careful investigation of the relative merits of big and small ships, in light of the lessons of the last war.

He also recommended including a reminder that Britain was committed to maintaining "a Fleet stronger than any other Power." Lloyd George asserted that if the Government reaffirmed the One Power Standard, in conjunction with the proposed inquiry, then "public opinion would be satisfied" and the Wilson Administration would probably defer their naval program "pending knowledge of the action taken by Britain."³⁸ The Prime Minister's proposals struck a responsive chord with the Finance Committee, which in its previous meeting had balked at the size of the service estimates.³⁹ Lloyd George thus secured the support of key members of the Cabinet, including Andrew Bonar Law and Austen Chamberlain, before Admiralty House had any opportunity to rebut his arguments.

The following day, the Prime Minister had little difficulty convincing the Cabinet of the wisdom of his proposal. Armed with the support of the Finance Committee, Lloyd George persuaded the full Cabinet to establish a committee to investigate the place and usefulness of the capital ship in the future of the Navy. In line with the

³⁸CAB 27/71: Finance Committee Minute 29, December 7, 1920.

³⁹CAB 27/71: Finance Committee Minute 28, November 29, 1920.

Prime Minister's reasoning before the Finance Committee, the Cabinet embraced the One Power standard while questioning the role of the capital ship. The Lloyd George ministry agreed "to maintain the Navy at a standard of strength which shall adequately secure the safety of the Empire and its maritime communications." At the same time, His Majesty's Government concluded that they were "bound to satisfy themselves that the lessons of the war have been definitively ascertained" before "sanctioning a new program of construction."⁴⁰ The cabinet then agreed to suspend the question of naval construction pending the upcoming investigation.

On December 14th, the Prime Minister carried his plan for a committee to investigate the capital ship to a different forum, the Committee of Imperial Defence. The C.I.D. provided the cabinet a valuable means of securing inter-service cooperation.⁴¹ Lloyd George pursued a strategy developed two nights before, over dinner with Hankey and

⁴⁰CAB 23: Cabinet Minute 67(4), December 8, 1920.

⁴¹During its first post-war meeting, the C.I.D. established a sub-committee which included the Prime Minister, the First Lord and First Sea Lord, the Secretary of State for War and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, the Under Secretary of State for Air and the Chief of the Air Staff to handle routine matters. Winston Churchill held the combined office of Secretary of State for War and Air from January 1919 to February 1921. See CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 133, June 29, 1920; Roskill, Naval Policy, 256.

Lord Haldane.⁴² He opened by announcing his regret over the absence of First Lord Walter Long, due to ill health, on a day when the members of the C.I.D. were to discuss "about the most important question that had ever been submitted to them." The Prime Minister then identified the issue as the type of Navy needed in the future. He questioned the need for "a great constructive programme" and stated "the kind of ship they were to select" was a decision that "required both political and expert [i.e., naval] opinion."⁴³

Lloyd George then asked the assembled experts to identify the "probable enemy." Europe, he suggested, could be ruled out; the only powers with formidable navies were Japan and the United States. He described these nations as "friendly" but noted that they were building against one another, forcing Britain to consider the uses to which their fleets could be put.⁴⁴ The Prime Minister then insisted that Britain could not fight the United States for economic as well as military reasons. Canada, he contended, had "an indefensible border," while a shipbuilding competition "might be ruinous" and would reduce the possibility that the

⁴²Hankey recorded that "we arranged the general lines of the Naval Inquiry viz:-first consider what enemies we are prepared to fight; second how; and third with what weapons so far as the Navy is concerned." See Roskill, Hankey, Vol II, 206.

⁴³CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 134, December 14, 1920.

⁴⁴CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 134, December 14, 1920.

United States would press for the repayment of £1,000 millions in war loans.⁴⁵ In something of a non sequitur, he suggested the possibility of naval spheres of influence, with Britain taking the Mediterranean, the North Sea, and the Indian Seas, among others.⁴⁶

Lloyd George then raised "the very important question of the particular weapon to be employed" by the Royal Navy in the future. He noted that the submarine "nearly became a determining factor in the war" and speculated as to the best method of establishing "the proportion between capital ships and lesser craft." After reiterating the need to ascertain the most likely future opponent and "the means with which to fight," the Prime Minister ended by emphasizing the importance of the experts to be consulted.⁴⁷

Winston Churchill, the Secretary of State for War and Air, joined in to argue that Britain must remain the strongest naval power. He reviewed the history of previous standards of naval strength and suggested that, in line with traditional practices, Britain should "avoid direct application" of the One Power standard "to any particular

⁴⁵For the American perspective on Britain's ability to defend Canada, see William Braisted, "On the American Red and Red-Orange Plans, 1919-39", in Gerald Jordan, ed, Naval Warfare in the Twentieth Century 1900-1945: Essays in Honour of Arthur Marder (New York, 1977), 167-185.

⁴⁶CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 134, December 14, 1920.

⁴⁷CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 134, December 14, 1920.

Power." He rejected as fallacious thinking Lloyd George's notion of regional sea supremacy, since "the seas were indivisible." Churchill then recommended that sea power be measured, not in terms of post-Jutland capital ships alone, but including man power and the fire power, armor, and handling of vessels of every class.⁴⁸

Admiral Beatty then provided the Navy's position.⁴⁹ He noted that the Admiralty had pointed out in October 1919 the need for either an arrangement with the United States or a new program of capital ship construction.⁵⁰ He then explained that in the absence of any diplomatic agreement the Admiralty Board had planned a building program which sought equality in sea power.⁵¹ The Board of Admiralty had considered the lessons of the Great War and were unanimous

⁴⁸CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 134, December 14, 1920.

⁴⁹Beatty was well aware of the Cabinet decision to commission an enquiry into the role of the capital ship, which he had briefed to the Admiralty board five days earlier. See ADM 167/60: Board Minute 1281, December 9, 1920.

⁵⁰ADM 116/1774: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Policy and Expenditure", October 24, 1919.

⁵¹Admiral Jellicoe, as recorded in Bellairs, The Sowing and The Reaping, 15, made the point that the Navy had a much easier time obtaining funds for battleships than for smaller classes of ships: "'Dreadnoughts' had caught on, and if you wanted money, you were pretty sure, with a certain amount of pressure, to get it for 'Dreadnoughts.'" But in the shout for 'Dreadnoughts' people forgot that there were other classes of craft that were necessary for other purposes. If money was asked for those craft there was not quite the same response."

in their belief that the basis of sea power remained the capital ship.⁵²

Responding to Churchill's argument, Beatty claimed the Admiralty's program did not measure naval strength purely in "post-Jutland battleships." The Admiralty could accept a ratio of twelve such American ships to nine British vessels, compensated by "superior design and a better proportion of other types of vessels."⁵³ The admiral avoided stating the obvious: if the Admiralty's program were not approved, the ratio of post-Jutland capital ships would be twelve American and eight Japanese to one British vessel (the Hood).⁵⁴

Beatty concluded by emphasizing the urgency of the situation. The Admiralty had already made clear to the Cabinet that a failure to build in the near future would result in a de facto abandonment of the One Power Standard. Beatty then addressed a new issue, the adverse impact of

⁵²CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 134, December 14, 1920.

⁵³This ratio came from a table of projected strength for 1924-25 presented in the Admiralty's latest request for a building program. Class A ships were those of post-Jutland design over 40,000 tons; Class B ships were capital ships of at least 30,000 tons with guns of at least 14"; Class C ships were capital ships of at least 25,000 tons with guns of less than 14":

	Britain	US	Japan	Britain with Program
Class A	1	12	8	9
Class B	13	11	4	13
Class C	4	4	4	4

See ADM 116/1775: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Policy and New Construction", November 22, 1920.

⁵⁴CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 134, December 14, 1920.

post-war retrenchment on the ship-building industry.⁵⁵ On December 10th, he had prepared a short memorandum for the Cabinet that stated that one large armaments firm had closed and another had accepted a foreign order.⁵⁶ The admiral had explained that further delay on the construction of capital ships threatened the livelihood of naval contractors and thus endangered Britain's capacity to build warships.⁵⁷ The First Sea Lord warned the C.I.D. that Britain's capacity to manufacture armor plate was disappearing.⁵⁸

After Beatty's discussion, the C.I.D. committee focused on the naval rivalry between Britain and the United States. Austen Chamberlain urged the avoidance of a building race with America. Andrew Bonar Law observed that the United

⁵⁵The Director of Naval Construction had first raised this issue with the Admiralty Board a year earlier: "The drive for economy may lead to the shutting down of new construction, which would be deleterious to the navy. We must review our designs annually and construct at least one new ship of each type. We must keep the necessary staff of designers, draughtsmen, and skilled workers on tap. We must enter some arrangements with the contractors to ensure the capacity to build does not become lost. See D'Eyncourt MSS 21: D'Eyncourt Memorandum, "Naval Material", September 8, 1919.

⁵⁶The Armstrong works at Openshaw, near Manchester, had closed, and Vickers had contracted to supply 7,600 tons of armor plate to the Japanese Government.

⁵⁷ADM 116/1775: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Construction", December 10, 1920.

⁵⁸CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 134, December 14, 1920. Beatty's prediction had some validity: during Britain's rearmament in the 1930's, the lack of native armament producers forced Britain to order armor plate from the Czechoslovakian firm of Skoda.

States was having difficulty manning her fleet and declared that British naval construction would arouse American pride. He counseled the acceptance of some risk in terms of naval security and then suggested a diplomatic solution to obviate "battleship building on a large scale." Lloyd George swiftly concurred. Before adjourning, the C.I.D. agreed that the Foreign Secretary would consult Auckland Geddes, Britain's Ambassador to the United States, regarding the prospects of the "limitation of armaments."⁵⁹

The Prime Minister's position regarding the capital ship controversy meanwhile crystallized. If there had been any doubts in his mind during the first week of December, they disappeared during the public debate on the issue. On December 20th, Hankey recorded in his diary:

The P.M. rather irritable. I felt instinctively that he was rather cross with me - I think over the Naval Inquiry. He wants to be able to prove that the Capital Ship is doomed.

Hankey himself believed that the capital ship remained viable, forwarding the latest Admiralty memo to his chief with a minute stating "their arguments appear incontrovertible."⁶⁰ Within two days of discussing the future of the capital ship with Hankey, Lloyd George told Lord Riddell that "it would be a great mistake for the

⁵⁹CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 134, December 14, 1920.

⁶⁰Maurice Hankey, as recorded in Roskill, Hankey, Vol II, 207.

country to engage in a big ship-building programme at the moment." The Prime Minister indicated his desire to reduce "the size of ships and the weight to be carried."⁶¹

On December 23, 1920, at the next meeting of the C.I.D., Churchill proposed the formation of a subcommittee that would collect and lay evidence before the full Committee of Imperial Defence. He suggested evidence from eight or nine individuals from different points of view, with cross examination by the Admiralty. The Secretary of State for War and Air explained that he tended to support the views of the Admiralty, but that he believed a hearing would simplify the task of refuting the opinions in the press.⁶²

The Prime Minister immediately supported Churchill's recommendation for a committee to investigate the capital ship, the idea that he had first proposed to the Cabinet Finance Committee over three weeks before. He added that "it was very necessary to obtain the views of men who favoured the 'little ship'."⁶³ Lloyd George then asked Beatty whether Tyrwhitt, Keyes, Duff, and Richmond—all of whom were officers known for accomplishments apart from

⁶¹David Lloyd George, as recorded in Riddell, Intimate Diary, 255.

⁶²CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 135, December 23, 1920.

⁶³CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 135, December 23, 1920.

capital ships--would be available to testify.⁶⁴ Beatty answered that the Admiralty "had always considered themselves the advisors of the Cabinet on naval matters" and in turn asked the Prime Minister whether the Government still adhered to the One Power standard. Lloyd George stated that "no alteration had been made in the Government's policy" but refused "to consider the question of taking immediate steps" regarding the construction of capital ships pending further deliberation. On that note, the C.I.D. agreed to form a subcommittee to investigate the role of the capital ship.⁶⁵ David Lloyd George would provide this group, known officially as Naval Shipbuilding Subcommittee (N.S.C.), the maximum opportunity consonant with the appearance of open-mindedness to limit the role of the capital ship.

On December 29th, the prime minister commissioned Andrew Bonar Law (Lord Privy Seal) as chairman of the N.S.C., whose members included Beatty, Churchill, Sir Eric

⁶⁴Rear-Admiral Reginald Tyrwhitt during the war commanded the Harwich Force, where he earned a thrusting reputation with light cruisers and destroyers. Vice-Admiral Roger Keyes, who commanded the Dover Patrol in a manner similar to Tyrwhitt, led the daring raid on Zeebrugge harbour which featured destroyers and blockships. Admiral Sir Alexander Duff, who served with the Admiralty as the Director of the Anti-Submarine Division, influenced Jellicoe to institute the convoy system in 1917. Rear-Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, the President of the Naval War College at Greenwich, earned distinction as naval historian, strategist, and tactician.

⁶⁵CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 135, December 23, 1920.

Geddes (Minister of Transport and former First Lord), Sir Robert Horne (President of the Board of Trade), and First Lord Walter Long. At first glance, the Bonar Law Enquiry, as the N.S.C. was informally known, seemed evenly balanced between the advocates of naval security (Beatty, Churchill, Long) and those of economy (Bonar Law, Geddes, Horne). In reality, however, the dynamics of the subcommittee discreetly favored the supporters of naval limitation. Bonar Law, who as chairman was responsible for drafting the subcommittee's report, generally lacked interest in defense matters.⁶⁶ In addition, he disliked and distrusted Winston Churchill.⁶⁷ When Lloyd George had asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer-designate his opinion of keeping Churchill in the Cabinet in December 1916, Bonar Law had responded: "I would rather have him against us every time."⁶⁸ Long was too ill to attend most of the N.S.C. meetings. He and Churchill, furthermore, were bitter political enemies.⁶⁹

Admiral Beatty fought doggedly to insure the Bonar Law Enquiry accepted the primacy of the capital ship in the

⁶⁶Robert Higham, The Military Intellectuals in Britain (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1966), 20.

⁶⁷Robert Blake, Unrepentant Tory: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law (New York: St. Martin's, 1956), 232-34; James, J.C.C. Davidson, 53.

⁶⁸Andrew Bonar Law, as recorded in Blake, Bonar Law, 234.

⁶⁹Martin Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, IV: The Stricken World 1916-1922 (Boston, 1975), 29.

future of the Royal Navy. The First Lord's rapidly failing health left to the First Sea Lord the primary burden of protecting the interests of the Royal Navy, a responsibility that the admiral took deeply to heart.⁷⁰ One diarist recorded Beatty's determination "to resign rather than go down to posterity as the First Sea Lord in office at the time such a shameful decision" [the abandonment of the capital ship and with it, naval supremacy] was implemented.⁷¹ The First Sea Lord built his case on the premise that for the life of a new battleship (approximately 20 years), it would remain the predominant weapon of naval warfare. Beatty took care to use all of the tools at his disposal: at Cabinet meetings he habitually appeared impeccably dressed in morning coat, striped trousers, and a satin cravat adorned with a single pearl, while at night he carefully rehearsed his arguments with his secretary, who played the role of devil's advocate.⁷²

Beatty orchestrated the Admiralty's case, selecting the expert witnesses and producing five documents for the

⁷⁰Roskill, Naval Policy, 224, notes that although Long was unable to attend the meetings of the N.S.C., he reviewed all the papers presented to it, and even prepared two of his own. See CAB 16/37: N8-First Lord Memorandum, "Subcommittee on the Capital Ship in the Navy", January 28, 1921 and N9-First Lord Memorandum, "Naval Policy and Shipbuilding", January 31, 1921.

⁷¹Bryan Godfrey-Faussett, as recorded in Roskill, Last Naval Hero, 302-03.

⁷²Chalmers, Life and Letters of David Beatty, 363-64.

committee on which he sat. He expanded his oral argument for the preservation of naval armament firms and recommended the adoption of a slow yet steady building program. Such a course, he argued, would serve not only to maintain naval production lines but also to reduce production costs.⁷³ He pointed out the extensive capital ship construction of the United States Navy and reminded the committee of the Government's professed adherence to the principle that the Royal Navy "should not be inferior in strength to the Navy of other Powers."⁷⁴ Beatty also reiterated his judgment that only the immediate construction of four new capital ships would suffice to maintain Britain's position of equality.⁷⁵ In a progress report to the ill First Lord, the First Sea Lord wrote that he had pointed out to the Bonar Law Enquiry that:

time was of the utmost importance...that unless we were authorized to commence building ships in the summer of 1921 we should drop from the position we have held for the past three hundred years to that of taking third place in the world.

⁷³CAB 16/37/3: N2-Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Construction", December 10, 1920; N4-Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Construction", December 14, 1920; N6-Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Construction-Armour Plate", December 15, 1920.

⁷⁴First pronounced by Walter Long in March 1920 and last reaffirmed by David Lloyd George in December 1920. See Parliamentary Debates, Commons, vol. 126, cols 2296-2347; CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 135, December 23, 1920.

⁷⁵CAB 16/37/3: N1-Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Policy and Construction", November 22, 1920.

Beatty added that the Royal Navy would "never be able to regain our present position without incurring great cost."⁷⁶

Finally, the First Sea Lord introduced a new line of argument regarding imperial naval defense. The Admiralty previously had recommended to the C.I.D. that "the Dominions and colonies limit their shipbuilding programmes to the provision of light cruisers and submarines," develop bases, and build up fuel supplies. The Royal Navy would serve as an imperial fire brigade, rushing as a whole to any threatened location. Such a strategy, the admiral argued, required a fleet of speedy capital ships: "the mobility of the main body is a very important factor." The eight proposed capital ships would form the backbone of the rapid response force. Beatty indicated that the projected division of labor would reduce the Royal Navy's ancillary costs.⁷⁷

Beatty discounted the threat from the sky, knowing that air power enthusiasts could make only limited claims for the fledgling Royal Air Force based on actual performance.⁷⁸ The Admiralty's Post War Questions Committee had reported less

⁷⁶Admiral Beatty, as recorded in Chalmers, Life and Letters of David Beatty, 363.

⁷⁷CAB 16/37/3: N10-Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Shipbuilding Policy", February 23, 1921.

⁷⁸Geoffrey Till, "Airpower and the Battleship in the 1920's", in Brian Ranft, ed, Technical Changes and British Naval Policy 1860-1939 (London, 1977), 108-122.

than a year before that aircraft could not threaten the capital ship "until the capabilities of aircraft increase beyond anything that appears probable in the near future."⁷⁹ Chief of Air Staff Sir Hugh Trenchard suggested that the Air Force could be expanded to assume the Navy's mission of preventing invasion, but for the present would go no further than to claim:

if we can concentrate on the development of the aircraft, the importance of the capital ship must be greatly reduced and will become an insurance for which we cannot afford to pay the premiums.⁸⁰

Stronger claims for air power were made by retired Major-General Sir Frederick Sykes, who stated: "All forms of warship will soon become obsolete, and by the time a programme of battleship construction is completed new factors may have arisen which render them useless."⁸¹

Retired Rear-Admiral Charles de Bartolomé, wartime Third Sea Lord, strongly supported Sykes's views concerning the enormous potential of air power. He asserted that the new technologies "are so promising that we should be well advised to defer the building of capital ships."⁸²

⁷⁹ADM 1/8586/70: Final Report of the Post-War Questions Committee, March 27, 1920.

⁸⁰CAB 16/37/2: NSC-22, Testimony of Air-Marshal Trenchard.

⁸¹CAB 16/37/2: NSC-24, Testimony of Major-General Sykes.

⁸²CAB 16/37/2: NSC-23, Testimony of Rear-Admiral de Bartolomé.

The Admiralty's counterattack included a memorandum which addressed the future of air/sea combat and the testimony of Assistant Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Ernle Chatfield.⁸³ Chatfield identified numerous difficulties that air power would face: the problem of locating targets, the need to mass sufficient aircraft, the limited pay-load of ship-borne bombers, and the inability of contemporary bombs to penetrate armor before detonation (thus much of their explosive power was wasted on a ship's superstructure, rather than concentrating against its vitals). An Admiralty paper highlighted the vulnerability of aviation to inclement weather, promised that anti-aircraft fire would render air attacks useless, and flatly stated that "there is nothing in the present offensive qualities of aircraft which render them a menace to the existence of the capital ship." The memorandum also predicted that naval countermeasures would progress in step with advances in aviation.⁸⁴

The First Lord concentrated his efforts on discrediting the value of the submarine. In order to impeach the credentials of Rear-Admiral Hall, Beatty arranged for the appearance of Captain Max Horton, who successfully commanded three submarines and later a submarine flotilla during the

⁸³A synopsis of Chatfield's testimony can be found in Till, "Airpower and the Battleship", in Ranft, Technical Change, 112.

⁸⁴CAB 16/37/3: N5-Admiralty Memorandum, "Retention of the Capital ship", December 14, 1920.

war.⁸⁵ In response to a series of questions from Sir Eric Geddes concerning the potential of the magnetic torpedo, Horton emphasized the operational difficulties involved with deploying futuristic weapons. He deprecated the theoretical capabilities of the submarine touted in the press as:

out of all proportion to the damage which these weapons will actually inflict under wartime conditions, and the difficulty of bringing them into action is not appreciated by the 'Material School'--of little sea experience--who are conducting the newspaper campaign against the Capital ship.⁸⁶

Rear-Admiral Keyes advised Vice-Admiral Brock against the possibility of testimony from Admiral Freemantle: "I don't think he would be a good witness until he has made up his mind that the submarine is not going to take sea supremacy from the Battleship."⁸⁷ In his own memorandum, Beatty argued that during the war improved anti-submarine warfare techniques "sensibly eased the submarine menace." German U-boats neither deterred the Grand Fleet from proceeding to sea nor sank "a single capital ship in the main fighting fleet."⁸⁸ His task was made easier by the refusal of Sir

⁸⁵Beatty MSS 8/2/4: Hankey prepared the list of witnesses after discussion with Beatty.

⁸⁶Beatty MSS 8/3: NSC-19, Testimony of Captain M.K. Horton.

⁸⁷Admiral Keyes, as recorded in Paul Halpern, ed, The Keyes Papers, Volume II: 1919-1938 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), 49.

⁸⁸CAB 16/37/2: N2-Admiralty Memorandum, "Retention of the Capital Ship", December 14, 1920.

Percy Scott, with his cry of "What is the use of a battleship?," to appear before the Committee.⁸⁹

One of the interesting features of the Bonar Law Enquiry was the absence of oral or written testimony from the Director of Naval Construction (D.N.C.), Sir Eustace Tennyson D'Eyncourt. Probably the leading naval architect of his day, D'Eyncourt held the responsibility for incorporating the lessons of the war into the design of His Majesty's warships.⁹⁰ In the face of the German submarine menace, the D.N.C. arranged for a series of experiments involving the use of torpedoes against a target ship equipped with bulges, which consisted of external watertight compartments filled with air and inner compartments filled with water.⁹¹ At the conclusion of the trials, he wrote:

With ships of this character [possessing bulges] the supremacy of the Battleship against the submarine can be taken as reestablished, a

⁸⁹Scott viewed the invitation to testify as an Admiralty trap to limit his freedom to speak out on the future of the capital ship. See Hunt, Sailor-Scholar, 121. Beatty considered legal proceedings against Scott for his disrespectful references to the Admiralty in The Times. See Beatty MSS: 8/2/4.

⁹⁰After an apprenticeship with Armstrong, the Royal Naval College, and Fairchild, D'Eyncourt served as the Director of Naval Construction from 1912 until his retirement in 1924.

⁹¹Professor Hopkinson of the War Committee of the Royal Society conducted these experiments at Cambridge, Chatham, and Portsmouth.

supremacy which at the earlier period of the war seemed to be threatened.⁹²

Wartime experience strengthened D'Eyncourt's faith in the value of bulges. The battleship Marlborough, torpedoed at Jutland, subsequently remained in the fight for a considerable time and returned safely to port. In 1917, the cruiser Grafton in the Mediterranean received a torpedo full amidships, but the ship made way safely back to Malta. At the height of the public controversy involving the submarine, D'Eyncourt made the following comparison:

Of Edgar class light cruisers, unbulged Hawke was torpedoed and sank rapidly with great loss of life, while sister ships Edgar, Grafton, and Endymion, all with bulges, returned safely to harbour after being torpedoed.⁹³

The summer of 1920 he developed the designs for the Royal Navy's next capital ships, the first British vessels to exceed 100' of beam in order to provide adequate anti-torpedo bulges.⁹⁴

Why, then, did the First Sea Lord not invite his Director of Naval Construction to educate the other members of the Bonar Law Enquiry as to the degree of protection

⁹²D'Eyncourt MSS 31: D'Eyncourt Memorandum, January 1, 1915.

⁹³D'Eyncourt MSS 31: D'Eyncourt to Sir Philip Watt, November 15, 1920.

⁹⁴D'Eyncourt MSS 27: Goodall Memorandum, "Battleship Design", July 1, 1920. The complete dimensions of the vessels were length, 760'; breadth, 112'; draft, 32'; displacement, 48,000 tons.

provided by anti-torpedo bulges? Beatty's wholehearted efforts throughout the work of the committee strongly indicate the omission did not stem from a sense of hopelessness or futility. One possibility is that Beatty may have suffered from tunnel vision: he was so convinced that the capital ship was safe from the submarine that he may not have seen the potential impact of D'Eyncourt's testimony on the other committee members. Another possibility involves the secondary effects of constructing capital ships equipped with bulges. Bulged vessels were necessarily broad of beam--D'Eyncourt's latest design called for a width of 112'--and required very large docks. None of the royal dockyards were capable of handling ships wider than 100', and only four private yards (Armstrong, Brown, Cammell, and Fairfield) could service vessels of such dimension.⁹⁵ The Admiralty's cost estimate for their construction program of eight new capital ships included £400,000 for the enlargement of a captured German floating dock.⁹⁶ The maintenance of those vessels, furthermore, would undoubtedly have entailed more than one such dock. Beatty thus may have feared closer investigation into the ancillary costs associated with bulged ships.

⁹⁵D'Eyncourt MSS 27: D'Eyncourt Memorandum to the controller, June 14, 1920.

⁹⁶ADM 116/1775: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Policy and New Construction", November 22, 1920.

Three members of the committee repeatedly challenged the professional judgments of the Admiralty experts. Sir Eric Geddes, who served as First Lord of the Admiralty from June 1917 through January 1919, strongly opposed the Admiralty experts who claimed that "by the autumn of 1918 the submarine menace was practically overcome." In the face of Rear-Admiral Keyes' testimony that the Royal Navy's first line of defense against the submarine was the mine rather than the use of convoy, supplemented by depth-charges, Geddes burst forth:

I do not want to give evidence before the committee, but when the Admiral [who after all was in charge at Dover, and succeeded at Dover] says, that he considers in this War we overcame the submarine menace, I am amazed...I consider the submarine was temporarily held up to May, 1918, but was getting more dangerous in the later months, and everything in the Admiralty will support that.

Geddes also challenged the judgment of naval witnesses regarding the value of the magnetic torpedo.⁹⁷

Sir Robert Horne, who along with Bonar Law could make no claim to any expertise in naval matters, rejected the proposition that future air defenses for capital ships would develop to counter air attack. He predicted that "a concerted attack by ten or fifteen torpedo carrying machines" would defeat the Hood class battle cruisers.⁹⁸

⁹⁷Beatty MSS 8/3: N.S.C. Minute 3, January 7, 1921.

⁹⁸Beatty MSS 8/3: N.S.C. Minute 4, January 7, 1921.

Horne swept aside the notion that fighter planes would be able to defend capital ships, provided the attacking bombers themselves had a fighter escort "to take care of your [defensive] fighters."⁹⁹

Committee chairman Andrew Bonar Law led overmatched Rear-Admiral Keyes, the Admiralty submarine expert, to discuss the course of a hypothetical war with America. After Keyes stated that he would take a fleet of capital ships to Bermuda, the Lord Privy Seal asked an important question: "Do you think it would be possible under any circumstances, with or without the equality of battleships, to keep the Canadian trade route open?" The admiral admitted that the Navy could not keep the sea line of communication at all times, but contended that the fleet could escort a large convoy. Bonar Law then pronounced: "You would lose the war and lose Canada for the time being." He next continued the attack on the capital ship with a series of questions:

What purpose would the fleet serve to protect our trade?...How could the American fleet interfere with our trade?...Could not smaller ships, planes, and submarines constitute the same threat to American trade as the fleet?¹⁰⁰

He concluded by asking a final question which demonstrated that he shared the viewpoint of Prime Minister David Lloyd

⁹⁹Beatty MSS 8/3: N.S.C. Minute 4, January 7, 1921.

¹⁰⁰Beatty MSS 8/3: N.S.C. Minute 4, January 7, 1921.

George: "Did not those smaller craft offer a more efficient alternative than the battleship?"¹⁰¹

The advocates of economy listened closely to the testimony of Rear-Admiral Herbert Richmond, President of the Royal Naval College at Greenwich. His reputation as a naval theorist had led Admiral Beatty in November 1920 to ask him for arguments in favor of funding capital ships.¹⁰²

Richmond's diary reflected his belief that a rigorous a posteriori investigation would serve Britain better than the First Sea Lord's abiding faith in the capital ship:

He wanted arguments to shew [sic] that battleships were necessary. I thought he was going about investigation the wrong way. One should not try to prove what needed proving in one's own mind, but to find out what was right. The Post-war [Questions] Committee had merely made statements, assertions, had not examined the war to find out what the influence of [the] big ship was or whether she was still in the position she used to be.¹⁰³

The President of the Royal Naval College had his own vision of the navies of the future, in which technological developments and financial constraints would lead to more,

¹⁰¹Beatty MSS 8/3: N.S.C. Minute 4, January 7, 1921.

¹⁰²Richmond's talents were universally recognized; his intolerance and scathing criticism for those with differing views alienated many contemporaries. Eminent naval historian Arthur Marder considered Richmond the ablest naval officer of the day, while Admiral Ernle Chatfield, who eventually rose to the position of First Sea Lord, called him the most irresponsible. See Higham, Military Intellectuals, 32.

¹⁰³Rear-Admiral Richmond, as recorded in Marder, Portrait of an Admiral, 364.

yet smaller ships:

The Fleet may then [1930] consist of very few ships of the line and a host of cruisers. To imagine that we are going to see fleets of 30 or more ships of the line, each costing 8 million pounds, is to imagine that the purses of the nations are bottomless - which they are not. We may see a core of heavy ships - a nucleus, with a host of lesser vessels.¹⁰⁴

Rather than giving this answer to Beatty, however, six weeks later, in December 1920, he provided his views to Hankey for transmission to Lloyd George.¹⁰⁵

Richmond's failure to work through his superiors or even to inform them of his actions, which the typical Royal Navy officer would have found reprehensible, was not unique. Richmond had once before communicated his views on naval matters to the Prime Minister, to whom he had turned in 1917 in order to force the Admiralty to the use of convoy against submarines.¹⁰⁶ His actions can best be explained by his biographer:

He was a man of strong views which did not always coincide with those of his seniors, and he was apt to be impatient and to show his annoyance when his views on any matter were not accepted by them.¹⁰⁷

By 1920, he had become disillusioned with the Beatty regime,

¹⁰⁴Rear-Admiral Richmond, as recorded in Marder, Portrait of an Admiral, 364.

¹⁰⁵Roskill, Hankey, Vol II, 207-08.

¹⁰⁶Hunt, Sailor-Scholar, 56-67; Marder, Scapa Flow, Vol IV, 154.

¹⁰⁷Marder, Scapa Flow, Vol V, 20.

particularly the Admiralty's inability to articulate and implement a clear-cut policy for naval defense.¹⁰⁸

Rear-Admiral Richmond provided support to both sides of the capital ship debate. He began by agreeing with Beatty's long parade of wartime veterans as to the value of capital ships. He testified that "the capital ship still remains the basis of sea power, cannot be seriously interfered with by submarines in open waters, and must be included in the British fleet."¹⁰⁹ Sea power, he continued, encompassed more than simply battleships; it stemmed from balanced fleets, supported by adequate bases, from locations with positional advantages.¹¹⁰

Richmond next addressed the impact of national finance on naval strength. The Royal Naval College president stated that Britain's position "depends upon the restoration of our credit and also the development of our trade."¹¹¹ He therefore strongly recommended against the Admiralty's building program based on the cost of new capital ships and the dockyards and smaller craft on which they relied. He argued: "If we cannot at the same time afford the great

¹⁰⁸Hunt, Sailor-Scholar, 109.

¹⁰⁹CAB 16/27/3: Summary of Evidence.

¹¹⁰CAB 16/37/3: NSC-27, Testimony of Rear-Admiral H.W. Richmond.

¹¹¹CAB 16/37/3: NSC-27, Testimony of Rear-Admiral H.W. Richmond.

ships and the cruisers, flotillas, and bases, the great ships will be useless." The admiral's analysis rested upon, but did not explicitly refer to, the existing distribution of capital ships which provided virtually no threat outside of Japan and the United States, faithful wartime allies.¹¹²

Richmond then put forth his recommendations for naval defense. He urged a policy of research work and experiment with new technologies and tactical combinations. He contended that:

if the battleship programme hinders our research work it will do harm...merely to build ships of a larger and more heavily armed type than those of the United States does not solve the problem.

He also suggested that the Royal Navy might adopt a much smaller battleship, "a more efficient instrument." The savings created by downsizing new capital ships would in turn enable Britain to "create a sufficient number of units" to fulfill its global obligations.¹¹³

The idea of a smaller vessel which would fulfill most of the functions of the capital ship and do so in a more efficient manner attracted other naval thinkers.¹¹⁴ Admiral

¹¹²CAB 16/37/3: NSC-27, Testimony of Rear-Admiral H.W. Richmond.

¹¹³CAB 16/37/3: NSC-27, Testimony of Rear-Admiral H.W. Richmond.

¹¹⁴It is interesting to speculate whether Richmond served as the source for Lloyd George's interest in "smaller ships." This researcher, however, cannot document any linkage between the two from the submarine crisis of 1917 to the campaign for an investigation of the capital ship.

Mark Kerr, who published his memoirs in 1933, lamented the size of post-Jutland capital ships, which, as they became larger, grew "more vulnerable to gunfire, torpedoes, or bombs."¹¹⁵ The German Navy enjoyed considerable success during the Second World War with their three pocket battleships, Admiral Graf Spee, Admiral Scheer, and Deutschland. At 12,000 tons displacement, these ships weighed less than a third as much as the British King George V class battleships, at 38,000 tons each.¹¹⁶

Given the conflicting testimony, the Naval Shipbuilding Committee could not agree on the value of the capital ship. Bonar Law, supported by Geddes and Horne, prepared a report that found "no evidence adequate to support the contention that the capital ship is obsolete," but that emphasized "the doubtful expediency of deciding to build big and costly vessels at the present time."¹¹⁷ The Bonar Law-Horne-Geddes report called particular attention to the evidence of Rear-Admirals Richmond and Bartolomé, who both gave credence to the potential of emerging weapons systems. The chairman's

¹¹⁵Mark Kerr, The Navy in My Time (London: Rich and Cowan, 1933), 227; 242.

¹¹⁶For the technical specifications of these ships, see Cajus Bekker, Hitler's Naval War (New York: Kensington, 1977), 379; William McMahon, Dreadnought Battleships and Battle Cruisers (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1978), 54-55.

¹¹⁷CAB 16/37/3: "Report of the Subcommittee on the Capital Ship", March 2, 1921.

report accepted the conclusion of these officers, who both advised against the construction of new capital ships.¹¹⁸

Churchill vehemently disagreed, noting that Bonar Law's summary laid "an undue emphasis on any evidence which may have been obtained against the capital ship." The Secretary of State for War and Air claimed that the Admiralty had "made out an overwhelming case for the retention of the capital ship as the foundation of sea power."¹¹⁹ He wrote in a similar vein to Arthur Balfour on February 26, 1921, when he pointed out that: "Britain is in danger of becoming not only the second but third naval power in a few years time." Churchill advocated a program of four capital ships to be built every year for four or five years "on the lines I declared against Germany in 1912."¹²⁰

Beatty, adamantly opposed to Bonar Law's findings, wrote a separate report. The admiral maintained that the advocates of the new technologies had in no way undermined the position of the capital ship as the predominant weapon in naval warfare for the foreseeable future. His report concluded that "the capital ship remains the material basis of sea-power" and "that to maintain the one-Power standard

¹¹⁸CAB 16/37/3: "Report of the Subcommittee on the Capital Ship", March 2, 1921.

¹¹⁹Beatty MSS 8/4: Churchill Note, February 13, 1921.

¹²⁰Winston Churchill, as recorded in Young, Balfour, 419.

in accordance with the policy adopted by the Government, it is necessary to lay down capital ships without delay." Churchill and Long concurred with Beatty's findings.¹²¹

The N.S.C. issued its divided report in March 1921. The body of the report comprised the opposing conclusions of the committee; those written by Bonar Law were printed on the left-hand pages of the report, while those written by Beatty were printed on the right hand pages for direct comparison. The remainder of the report gave no cause for controversy. Appendix I listed the fourteen witnesses before the committee, together with their present and wartime appointments. Appendix II provided a summary of evidence. On the last page of that appendix was a discussion of the contingency of a war with Japan. The committee agreed that "for such a war a British naval base at Singapore was essential."¹²²

Although the very constitution of a committee to investigate the role of the capital ship in the navy reflected the Admiralty's loss of hegemony in naval affairs, the reports of the Naval Shipbuilding Subcommittee served to strengthen marginally the position of the Admiralty. The Jutland controversy and the ensuing media debate influenced

¹²¹CAB 16/37/3: "Report of the Subcommittee on the Capital Ship", March 2, 1921.

¹²²CAB 16/37/3: "Report of the Subcommittee on the Capital Ship", March 2, 1921.

certain members of the Cabinet to reject the Admiralty's assurances on the continuing value of the capital ship. The oral arguments of Bonar Law, Geddes, and Horne demonstrated the battleship no longer enjoyed the position of unquestioned predominance it had had before the war. None of the witnesses before the committee, however, established a credible alternative to a fleet based on the capital ship. Nor had any of them challenged the Admiralty's claim that the construction of four capital ships was necessary to maintain equality with the fleet of the United States. In the spring of 1921, the Cabinet nonetheless remained unconvinced as to the value of such a fleet.

CHAPTER 7

IMPERIAL CONFERENCE, 1921

The course of the Imperial Conference of 1921 reflected one of the major changes wrought by the Great War, the increased strength of the Dominions, Japan, and the United States. As the Anglo-Japanese Alliance came due for renewal in 1921, the British government pursued the cautious policy of seeking renewal under the covenant of the League of Nations. Independently, the Admiralty dispatched Admiral Jellicoe on a tour of the Pacific in order to evaluate the strategic requirements for imperial defense in that region. At the Imperial Conference of 1921, Australia and New Zealand supported renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in order to avoid offending the Japanese, while Canada sought abrogation to avoid offending the Americans. Lloyd George brought the Imperial Cabinet to agreement on two decisions: the development of a naval base at Singapore and Britain's acceptance of an American invitation to discuss disarmament and Pacific security.

Early in 1921, the British government began its preparations for the forthcoming Imperial Conference. In order to develop an agenda for the conference, the prime minister created a planning committee under the direction of Leo Amery. On February 4, 1921, the Amery committee submitted its report, which identified for the conference four major issues, of which the two most important were

imperial defense and renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.¹

Britain had concluded a defensive alliance with Japan on January 30, 1902, primarily from concern with Russian imperialism. British interests in the region included the defense of India and trade in China's Yangtze Valley.² In the wake of the Boer War, Britain had felt isolated and threatened by Russian territorial aggrandizement as well as the expansion of Russian sea power.³ The original Anglo-Japanese Alliance, valid for five years, allowed each signatory to remain neutral in a war between the other nation and a single belligerent but required intervention if the other party faced two or more powers.⁴ London also agreed to maintain a certain level of naval strength in Far Eastern waters.⁵ Britain avoided the need to join a purely

¹ADM 1/8611/151: Imperial Conference Agenda, February 4, 1921. The committee, comprised of representatives from the Board of Trade, the Air Ministry, and the Colonial, Foreign, India, and War Offices, included Captain Barry Domville of the Admiralty Plans Division.

²Lowe and Dockerill, Mirage of Power, 275-76.

³Beloff, Imperial Sunset, 100-01, notes that in the search for an ally against Russia, Britain first looked to the United States.

⁴Kennedy, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 116-17. Beloff, Imperial Sunset, 75, points out that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance represented the only diplomatic undertaking before the First World War in which Britain agreed to go to war upon a specified condition, regardless of other circumstances.

⁵Beloff, Imperial Sunset, 101.

Russo-Japanese conflict, but secured Japanese assistance against a possible Franco-Russian combination in the Far East. Continued fears of Russian menace against India, fueled by the completion of the Transcaspian and Orenburg-Tashkent railways, led the Balfour Government to revise and renew the Anglo-Japanese Alliance on August 12, 1905, for a period of ten years.⁶ The terms of the revised Alliance, which became operative in the event of a signatory engaging in hostilities with a single belligerent, served to bolster the defenses of India against invasion by land and to facilitate the concentration of British naval strength in European waters against the growing German fleet.

The British government again revised and renewed the alliance on July 13, 1911, for another period of ten years. The incompatibility of an Anglo-American treaty of arbitration proposed by American President William Taft in July 1910 with the existing terms of the treaty caused Britain to review the treaty four years ahead of schedule.⁷ The Asquith Government decided to renew early and to revise the agreement to accommodate Taft's proposal. In May 1911, at a special meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence, Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey briefed the Dominion Prime Ministers on the alliance and requested indorsement of the

⁶Lowe and Dockrill, Mirage of Power, 279.

⁷Ian Nish, Alliance in Decline: A Study in Anglo-Japanese Relations 1908-23 (London, 1972), 41-77.

proposed renewal, which he received unanimously.⁸ Article IV of the 1911 treaty absolved either signatory of the need to conduct hostilities against any third party with whom they had contracted a treaty of arbitration.⁹ Although the refusal of the United States Senate to ratify an Anglo-American arbitration treaty in August 1911 left Article IV temporarily inoperative, Britain announced to Japan that the peace commission treaty of September 15, 1914, constituted such an arbitration agreement.¹⁰ After 1914, then, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance specifically relieved Britain of any obligation to support her ally in the event of hostilities between Japan and America.

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which in 1905 facilitated the concentration of British naval strength in European waters against the growing German fleet, served to protect British interests in a region Britain could not defend militarily at the conclusion of the Great War. The concentration of imperial forces against the German threat, which forced Britain to denude her overseas defenses, caused London to insist on the renewal of the treaty in 1911

⁸Beloff, Imperial Sunset, 149, indicates that Britain would have renewed even without Dominion concurrence.

⁹For the text of the 1911 treaty, see Nish, Alliance, 66-68.

¹⁰Nish, Alliance in Decline, 110-111.

despite the objections of Australia and New Zealand.¹¹ In the spring of 1920, the British Foreign Office conducted a study which identified seven points of divergence between British and Japanese interests, including the autonomy of China, economic competition, and the racial policies of Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.¹² Nonetheless, one senior Foreign Office official concluded that "it is essential for us, owing to our naval weaknesses in the Pacific, to have a friendly Japan."¹³ The value of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was also clear to his Department chief, the Foreign Secretary.

George Nathaniel Curzon, K.G., P.C., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., F.R.S., Baron Curzon of Kedleston, Baron Ravensdale, Viscount Scarsdale, and 1st Earl of Kedleston, assumed duties as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in January, 1919. The Foreign Secretary remained a staunch imperialist, concerned always to strengthen the bonds of the British Empire, particularly British control over Persia and the Middle East. He visited Mesopotamia in 1889 and wrote

¹¹The Dominion reservations concerned their right, unrestricted by the revised alliance, to enact discriminatory legislation against Japanese immigrants. See Beloff, Imperial Sunset, 148-49.

¹²James Neidpath, The Singapore Naval Base and the Defence of Britain's Eastern Empire, 1919-1941 (Oxford, 1981), 38.

¹³Assistant Secretary John Tilley, as recorded in Nish, Alliance in Decline, 277.

Persia and the Persian Question, which became a standard work in England.¹⁴ In his book, Curzon explained his view of diplomacy, which involved making decisions based upon accurate information and then conveying his positions clearly:

There are two constituents of successful diplomacy, which seem to me sometimes in danger of being forgotten. One is knowing one's own mind, the other is letting other people know it.¹⁵

In August 1917, C.P. Scott, editor of the Liberal Manchester Guardian, noted in his diary that "Milner and Curzon were powerful, but useless--their minds were closed. Curzon lived in the year 1902 (when Britain sent gunboats to the Persian Gulf)."¹⁶ After the conclusion of the Great War, the Foreign Secretary sought to establish a bulwark of Moslem states to protect the British possessions of India and his beloved Persia against Russian imperialism. The success of Bolshevik propaganda at stirring nascent Moslem nationalism caused Curzon in 1920 to warn his Cabinet colleagues: "The Russian menace in the East is incomparably greater than anything else that has happened in my time to the British

¹⁴David Fromkin, A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the Modern Middle East (New York, 1989), 455.

¹⁵Lord Curzon, as recorded in Nicolson, Curzon, 42-43.

¹⁶C.P. Scott, as recorded in Trevor Wilson, ed, The Political Diaries of C.P. Scott 1911-1928 (Ithaca, NY, 1970), 301.

Empire."¹⁷ He gave liberally of his time and attention to the issue of Anglo-Japanese relations, although it never stirred his passions as did questions involving Persia.

Curzon guided the British Cabinet meeting of May 30, 1921, in its consideration of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.¹⁸ The Foreign Secretary began by providing a history of the development of the alliance, including the 1905 renewal and the 1911 modification. He then reminded those present that, in accordance with the provisions of Article IV of the revised treaty, the peace commission treaty of September 1914 constituted an arbitration agreement and that Britain hence was no longer obligated to support Japan in a conflict with America.¹⁹

The Foreign Secretary then followed with the arguments for and against renewal. The case against renewal, he reasoned, rested upon three points: the causes for its

¹⁷Lord Curzon, as recorded in Fromkin, To End All Peace, 461.

¹⁸Curzon lacked the authority of previous Foreign Secretaries in dealing with the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, in part because Lloyd George distrusted the professional diplomatic machinery of the Foreign Office and in part because Curzon refused to confront the Prime Minister for fear of being dismissed from office. See Roberta Warman, "The Erosion of Foreign Office Influence in the Making of Foreign Policy, 1916-1918", (The Historical Journal, XV, 1972); Kenneth Morgan, "Lloyd George's Premiership: A Study in 'Prime Ministerial Government'", (The Historical Journal, XIII, 1970); Craig and Gilbert, The Diplomats, 33; Nicolson, Curzon, 31.

¹⁹CAB 23/25: Cabinet Conclusion 43 (2), May 31, 1921.

creation no longer endured, it offended American opinion, and it alienated Britain from China. Curzon argued that the arguments for the treaty "on the whole made out the stronger case." He presented numerous justifications: the alliance had been a substantial success for both parties; it served as a barrier against a revitalized Russia (and possibly a revived Germany); it served as a brake on the rapacity of Japan; it precluded the need to maintain large forces in the Far East; and it was favorably regarded by Britain's allies, France, Holland, and Japan herself. The Foreign Secretary then suggested that non-renewal would prompt "considerable resentment" among the Japanese, who might adopt "a spirit of retaliation."²⁰ He noted that both the Admiralty and the War Office favored renewal, as did Australia and New Zealand, while Canada strongly opposed, and South Africa had not yet made her position clear. Curzon added that Auckland Geddes, the British ambassador to Washington, favored renewal as a means to quiet extremists who demanded additional armaments. To round out his presentation, he mentioned the idea of replacing the alliance with a tripartite pact which included America, but suggested the possibility of the United States Senate passing such an agreement was slim. The Foreign Secretary recommended renewal for a period of four or five years in a form modified to conform with the Covenant of the

²⁰CAB 23/25: Cabinet Conclusion 43 (2), May 31, 1921.

League of Nations, after consultation with the United States and China.²¹

Winston Churchill and Arthur, 1st Viscount Lee of Fareham, argued against the treaty as poisoning relations with the United States. Churchill, who traded his portfolio as Secretary of State for War and Air for the office of Colonial Secretary in February 1921, contended that the Foreign Secretary had misstated the positions of the Dominions.²² Canada, he indicated, had even gone as far as to suggest an independent arrangement with the United States in case of renewal, while Australia and New Zealand supported the alliance only out of fear. He suggested there would undoubtedly be several advantages arising from an agreement with both Japan and America. Lord Lee, who replaced the failing Walter Long as First Lord of the Admiralty in February 1921, asserted that political relations with the United States were of transcendent importance. In his opinion, based upon conversations with American Admiral William Sims, public opinion in the United States violently detested the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Lee suggested a conference on Pacific affairs that would culminate in a tripartite pact between Japan, the British

²¹CAB 23/25: Cabinet Conclusion 43 (2), May 31, 1921.

²²Beaverbrook, Fall of Lloyd George, 40-42, notes that Curzon and Churchill were fighting over whose Department should exercise control of Egypt.

Empire, and the United States--a solution he believed would incidentally provide a political framework within which the armed services could complete their military planning.²³ He concluded by emphasizing the need to avoid a split in the British Empire.²⁴

A greater share of the Cabinet worried more about the effect of abrogation upon Japan than that of renewal upon the United States. Austen Chamberlain, who had assumed the office of Lord Privy Seal upon the temporary retirement of Andrew Bonar Law in March 1921, raised the specter of a disaffected Japan drifting into a Russo-German combination. Lord President Arthur Balfour pointed out the existing anti-Japanese legislation in Australia, New Zealand, California, and the Philippines and then declared that attempts to keep Japan out of China were unreasonable. Edwin Montagu, the Secretary for India, noted that although Japan was not popular in India, the Alliance was, both for security reasons and as a means of legitimizing British interests in the Far East. The Prime Minister concluded the discussion by echoing the arguments of the Lord Privy Seal. Lloyd George asserted that failure to renew would alienate the Japanese and, as a result, British prestige in the Far East would suffer. He gave credence to the prospect of a Russo-

²³Fry, Illusions, 113.

²⁴CAB 23/25: Cabinet Conclusion 43 (2), May 31, 1921.

German combination. Should these two possibilities materialize, he believed that Tokyo would fall into the Berlin-Moscow orbit. Lloyd George characterized Japan as faithful to her treaty obligations and indicated that he would not oppose a Pacific conference, but that consultations with Japan must take precedence.²⁵

The Cabinet then reached four conclusions. First, at the upcoming Imperial Conference, Britain would ask the Dominions and India to support a proposal asking the President of the United States to summon a conference of Pacific affairs, but only after informing Japan and the other nations that Britain had no intention of dropping the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Second, the Alliance should be renewed, albeit for a period shorter than the previous term of ten years, in a form compatible with the Covenant of the League of Nations, and inoffensive to American sensibilities. In order to accomplish the latter goals, Britain should enter discussions with China and the United States, while keeping Japan fully informed of any developments. Third, in order to gain time, Britain should renew provisionally the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in such three month increments as were necessary. Finally, the Admiralty and the War Office should prepare memoranda showing the assistance given by Japan during the Great War,

²⁵CAB 23/25: Cabinet Conclusion 43 (2), May 31, 1921.

while the C.I.D. should prepare a study of the strategic situation in the Far East.²⁶

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance affected the second topic identified by the Amery Committee, imperial defense. The Great War had overturned the strategic situation in the Pacific. The German presence had vanished, while the (Bolshevik) Russian hold over Siberia remained tenuous for several years after the war. The United States, by 1919 the world's second naval power, appeared poised to advance in the Pacific. At the same time, Japan, in the words of one historian of Far Eastern affairs, "emerged from the war as third in the table of world powers."²⁷ The strength of the imperial forces needed in the region would depend to a large degree on the intentions of Japan and the Dominions.

During the Great War, the leaders of the British Empire had begun to look ahead to the problem of imperial defense in the post-war era. The Imperial War Conference of March 1917 passed a resolution which requested the Admiralty "to work out after the conclusion of the War what they consider the most effective scheme of naval defence of the Empire."²⁸ Pre-occupied with the German submarine campaign, the Admiralty staff took over a year to prepare their answer.

²⁶CAB 23/25: Cabinet Conclusion 43 (2), May 31, 1921.

²⁷Nish, Alliance in Decline, 261.

²⁸ADM 116/1770 + 116/1815: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Defence of the British Empire", May 17, 1918.

The history of imperial naval defense had involved a continuous struggle between Dominion concerns for control over local defense forces and the Admiralty's doctrine of "one ocean, one fleet, one flag" inspired by Mahan. Naval defense had first assumed an imperial, as opposed to purely British character, in the wake of the Australian naval agreement of 1887. In return for an annual subsidy of £126,000 from the colonial government, the Royal Navy created and maintained in the south Pacific an auxiliary squadron of ships "for the protection of floating trade in Australian waters." Subsequently, the control of these vessels proved controversial--the colonials expected them permanently assigned to local waters, while the Admiralty considered them available for use world-wide. In 1906, the C.I.D. reiterated Admiralty opposition to the localization of naval forces:

The policy of devoting the entire naval forces of the Empire to seeking out and destroying the ships of the enemy, wherever they may be, is that which will best ensure not only the safety of floating trade, but also the immunity from attack of coast towns and harbours...if this policy is to be properly and efficiently carried, the Royal Navy must be one and undivided.²⁹

During the Imperial Defence Conference of 1909, at the height of the naval crisis with Germany, the Admiralty gratefully accepted the offers of New Zealand and Australia

²⁹ADM 167/56: Appendix to Admiralty Memorandum, "Past History of Dominion Contributions to the Naval Defence of the Empire", September 25, 1919.

to pay for the cost of construction of a new battleship for the Royal Navy.

At the same time, Canada and Australia had proposed creating their own naval forces, based on small vessels designed for local defense. The Admiralty reversed its earlier position and supported the notion that each of the Dominions "might be made responsible for the maintenance of a certain naval strength in its own sphere of influence, thus relieving the imperial fleet of direct responsibility in distant seas."³⁰ The Admiralty suggested these fleet units would include a battle cruiser, with supporting cruiser, destroyer, and submarine elements, together with port facilities. Australia chose to include a battle cruiser in her squadron, while New Zealand and Canada agreed to lesser flotillas.

By 1912, however, the Admiralty had returned to its earlier insistence on a unified fleet. In July 1913, the C.I.D. invited Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden to contribute three new battleships to offset German construction. Borden guided a naval bill through the Canadian House of Commons, but it died in the Senate.³¹

³⁰Admiralty Memorandum, July 13, 1909, as recorded in Donald Gordon, The Dominion Partnership in Imperial Defense, 1870-1914 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1965), 237.

³¹Gilbert Tucker, "The Naval Policy of Sir Robert Borden, 1912-14", (Canadian Historical Review, XXVIII, 1947).

Canada proved unable to agree on any program of naval defense. In the spring of 1914, First Lord Winston Churchill unilaterally abrogated the 1909 agreement to station modern capital ships in Dominion waters. Coincident with his announcement of the withdrawal of the new battle cruisers, the First Lord praised New Zealand's donation of a capital ship as the most effective contribution to the security of the British Empire. Both the decision and the lack of consultation with London created significant resentment in Melbourne and Wellington. These differences were suspended, but not forgotten, with the outbreak of hostilities in Europe.³²

The Admiralty's wartime planning had reflected sustained faith in the maintenance of sea power as taught by Mahan: balanced fleets, based on capital ships adequately provided with bases. The Board recognized that "money contributions have always been unpopular" and that "fleet units are not within the reach of some of the Dominions."³³ The Board, with Lloyd George's approval, therefore submitted to the Imperial War Conference of 1918 a memorandum which recommended the establishment of a unified imperial fleet:

The whole naval force of the Empire to form one Navy, all effective units being under the control of an Imperial Naval Authority, both in peace and

³²Gordon, Dominion Partnership, 290-296.

³³ADM 116/1770 + 116/1815: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Defence of the British Empire", May 17, 1918.

war. Ships to be available to serve in any waters, and officers and men in any ship.³⁴

Under this plan, each of the Dominions would assume responsibility for all local naval establishments, including dockyards and the recruitment and training of naval personnel.

In recognition of Dominion sensitivities about domination from London, the Admiralty had indicated that the Dominion Naval Ministers should visit London "whenever possible...for the consideration of the annual estimates and deliberation on large matters of policy." At other times, the Dominions "could be represented generally by the First Lord of the Admiralty," who would consult them "on the distribution of naval forces and other important questions affecting the squadrons in their waters." The Board further suggested that the staff of the proposed single navy "would gradually become fully representative as officers from the overseas nations acquired sufficient naval experience" for leadership positions.³⁵ On the critical issue of funding, the Admiralty recommended that:

Each nation would decide, with due regard for its resources, the extent to which it would share in the total cost of the navy, and, as far as

³⁴ADM 116/1770 + 116/1815: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Defence of the British Empire", May 17, 1918.; ADM 116/1603: The First Lord discussed the Admiralty memorandum with the Prime Minister, who liked the concept of Dominion ships as part of an Imperial Navy.

³⁵ADM 116/1770 + 116/1815: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Defence of the British Empire", May 17, 1918.

possible, control the expenditure of the money it provides.

After each member indicated the size of its voluntary contribution, the Imperial Naval Authority would develop a unified budget proposal, "subject to the approval of the respective Parliaments."³⁶

During the Imperial Conference of 1918, the Dominion premiers had firmly rejected the Admiralty's proposal for a single Imperial Navy under a single Imperial Authority. Sir Robert Borden, the Prime Minister of Canada, took the lead in drafting a memorandum to First Lord Sir Eric Geddes which flatly stated that from the perspective of the Dominion Ministers "the proposals set forth in the Admiralty Memorandum for a single navy at all times under a central naval authority are not considered practicable."³⁷ The Prime Ministers asserted that the Admiralty's arguments for "a single navy...under a central naval authority, are strong but not unanswerable." They pointed to the example of the Australian Navy in the recent conflict as proving that Dominion units could "operate with the highest efficiency" in concert with the Royal Navy. The memorandum acknowledged the value of commonality in "the character of construction, armaments and equipment and the methods and principles of

³⁶ADM 116/1770 + 116/1815: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Defence of the British Empire", May 17, 1918.

³⁷ADM 116/1815: Memorandum from the Dominion Prime Ministers, cover letter dated August 15, 1918.

training, administration, and organization." The Dominions indicated their desire for a visit from "a highly qualified representative of the Admiralty" for technical assistance. Perhaps as a consolation to the Admiralty, the memorandum concluded by agreeing to the possibility of a wartime "supreme naval authority" provided that "each of the Dominions would be adequately represented." Borden's cover letter noted that the memorandum expressed the sentiment of all of the Dominion Prime Ministers with the single exception of Newfoundland.³⁸

The Admiralty had responded to this memorandum by selecting Admiral Jellicoe to undertake the mission of advising the Dominions on efficiency and commonality.³⁹ Within three months of the Dominions' memorandum rejecting a single imperial navy, both Australia and Canada made further requests for Admiralty assistance with their fledgling fleets. Geddes consulted with Colonial Secretary Walter Long as to the wisdom of including New Zealand and South Africa on the admiral's itinerary. They agreed that New Zealand should be approached about a naval assistance visit, but that, for fear of adversely affecting public opinion, South Africa should merely be informed that Jellicoe might

³⁸ADM 116/1815: Memorandum from the Dominion Prime Ministers, cover letter dated August 15, 1918.

³⁹ADM 116/1770 + 116/1815: Admiralty Memorandum, "Proposed Visit of Lord Jellicoe to the Dominions and India to Advise on Naval Matters", December 17, 1918.

visit in order to gather information regarding naval defenses there.⁴⁰

On December 23, 1918, Admiralty Secretary Sir Oswin Murray issued Admiral Jellicoe instructions to visit Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, with the possibility of additional calls at South Africa and India. The Admiralty instructions indicated that the primary purpose of the mission was "the promotion of uniformity in naval organization and training and types of naval material." They also included the provision that:

Should Dominion Authorities desire to consider how far it is possible...to take a more effective share in the naval defence of the Empire, he [Jellicoe] will give assistance from the naval point of view in drawing up a scheme for consideration.⁴¹

This proviso created the potential for a serious misunderstanding between the Admiralty Board, which expected the admiral to deal with finite matters such as ship design and squadron tables of organization, and Jellicoe, who interpreted the last paragraph as authority to develop and discuss a comprehensive strategy for the post-war naval defense of the British Empire. In February 1919, the admiral, accompanied by his former flag captain, Commodore

⁴⁰Geddes to Long, November 25, 1918; Long to Geddes, November 28, 1918; Geddes to Long, November 30, 1918, as recorded in Patterson, Jellicoe Papers, Vol II, 287-288.

⁴¹ADM 116/1815: Admiralty to Jellicoe, December 23, 1918.

Frederic Dreyer, together with a small staff, sailed in the battle cruiser New Zealand on a cruise that would last a year.

In March, from Port Said, Egypt, he sent his appreciation of post-war naval requirements to the Admiralty. The admiral acknowledged the difficulty of framing imperial naval requirements since previous standards of naval strength were based on that of possible opponents and "our late enemies were practically powerless and we are allied to, or working in co-operation with, the rest of the world." Jellicoe admitted the delicacy of planning a naval strategy based on opposition to the United States, but asserted "the safety of the British Empire should rest securely on the might of the British Navy and should not be dependent on the goodwill of other nations." The "enormous program of warship building" projected by the Wilson Administration would give the United States Navy 41 modern capital ships by 1925. As the width of the Atlantic Ocean would enable the Royal Navy to defend Britain with a fleet of capital ships "of a strength of 70% of that of the United States," Britain required at least 30 capital ships by 1925, which required 12 new capital ships, hence a building program of three new ships per year.⁴² Such a fleet would

⁴²Jellicoe Memorandum, "Post-War Naval Requirements", March 3, 1919, as recorded in Patterson, Jellicoe Papers, Vol II, 290-95.

also be able to deal with "any likely combination of European Powers." The admiral also indicated the need for a force of cruisers and aircraft carriers for the protection of trade.⁴³

Jellicoe next stopped in India from mid-March through the end of April. While most of his recommendations for that region dealt with reforms limited to the Royal Indian Marine, he raised one issue of greater import. In terms of potential enemies, the admiral switched his focus from the United States to Japan, which he labelled "as much a bogey to India as it is to Australia." Given the possibility of conflict in the Far East, Jellicoe concluded that "it will be necessary before long to construct a dock in the Far East that will accommodate our largest ships" and to improve "the anti-submarine defenses of Singapore."⁴⁴

In June 1919, the admiral reached Australian waters, of which he began a careful inspection. Jellicoe rendered his next reports in August. In a lengthy paper to the Governor-General, he framed the naval requirements of the Pacific and Indian Oceans as a single problem which required a Far Eastern fleet. He reviewed the latest developments in naval

⁴³Jellicoe Memorandum, "Post-War Naval Requirements", March 3, 1919, as recorded in Patterson, Jellicoe Papers, Vol II, 290-95.

⁴⁴Jellicoe to the First Lord of the Admiralty, May 2, 1919, as recorded in Patterson, Jellicoe Papers, Vol II, 296-97.

technology and concluded that "the wise course to pursue is to build capital ships until, if ever, it is shown that some other weapon has been found which permanently renders them inefficient." Jellicoe also emphasized the importance of proper docking facilities, without which the latest capital ships "cannot be sent to the Far East except under the gravest disadvantage." He suggested that the cost of these defenses "should be provided by those constituent parts of the Empire, including Great Britain, for which it is of vital necessity."⁴⁵

Jellicoe considered the likeliest potential enemy to be Japan, "the only nation in the Far East, except the United States, which would be in a position to inflict any permanent injury on the British Empire." He noted "the ill-feeling against Britain" prevalent in the Japanese Press and cited the resentment throughout the Eastern portions of the British Empire against Japanese commercial expansion into India, China, the Dutch East Indies, and Australia.⁴⁶ He concluded:

It is, therefore, almost inevitable that the interests of Japan and the British Empire will clash, and the two parts of the empire most

⁴⁵ADM 116/1834: Jellicoe to the Governor-General of Australia, August 12, 1919. Roskill, Naval Policy, 281, notes that Jellicoe quietly approached the Australian Government about assuming responsibility for warships that the Royal Navy had placed on the Disposal List as excess during the post-war consolidation.

⁴⁶ADM 116/1834: Jellicoe to the Governor-General of Australia, August 12, 1919.

affected are Australia and India. For this reason, the potential enemy in the Pacific is taken as Japan.

The admiral then conveyed the latest reports of a Japanese capital ship building program, which aimed for a fleet of eight battleships and eight battle cruisers by 1924. As a result, he recommended: "the fleet of capital ships of the British Empire stationed in the Pacific should be composed of not less than eight battleships and eight battle-cruisers." He stated "the proper strategy of the British Empire" involved two planks: the provision of "an adequate fleet in the Far East" and the defense of "Singapore and Hong Kong (in that order)."⁴⁷

In a letter to the First Lord the following week, Jellicoe provided a summary of his appreciation of Australian defense, in which he identified Japan as "the possible enemy of the future." He predicted that the Admiralty would "strengthen the fleet in the Far East." The admiral emphasized the importance of "docks, naval bases, and local defence flotillas" to support the capital ships that would constitute the backbone of naval defense.⁴⁸ He admitted his inability to establish local support for the idea of a single Imperial Navy and advised the Admiralty "to

⁴⁷ADM 116/1834: Jellicoe to the Governor-General of Australia, August 12, 1919.

⁴⁸Jellicoe to the First Lord of the Admiralty, August 20, 1919, as recorded in Patterson, Jellicoe Papers, Vol II, 312-13.

accept the inevitable and make the best of it" with regard to an independent Australian Navy.⁴⁹

After delivering his appreciation of New Zealand defense requirements, which scarcely differed from his report on Australia, Jellicoe sailed to Canada, arriving in November 1919. There he found Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden desirous of his assistance with the task of establishing a Canadian Navy in the face of opposition within the Government.⁵⁰ In December 1919, Jellicoe provided the Governor-General of Canada his survey of the Canadian situation, which differed markedly from India and the Australasian Dominions. The admiral noted that Canada's location, isolated from most threats and proximate to the United States, provided a degree of protection which allowed Canada to choose either of two lines: "in the light of Canada's own requirements...[or] in the broader light of the security and safety of the Empire as a whole."⁵¹ Thus Canada could choose either a small force designed for coastal defense (a flotilla of light cruisers, torpedo boats and submarines) or a squadron built around a modern battle

⁴⁹Jellicoe to the First Lord of the Admiralty, August 20, 1919, as recorded in Patterson, Jellicoe Papers, Vol II, 312-13.

⁵⁰Gilbert Tucker, The Naval Service of Canada, I: Origins and Early Years (Ottawa, 1952), 309-23.

⁵¹Jellicoe to the Governor-General of Canada, 31 December 1919, as recorded in Patterson, Jellicoe Papers, Vol II, 369-90.

cruiser. The admiral reiterated his opinion that Japan was the most probable enemy of the British Empire and predicted that in the course of such a conflict, Japan would refrain from landing on the North American continent and would limit her attacks to Canadian trade in the Pacific. Canadian bases would probably not host imperial fleets, which "would in all probability be working, not from the Canadian Pacific coast, but from Singapore or Australia." Jellicoe's report also included a section entitled "Naval Co-operation on a Wider Basis," which explained the enormous costs associated with the Royal Navy and which emphasized the per capita contributions to naval defense made by the Australasian Dominions.⁵²

During his stay in Ottawa, the admiral finally established communications with Admiralty House. Jellicoe received notice from London that the Admiralty had renounced its plan for a single Imperial Navy and now supported his proposals for Dominion naval forces.⁵³ The Board also endorsed his proposal to give warships on the Excess List to the Dominions, who would bear the cost of their operation.⁵⁴

⁵²Jellicoe to the Governor-General of Canada, 31 December 1919, as recorded in Patterson, Jellicoe Papers, Vol II, 369-90.

⁵³ADM 167/56: Board Minute 958, September 25, 1919; Patterson, Jellicoe Papers, Vol II, 267.

⁵⁴ADM 116/1774: Admiralty Memorandum, "Gift of Surplus Warships to the Dominions", September 16, 1919.

On a less agreeable note, however, the Board sharply criticized his formulation of an imperial strategy based on a Far Eastern fleet prepared to oppose Japan. After reviewing Jellicoe's report to Australia, First Sea Lord Wemyss wrote to the First Lord: "A preliminary survey of Lord Jellicoe's report shows that he has entered a sphere never contemplated by the Admiralty and far beyond his terms of reference."⁵⁵ Long agreed, and Admiralty House sent Jellicoe a telegram admonishing him for submitting proposals to the Dominion governments without staffing them through London for approval:

it was not the intention of the Admiralty for your views on the strategic arrangements of the future to be presented to the Commonwealth Government without submitting them to the Admiralty. This procedure should be followed as regards any future reports to other Dominions.⁵⁶

The Admiralty, at the last stop of Jellicoe's world tour, for the first time provided him with guidance on imperial naval defense.⁵⁷

Upon his return to Portsmouth, England, Admiral Jellicoe submitted his final report to the Secretary of the Admiralty. He explained that his efforts had been hampered

⁵⁵ADM 116/1815: First Sea Lord Memorandum, "Lord Jellicoe's Report to the Commonwealth Government of Australia", October 3, 1919.

⁵⁶ADM 116/1815: Admiralty Board to Jellicoe, November 3, 1919.

⁵⁷ADM 167/56: Admiralty Memorandum, "Imperial Naval Defence", Board Minute 958, September 25, 1919.

by a lamentable series of political developments: the absence during his visit of the Australian Prime Minister and Minister of the Navy, the break-up of a coalition government in New Zealand upon his arrival, and the ill health of the Canadian Prime Minister and Minister for Naval Affairs during his stay in Ottawa. Jellicoe then stated his mission as one of "inducing the Dominions to co-operate in the naval defence of the Empire" and developing a scheme of cooperation which ensured commonality and at the same time removing party politics from Dominion considerations. The admiral noted disparagingly that he had had difficulty obtaining information from the Admiralty and thus had had "to form my own opinion as to the future necessary naval strength of the Empire and to base my recommendations on this opinion." He saw "no difficulty in deciding on the source from which danger might come" and assumed that sooner or later "a fleet of a definite strength would be required either in the Pacific or in the vicinity." Jellicoe also explained that he had disregarded the official Admiralty policy--in effect, to the best of his knowledge, until December 1919--which called for a single unitary Imperial Navy as hopelessly at odds with Dominion intentions.⁵⁸

The Admiralty, meanwhile, had been striving to formulate and receive Cabinet approval for a post-war naval

⁵⁸ADM 116/1831: Jellicoe to the Secretary of the Admiralty, February 3, 1920.

policy. In the wake of "the ten year rule" promulgated in August 1919, and in search of a justification--and perhaps even funding--for the Royal Navy, Admiralty House shifted its focus from British to imperial affairs. The Board conducted a review of imperial defense in September. With respect to the role of capital ships, the Admiralty declared that "a superior fighting force must be maintained in the main theatre of operations."⁵⁹ The Board emphasized cooperation with the Dominions rather than dictation by London, particularly "as greater financial obligations are likely to be maintained," and then announced that "the Dominions can now best contribute to the naval defence of the Empire by building up their own Navies," which might include capital ships. The Admiralty, influenced by the need for fiscal restraint, as well as Admiral Wemyss' personal animosity towards his predecessor as First Sea Lord, repudiated Jellicoe's recommendations for a Far Eastern Fleet, regardless of size.⁶⁰ The proposal for a naval base at Singapore, however, attracted a more favorable reception. As their opponent's strategy in an Anglo-

⁵⁹ADM 167/56: Admiralty Memorandum, "Imperial Naval Defence", Board Minute 958, September 25, 1919.

⁶⁰ADM 116/1815: First Sea Lord Memorandum, "Lord Jellicoe's Report to the Commonwealth Government of Australia", October 3, 1919; ADM 116/1815: Admiralty Board to Jellicoe, November 3, 1919; Roskill, Naval Policy, 279-282, notes that Wemyss frequently criticized Jellicoe to the First Lord.

Japanese conflict would probably feature an offensive thrust into the south Pacific, Admiralty planners had earlier concluded:

the imperial fleet should be provided with a secure base well to the southward of Hong Kong, and no more suitable position can be suggested than Singapore.⁶¹

The Board accepted the Naval Staff analysis and recommended to the Cabinet that "if it is decided that the Empire should be prepared for a war with Japan, Singapore and Sydney should be considered the two primary imperial bases in the Pacific."⁶²

In a subsequent memorandum to the Committee of Imperial Defence, the Board reviewed the naval situation in the Far East. The Admiralty memorandum emphasized the crucial nature of Anglo-Japanese relations and inquired as to the intentions of the Government regarding the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The Board presumed that the Cabinet would be hesitant "to prolong an alliance which might cause them to be embroiled with the United States."⁶³ The Board also projected a reduction in the number of British capital ships in full commission, in an effort to free money for other

⁶¹Naval Staff Paper, "Imperial Naval Defence", August 4, 1919, as recorded in Neidpath, Singapore Naval Base, 31.

⁶²ADM 167/56: Board Minute 958, September 25, 1919.

⁶³ADM 1/8571/295: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Situation in the Far East", October 21, 1919. Accepted as C.I.D. Paper No. 119-C, October 31, 1919.

purposes.⁶⁴ Placing almost half of the Royal Navy's capital ships into reserve would affect the naval situation in the Pacific in two ways: during peacetime, Britain would not be able to match Japanese naval strength in the region; and in wartime, reinforcements would take longer to arrive. In consequence, if war with Japan did break out, "a period of three months might elapse before our Naval supremacy in the Far East could be established. During this period, Japan might have practically a free hand." Reinforcements should not plan on assembling at Hong Kong, which would be too vulnerable. The best base for the task force would be Singapore, which "may be considered sufficiently far from any Japanese possessions to make an attack on it in force improbable during the period before the Fleet arrives."⁶⁵ This analysis rested upon two assumptions: first, that Britain would always possess in other waters sufficient naval strength to defeat the Japanese Imperial Navy, and second, that Japan could not inflict irreparable damage on the British Empire during its window of superiority.

The Admiralty subsequently began to take steps to facilitate the development of Singapore. Early in 1920, the

⁶⁴Neidpath, Singapore Naval Base, 35, notes that the budgetary constraints of the Ten Year Rule led the Admiralty to place 16 of 36 capital ships from full commission into reserve.

⁶⁵ADM 1/8571/295: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Situation in the Far East", October 21, 1919. Accepted as C.I.D. Paper No. 119-C, October 31, 1919.

Board dispatched H.M.S. Merlin to Singapore to ascertain if any of the anchorages there could support a fleet. By January 1921, Admiralty interest extended to the details of the Johore Causeway, to ensure that capital ships would be able to put rapidly to sea.⁶⁶ Later that month, the Board formally requested that the Colonial Secretary maintain a close hold over the Royal Navy's interest in Singapore in order to keep its development as a naval base secret from Japan as long as possible.⁶⁷ The Admiralty also made arrangements with the War Office for a joint service study of the defense of southern Malaya against attack by land.⁶⁸

These efforts to expand and develop Singapore as a major fleet base complemented the Board's strategic thought in early 1921. In preparation for the coming Imperial Conference, Admiralty House in February prepared for the Cabinet a memorandum which surveyed imperial naval defence. The Board still lauded the concept of a single imperial navy, but admitted that the Dominions would not support such an arrangement. Given the current situation (separate Dominion fleets supporting a reduced Royal Navy), the Admiralty stressed the need for thorough coordination. The Board also emphasized the importance of capital ship

⁶⁶ADM 116/2100: Admiralty Telegram, January 12, 1921.

⁶⁷ADM 116/2100: Admiralty Telegram, January 20, 1921.

⁶⁸Roskill, Naval Policy, 291.

mobility, which rested upon pre-positioned fuel reserves:

Here then is a matter of first importance to the naval policy of the Empire. The expenditure necessary to put the reserves in a satisfactory condition is very great, and the Dominion Governments would be affording valuable assistance to the naval defence of the Empire if they would accept the liability for the installation in the regions for which they are responsible, respectively, of the fuel reserves which are considered essential by the Naval Staff on strategic grounds.⁶⁹

The Admiralty undoubtedly realized, but did not state, that trying to persuade the Dominions to pay for fuel rather than new capital ships carried two advantages: the costs involved were lower (and, to a large degree, non-recurring) and any use of those fuel reserves would be in direct support of the Dominions. Three months later, a Naval Staff study, working on the assumption of a war with Japan in 1930, developed these general concepts into specific proposals.⁷⁰ Additional fuel depots in the Red Sea and off Ceylon would enable the fleet, given fair weather and three days warning, to move in 40 days from the Mediterranean to Singapore, where some 1.2 million gallons of fuel should be stored, with an additional 730,000 tons in the East Indies. The Board accepted these proposals in late May 1921.⁷¹

⁶⁹ADM 1/8611/151: Admiralty Memorandum, February 1921.

⁷⁰ADM 1/8607/98: Director of Plans Memorandum, "Proposed Redistribution of the Fleet on Strategic Principles", May 12, 1921.

⁷¹Roskill, Naval Policy, 290.

The Committee of Imperial Defence became increasingly interested in the future of Singapore between 1919 and 1921. A subcommittee of the C.I.D. entitled the Overseas Defence Committee (O.D.C.) considered the development of Singapore in over 12% (9 of 77) of its meetings between April 1920 and August 1921. The O.D.C. heard Admiralty testimony "strongly in favour in any scheme which will improve and increase facilities for oiling at Singapore," while the Air Council, the counterpart of the Admiralty Board, urged development of Singapore as a regional air junction.⁷² In the spring of 1920, the O.D.C. received the Navy's judgments that the Old (Johore) Strait at Singapore would form sufficient anchorage for a fleet and that the defense of Singapore would rest upon command of the seas, as the Malayan jungle would "render military operations on a large scale extremely difficult and tedious."⁷³ In May, the O.D.C. reviewed a Naval Staff appreciation of the defence of Singapore, described as occupying "the corresponding position to the British Empire in the East that Gibraltar does in the West."⁷⁴ The Naval Staff labelled the development of Singapore "a necessity in any sound Empire Naval Policy" and

⁷²CAB 8/8: O.D.C. Minute 11, April 14, 1920; O.D.C. Minute 33, September 27, 1920.

⁷³CAB 8/8: O.D.C. Minute 49, March 3, 1921; O.D.C. Minute 57, April 27, 1921.

⁷⁴CAB 8/8: O.D.C. Minute 63, May 6, 1921.

ascribed previous inaction to "our preoccupation in Home Waters and the comparative weakness of the Japanese Fleet." On June 7th, the O.D.C. forwarded to the Standing Defence Sub-Committee a report that endorsed the analysis of the Naval Staff and provided a cost estimate of £4.9 millions for the development of Singapore over a period of eight years.⁷⁵

The Standing Defence Sub-Committee (S.S.) of the C.I.D. held its first meeting of 1921 on May 2nd, four months after the decision to investigate the capital ship. From 1920-22, this body, in the words of the leading historian of the C.I.D., functioned as "the virtual replacement of the full C.I.D."⁷⁶ The S.S. considered the naval situation in the Pacific in light of the findings of the O.D.C. and decided that Singapore would replace Hong Kong as the focus of imperial defence, since Britain's foothold in China could not be adequately defended and the loss of the latter port would "almost irretrievably damage the British position in the Far East." The senior defense council directed the O.D.C. to investigate the measures necessary to develop and defend that port.⁷⁷

⁷⁵Neidpath, Singapore Naval Base, 42-54; W. David McIntyre, The Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base, 1919-1942 (Hamden, CT, 1979), 29.

⁷⁶Franklin Johnson, Defence by Committee: The British Committee of Imperial Defence 1885-1959 (London, 1960), 170.

⁷⁷CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 136, May 2, 1921.

Two meetings and ten days later, the Standing Defence Sub-Committee continued its review of imperial naval defense in rehearsal for the imminent Imperial Conference. During that review, discussion touched upon the development of Bermuda as a base against the expanding United States Navy. Realizing that strategic planning against America was bound to offend Canadian opinion, the committee agreed that the less reference made to Bermuda as a naval base the better. The S.S. concluded:

That in any such statements the desirability of concentrating discussions on Pacific rather than North American problems should be borne in mind, and the whole trend of the discussion should be steered in that direction.⁷⁸

The Royal Navy, at least, still took Atlantic considerations seriously; the First Sea Lord personally reviewed the Naval Staff's war plans for a conflict with the United States in January 1921.⁷⁹ Subsequent discussion of imperial naval defense must be examined in light of this agreement to frame all requirements and justifications in purely Pacific terms.

In June 1921, less than two weeks before the Imperial Conference, the Standing Defence Sub-Committee revisited the question of the development of Singapore as a major fleet

⁷⁸CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 138, May 12, 1921.

⁷⁹Beatty MSS 8/1: Plans Division Memorandum, January 4, 1921. This document anticipated a separation of the United States Navy into a fleet on each coast, thus inviting defeat in detail by a concentrated British force based at Bermuda and Halifax.

base. On the 10th, after reviewing the 7 June report of the O.D.C., the committee members agreed that from the strategic point of view, the arguments in favor of development were irrefutable. They also considered Dominion opinion. The Dominions were loyal in part because of British sea power; the loss of which "would be disastrous to the prestige of Great Britain." The S.S. noted at the same time that development would be expensive at a time when economy was needed. A leak to the public of large expenditure on a naval base "might not only embarrass the Government but might even occasion their fall." The meeting ended inconclusively, the proponents of "Treasury control" having checked the adherents of sea power.⁸⁰

Arthur Balfour swiftly engineered a compromise. He suggested that Britain should formally indicate an intention to develop Singapore, while deferring any immediate financial commitment.⁸¹ The Standing Defence Sub-Committee quickly agreed to submit this proposal to their political superiors. The committee made four recommendations to the Cabinet. First, the S.S. noted that the basis of any system of imperial defense must be the maintenance of British sea power. Second, the Standing Defence Sub-Committee indicated that the most pressing question [in accordance

⁸⁰CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 140, June 10, 1921.

⁸¹Roskill, Naval Policy, 291.

with the agreement of May 12th] involved the Pacific. Third, they advised the Government that "it is essential that Singapore should be available as a base of concentration." Fourth, the senior defense advisors urged that while Britain could not afford to spend much immediately, owing to existing economic conditions, the work should be done and "the greater the assistance that can be rendered by the overseas Governments in this connection the sooner will the necessary programme be completed."⁸²

Three days later, the Cabinet considered the proposals of the Standing Defence Sub-Committee. Balfour guided the discussion. He maintained that the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, although reducing the immediate danger, would not remove the need for developing the base, because "whatever fleet we might maintain, it was almost inconceivable that we could not use it in those waters where it was most likely to be needed." The Lord President explained that the project would take five years to complete and that British interests in the region were very likely to continue far longer. The Cabinet recognized the value of having a plan for the Pacific, as Washington was constantly suggesting that the United States Navy could protect whites in that region, and that Singapore incidently would protect the west coast of Canada. The Government directed the

⁸²CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 141, June 13, 1921.

O.D.C. to prepare a detailed plan for the development of Singapore. On the condition that there would be no major expenditure for two years--in accordance with Balfour's plan--the Cabinet agreed to develop Singapore and raise at the Imperial Conference the question of Dominion assistance.⁸³

Lloyd George officially convened the Imperial Conference at 10 Downing Street on June 20, 1921. In addition to the Prime Minister, the British contingent included Austen Chamberlain; Winston Churchill; Edwin Montagu; Sir Eyre Crowe, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office; Sir Henry Lambert of the Colonial Office; and Sir Edward Grigg, a personal advisor to Lloyd George. The Dominions all sent their Prime Ministers: William Hughes from Australia; Arthur Meighen from Canada, together with his advisor, Loring Christie; William Massey from New Zealand; and Jan Smuts from South Africa. Lloyd George came quickly to the heart of the matter, "the most urgent and important of foreign questions--the relations of the Empire with the United States and Japan." He indicated his aspirations "to maintain peace and fair play for all nations" and additionally "to avoid a competition of armaments."⁸⁴

⁸³CAB 23: Cabinet Conclusion 50 (3), June 16, 1921.

⁸⁴CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 1, June 20, 1921.

The Prime Minister began his discussion of Anglo-Japanese relations by paying tribute to the Alliance. He characterized Japan as "a faithful ally, who rendered us valuable assistance in an hour of very serious and critical need" and mentioned the Japanese escorts which had protected imperial troop transports from German cruisers. He expressed his desire "to preserve that well-trying friendship which has stood us both in good stead, and to apply it to the solution of all questions in the Far East." Lloyd George concluded by mentioning Japan's "special interests" in China and Britain's wishes for an "open door" policy, thus tacitly acknowledging disagreements with Japan.⁸⁵

The Prime Minister then addressed Anglo-American relations. He adopted a somewhat warmer tone, stating that:

friendly co-operation with the United States is for us a cardinal principal, dictated by what seems to us the proper nature of things, dictated by instinct quite as much as by reason and common sense.

Lloyd George then reiterated his opposition to "the growth of armaments, whether in the Pacific or elsewhere" and praised American public opinion "for showing so much earnestness" over the issue of disarmament.⁸⁶

The British Prime Minister concluded with a brief discussion of imperial defence. He proclaimed his

⁸⁵CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 1, June 20, 1921.

⁸⁶CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 1, June 20, 1921.

willingness to discuss any proposal for the limitation of armaments. At the same time, however, he paid tribute to the value of sea power:

We cannot forget that the very life of the United Kingdom...indeed, the whole Empire, has been built upon sea power--and that sea power is necessarily the basis of the whole Empire's existence.

Having concealed his own positions, the Welsh Wizard closed the first meeting and waited for the Dominion premiers to take sides.⁸⁷

Prime Minister William Morris Hughes took the lead at the second meeting. His well-publicized position on the Anglo-Japanese Alliance involved renewal "in such form--modified if that should be deemed proper--as will be acceptable to Britain, to America, to Japan, and to ourselves."⁸⁸ He placed Australia squarely on the side of renewing the alliance, subject to two conditions.⁸⁹ The alliance must "conform to the requirements of the League of Nations" and "specifically exclude the possibility of war with the United States of America."⁹⁰ He contended that "a

⁸⁷CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 1, June 20, 1921.

⁸⁸William Hughes, as recorded in J.C. Vinson, "The Imperial Conference of 1921 and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance", (Pacific Historical Review, XXXI, 1962).

⁸⁹D.K. Dignan, "Australia and British Relations with Japan, 1914-1921", (Australia Outlook, XXI, 1967), argues that Hughes' support for the Anglo-Japanese Alliance stemmed from Curzon's deliberate manipulation of the Foreign Office documents available to the Dominion leaders.

⁹⁰CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 2, June 21, 1921.

treaty will help us influence Japanese policy" and suggested a conference with both Japan and the United States.⁹¹

Hughes next addressed the issue of naval disarmament, which he linked to the diplomatic situation. He desired "an agreement among the great naval powers" which would enable the participants to eliminate "naval expenditure other than that necessary for the maintenance of existing units." He refused, however, to hazard Australia's security to the oscillations of foreign relations:

We must have such naval defence as is adequate for our safety...In our case, sea power is, and must always be, the determining factor in our foreign policy.

Hughes then admitted the need for Dominion contributions to the cost of imperial defense and suggested per capita shares applied to Dominion naval forces.⁹²

William Massey of New Zealand echoed the sentiments of his neighboring Prime Minister. He stated his belief that the Pacific would be the site of the next great war and pointed to the Japanese assistance to the Australasian Dominions during the conflict past. He championed the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, "with whatever modifications may be necessary." Massey also supported the idea of Dominion contributions to imperial naval defence.⁹³

⁹¹CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 2, June 21, 1921.

⁹²CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 2, June 21, 1921.

⁹³CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 2, June 21, 1921.

Jan Christian Smuts, the most experienced of the Dominion representatives, proposed a compromise diplomatic arrangement. He adopted the role of mediator, perhaps from his desire to persuade the Conference to adopt his proposals for constitutional development within the framework of the Empire.⁹⁴ Knowing that Meighen of Canada opposed any renewal of the treaty with Japan, Smuts suggested replacing the Alliance with a trilateral pact:

But supposing some specific arrangements could be made with America which would deal both with Japan and America in regard to disarmament, and which involved the League of Nations, and that America were to agree to come in,⁹⁵ then you solve the whole sum of problems at once.

The prerequisite for the success of Smuts' proposal, of course, was the cooperation of the United States.

The idea of expanding the Anglo-Japanese Alliance into a broader arrangement including the United States was not original. The Foreign Office had first suggested such a course in an analysis of the Alliance written in February 1920: "Some sort of tripartite understanding in the Far East, to which France might also adhere, would indeed be an

⁹⁴W.K. Hancock, Smuts, II: The Fields of Force, 1919-1950 (Cambridge, 1968), 40-49. Smuts' proposals anticipated the Balfour Declaration of 1926 and the Statute of Westminster of 1931, which provided equality of status between Britain and the Dominions.

⁹⁵CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 3, June 21, 1921.

ideal situation."⁹⁶ In January 1921, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance Committee of the Foreign Office had again recommended that "a Tripartite Entente between the United States, Japan, and Great Britain" replace the existing Alliance.⁹⁷ The Foreign Office regretfully shared the opinion of Britain's Ambassador to Washington, Sir Auckland Geddes, that there was "little chance of the Senate agreeing to anything of the nature of an Anglo-American Alliance," let alone a tripartite pact involving Japan.⁹⁸ The United States, in fact, had rebuffed Britain's latest overture towards such an agreement.⁹⁹ Hughes' support for modification to exclude war with America rather than modification acceptable to America thus reflected both Washington's reluctance to enter a tripartite pact with any defense obligations and his preference--if forced to choose--

⁹⁶F.O. Memorandum, "Effect of Anglo-Japanese Alliance upon Foreign Relationships", February 28, 1920, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol VI, 1016-1023.

⁹⁷F.O. Memorandum, "Report of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance Committee", January 21, 1921, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 221-227.

⁹⁸F.O. Memorandum, "Respecting the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, September 1, 1920; Sir A. Geddes to Earl Curzon, November 15, 1920, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 106-13 and 177-178, respectively.

⁹⁹Vinson, "The Imperial Conference of 1921 and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance", notes that the State Department rebuffed inquiries from Britain's Foreign Service concerning a tripartite pact in May 1921.

-for a meaningful agreement with Japan rather than a vague understanding with the United States.

The day after Smuts' proposal, Curzon answered with an appraisal of American diplomacy. In the morning, he stated that the peace of the world could only be maintained by the "continued cooperation of the Great Powers," from the ranks of which the United States had defected. He added that "the influence of a powerful Empire like Great Britain...is most potent for good or evil" and asserted that "it ought to be used." He continued:

There can be no doubt that while the Anglo-Japanese Alliance has lasted, whether we continue it or not, it has enabled us to exercise a very controlling influence on the sometimes dangerous ambitions of Japan.¹⁰⁰

In the afternoon, the Foreign Secretary explained that the rift between the Senate and the Wilson Administration had led to a collapse in Anglo-American relations. He stated: "Official relations with the American Government almost ceased to exist, and for ten months we practically did no business with America at all".¹⁰¹ He briefly touched on America's 1916 naval construction program, designed to

¹⁰⁰CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 4, June 22, 1921.

¹⁰¹Curzon could have mentioned that the Harding Administration had ignored two invitations from First Lord Lee, during his address to the British Institute of Naval Architects on March 17th and an interview with Adolph Ochs of the New York Times on April 22nd, to discuss naval disarmament. See Sprouts, New Order, 129.

produce "the most powerful fleet that the world has ever known." Curzon ended in a more positive fashion by noting that the Senate had recently authorized President Warren Harding to discuss disarmament with Great Britain and Japan.¹⁰²

At the sixth meeting of the Imperial Conference, on June 24th, Prime Minister Arthur Meighen made his first major contribution to the discussions. In February 1921, he had suggested to Lloyd George the desirability of replacing the Anglo-Japanese Alliance with a multi-lateral pact and suggested that a Canadian envoy approach the Harding Administration about scheduling a conference on Pacific Affairs.¹⁰³ At the Imperial Conference, Meighen sought to establish an entente between the British Empire and the United States so as to ensure America would remain an active force in the League, which he and his advisor Loring Christie believed was essential to the peace and security of the post-war world.¹⁰⁴ He also desired to consolidate, and if possible, advance, the gains made by his predecessor in Canada's pursuit of recognition as a fully autonomous

¹⁰²CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 5, June 22, 1921.

¹⁰³Roger Graham, Arthur Meighen (Toronto, 1960), Vol II, 70-72.

¹⁰⁴Fry, "The North Atlantic Triangle and the Abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance".

nation.¹⁰⁵ The Canadian Prime Minister recommended frequent imperial conferences; a single imperial foreign policy, administered by the British Foreign Office; and, with regard to issues bearing on the Dominions, that their opinions be given weight commensurate with their interest. For issues affecting Canada and the United States, he claimed that "the Dominion should have full and final authority." Without addressing the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, he then stated:

The maintenance, and if it is by any means possible, the betterment, of relations between the British Empire and the United States of America should be, as the Foreign Secretary has well said, 'the pivot of Britain's world policy'.

Meighen concluded by urging, in support of Curzon, a policy of intervention in Europe in order to avoid "isolation full of menace not only to ourselves, but also to the world."¹⁰⁶

On June 28, 1921, the conference focused on the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Curzon began by reminding those present--Lloyd George was absent due to a coal strike--that Article IV of the Alliance contained a provision which removed any obligation of either signatory to go to war with any third

¹⁰⁵J.W. Dafoe, "Canada and the Peace Conference of 1919", (Canadian Historical Review, XXIV, 1943), notes that in 1919, Sir Robert Borden had secured separate representation for Canada at the Paris Peace Conference. For a contemporary Canadian perspective on Meighen and the Imperial Conference, see Ramsey Cook, ed, The Dafoe-Sifton Correspondence, II: 1919-1927 (Altona, Manitoba, 1966), 69-79.

¹⁰⁶CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 6, June 24, 1921.

party with which they had a treaty of arbitration; that Britain regarded the Anglo-American Peace Commission Treaty of September 1914 as such a treaty; and that Britain had communicated her position to both Japan and the United States. He noted that the American press suggested nonetheless that the Alliance contained "seeds of possible conflict."¹⁰⁷ Curzon next announced that the treaty would expire on July 13th, in consequence of the Anglo-Japanese notice to the League of Nations in July 1920, which stated that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was incompatible with the Covenant of the League. He then duplicated his earlier presentation to the Cabinet. He included the opinion of Sir Charles Eliot, Britain's Ambassador to Japan: "If the present alliance is replaced by an Anglo-American understanding, at the expense of Japan, the Japanese will no doubt cast about for new allies."¹⁰⁸ Curzon concluded that to expand the alliance into a tripartite agreement was reasonable but hardly feasible. He recommended that "the agreement should be renewed in a different form" after consultation with the United States and the League.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 8, June 28, 1921.

¹⁰⁸Sir C. Eliot to Earl Curzon, December 12, 1920, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 194-196.

¹⁰⁹CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 8, June 28, 1921.

Balfour, as chairman of the Standing Defence Sub-Committee, added the perspective of the C.I.D. He noted the relative decline of British naval strength in the Pacific and declared that "it is, from a strategic point of view, of very great importance that the Japanese Alliance should be maintained." He also explained that the bulk of the Royal Navy would remain in European waters. In order to increase the mobility of Britain's capital ships, which would act as an imperial fire brigade, Britain "must develop a base at Singapore with the capacity of storing significant quantities of oil." Until the completion of Singapore, Balfour admitted that the British Empire was vulnerable to naval attack in the Pacific and so should attempt to maintain good relations with Japan.¹¹⁰

The next meeting contained the expected confrontation between the representatives of Australia and Canada. Meighen flatly rejected renewing the Alliance in any form whatsoever. He argued that it had not served to restrain Japan's exploitation of China. He claimed that Canada had a special interest in Anglo-American relations, which would be ruined by renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. He said:

if we now...renew a confidential and exclusive relationship with Japan it is wholly impossible to argue convincingly, to my mind, that it is not going to affect detrimentally our relations with the United States, no matter how steadfastly the British government sets its face to keep those

¹¹⁰CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 8, June 28, 1921.

relations good.

Meighen asserted that the abrogation of the Alliance would facilitate an arms control agreement with America, where the new administration was open to fresh initiatives. He recommended a conference involving America, China, Japan, and the Empire. He asserted that non-renewal would not estrange Japan, provided a multi-lateral agreement was reached. Meighen concluded by stating Canada would not participate in an Alliance aimed at the United States.¹¹¹

Hughes immediately reduced Meighen's argument to "listen to America." He claimed that Canada's interests were smaller than those of Australia, for which national survival could be at stake. The Australian prime minister mentioned America's rejection of the League and stated that he would vote "against any renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance upon one condition and one only...that America gives us the assurance of safety which our circumstance absolutely demands."¹¹²

The next meeting of the Imperial Conference, which took place the same afternoon, produced little more than heated rhetoric. Curzon suggested two alternatives: a renewal of

¹¹¹Lower, "Loring Christie and the Genesis of the Washington Conference", notes Meighen based his arguments on a paper prepared by Loring Christie, the Legal Advisor to Canada's Department of External Affairs.

¹¹²CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 9, June 29, 1921.

perhaps five years in consonance with the Covenant of the League or a temporary renewal of a year in order to hold an international conference on the Pacific.¹¹³ Hughes supported the former and argued that "a nation who rejects the League cannot fault those whose work falls entirely within the arrangements of the League." He further deprecated the possibility of diplomatic relations with a country whose policy rests on "shifting quicksands of faction or public opinion." Smuts then turned Hughes' tactic of paraphrase against him. The old Boer restated Hughes' position as: "Japan is the bigger danger and, therefore, we should control her by keeping up the Alliance." Massey occupied the rest of the session with a pronouncement of loyalty to the British Empire.¹¹⁴

The next morning, Lloyd George convened a meeting of his Government. Curzon briefed the Cabinet regarding the Dominion positions: Meighen opposed, possibly to the degree that Canada would disassociate from any decision to renew; Hughes and Massey strongly in favor; with Smuts balancing. The Foreign Secretary then discussed the latest report from Washington, received five days before. Geddes, who had

¹¹³Fry, Illusions, 136, notes that the Foreign Secretary was handicapped by the conflicting reports he was receiving from Ambassador Harvey in London and from Auckland Geddes in Washington as to the American position on renewal of the alliance.

¹¹⁴CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 10, June 29, 1921.

originally advised for renewal but later recommended the substitution of a tripartite pact, relayed a conversation with the Secretary of State. The Secretary had explained that public opinion opposed renewal and that the Senate was unlikely to ratify any tripartite arrangement, but that he personally favored "a declaration of policy embodied in identic notes" between the American, British, and Japanese Governments.¹¹⁵ The Cabinet, however, did not believe that an exchange of notes constituted an adequate substitute for the existing Alliance.¹¹⁶ Lloyd George emphasized the twin pillars of British policy: the avoidance of any dispute with the United States, and the avoidance of any insult to Japan. The Cabinet subsequently agreed that the British delegation at the Imperial Conference had the authority to propose or assent to negotiations with both Japan and America.¹¹⁷

The Cabinet then considered a suggestion from Lloyd George, to the effect that the Lord Chancellor might re-examine the case for the termination of the Alliance. Only three days before, Curzon had informed the Japanese Ambassador that the British Government considered that the

¹¹⁵Sir A. Geddes to Earl Curzon, June 24, 1921, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 311-12.

¹¹⁶Fry, "The North Atlantic Triangle and the Abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance".

¹¹⁷CAB 23: Cabinet Conclusion 56 (3), June 30, 1921; Lowe and Dockrill, Mirage of Power, Vol I, 652-656.

Anglo-Japanese notice to the League constituted a denunciation of the Alliance, which would therefore expire on July 13th, and had requested a second joint notification to the League of a prolongation until October.¹¹⁸ A ruling to the reverse effect would mean that the Alliance would continue indefinitely, thus buying time for diplomatic conversations before any potentially divisive action regarding the Alliance.¹¹⁹ The Cabinet promptly agreed that:

The Lord Chancellor should be asked to give an opinion as to whether the notice given to the League of Nations in regard to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance must... be held as equivalent to a denunciation of the Treaty of 1911.

The Lord Chancellor, F.E. Smith, Viscount Birkenhead, obligingly ruled that the joint notice to the League did not constitute denunciation and the Treaty thus would remain in effect.¹²⁰

Late that afternoon, Lloyd George reconvened the Imperial Conference and moved to break the deadlock between Meighen and Hughes. He started by reminding the delegates

¹¹⁸Note from Earl Curzon to the Japanese Ambassador, June 27, 1921, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 313.

¹¹⁹Frances Stevenson recorded in her diary: "It suddenly occurred to D. [Lloyd George] that under international law the League of Nations ruling did not hold good, & on looking it up found that instead of renewing the agreement this year, it had never been legally terminated & no notice had yet been given. It would therefore leave a whole year in which to make up our minds." See Taylor, Lloyd George: A Diary, 225.

¹²⁰CAB 23: Cabinet Conclusion 56 (3), June 30, 1921.

that:

Friendship with America was fundamental. It is a dominant principle in all British policy, and it is inconceivable that we should embark upon any policy that would involve a breach with the United States.

The British Prime Minister then advanced the claim that "a refusal to renew would involve a breach with Japan." After insisting that "we must not insult Japan," Lloyd George advocated consultation with America and support for China. All of these laudable intentions, he suggested, might be achieved at a conference, the forum in which one might "reconcile the irreconcilable." Then he asked for an opinion of the status of the alliance from Lord Birkenhead, who replied that "no denunciation has taken place." Upon realizing that Birkenhead's legal opinion upset the basis of the previous discussion by removing the immediacy of a decision regarding the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the delegates adjourned.¹²¹

The next day, Meighen commenced discussion by restating the situation: the Treaty ran indefinitely, and Japan and Great Britain were under obligation to the League to revise the Alliance. He claimed his views regarding Japan had been misstated and recommended that the Treaty be limited to one year. The Canadian Prime Minister then urged a communication to China, Japan, and the United States,

¹²¹CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 11, June 30, 1921; Lowe and Dockrill, Mirage of Power, Vol I, 652-656.

proclaiming friendship and inviting a conference. Lloyd George opposed his effort to limit the Anglo-Japanese Alliance but supported calling a conference immediately. Hughes again attacked Meighen's unwillingness to understand the vulnerability of the Australasian Dominions and demanded that the Imperial Conference determine the Empire's policy at the proposed international conference, which Australia and New Zealand would not, in all probability, be able to attend. Curzon sought agreement on five points: a) telling Japan that the Alliance remained in force; b) telling the League that the Covenant superseded the Alliance; c) approaching Japan, America, and China regarding a conference; d) not denouncing the Alliance, which would remain in effect if the conference failed; and e) meeting again. The group adjourned without reaching consensus.¹²²

That afternoon, the late session of the Imperial Conference marked the apex of agreement among the conference delegates. Smuts warned the group against publicizing the understanding that the alliance would remain in effect unless the proposed conference reached agreement to the contrary as providing Japan an incentive not to cooperate. Hughes immediately countered by pointing out that the opposite position gave the United States a similar inducement, whereupon Massey concurred. All present then

¹²²CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 12, July 1, 1921.

agreed to contact China, Japan, and America concerning a conference, that the Alliance stood until denounced, and to consider whether or not to announce the default future of the Alliance.¹²³

The Dominion representatives then heard a series of briefings on imperial defense. First Lord Arthur Lee analyzed the British Empire's strategic naval situation. He noted that despite the destruction of the German High Seas Fleet, Britain's command of the seas was "challenged as never before." The First Lord stated that Admiralty was willing to accept a One Power standard but admitted:

There is, however, very grave doubt whether we can afford to maintain even a one-power standard at the present time unless the whole Empire combines...to assist us in sharing the burden and responsibility.¹²⁴

He provided a spirited defense of the capital ship, together with the proper ancillaries, as the basis of sea power. Lee revealed the details of the American and Japanese naval construction programs, which forced Britain to lay down four new capital ships within a year. He explained that the British Cabinet intended to develop strategic oil stockpiles and a base at Singapore. The First Lord then made a pointed comparison, between Britain and the Dominions, of per capita

¹²³CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 13, July 1, 1921.

¹²⁴CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 14, July 4, 1921.

spending on naval defense. He stated that the most helpful contributions would take the form of "assistance in the creation of oil storage in these [Pacific] regions, the maintenance of oil reserves, and the development and maintenance of the chief naval bases in these waters."

Beatty joined the discussion to emphasize three points: Britain needed a centrally located fleet; the fleet required mobility, which rested upon oil supplies; and operations in the Pacific required a base at Singapore. Lloyd George concluded by claiming the Navy was not aimed at any particular opponent: "We are just building in order to be equal to anybody, so as not to be in a position to be dictated to diplomatically by anybody."¹²⁵

Lloyd George and Curzon then gave thought to the mechanics of the proposed conference. When the Prime Minister suggested the British capital for the site, Curzon predicted that a conference held in London would struggle to overcome the isolationist sentiment in America.¹²⁶ The Foreign Secretary, after meeting with the Japanese and Chinese Ambassadors, asked the American Ambassador on July 5th to propose to his government that President Harding extend invitations to a conference on Pacific affairs which

¹²⁵CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 14, July 4, 1921.

¹²⁶Galbraith, "The Imperial Conference of 1921 and the Washington Conference."

might also eliminate naval competition.¹²⁷ Curzon subsequently asked Ambassador Harvey whether he might obtain an answer before July 11th in order that Lloyd George might provide it to Parliament. The Foreign Secretary added that the agreement desired from the proposed conference would bring an end to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.¹²⁸

On July 11th, Lloyd George informed the Imperial Conference that the previous day President Harding had invited the Allied and Associated Powers to a disarmament conference, to be preceded by a Pacific conference of the British Empire, China, Japan, and the United States. While there was no question of anything but acceptance, Hughes and Massey strongly desired a preliminary consultation in London before mid-August, in order to attend without extending the length of their visit. To the vast irritation of the delegates, however, the United States refused to accommodate by date or location the Australasian premiers.¹²⁹ On July 18th, Lloyd George wrote scathingly to Churchill:

I agree with you that the venue is immaterial, but time and the composition of the conference are essential. To hold a meeting in Washington in November with a mob of delegates who have only a remote interest in this question...would be fatal

¹²⁷Marquess Curzon of Kedleston to Sir A. Geddes, July 9, 1921, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 336-38.

¹²⁸Charles Spinks, "The Termination of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance", (Pacific Historical Review, VI, 1937).

¹²⁹CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 25, July 19, 1921.

to our interests. Australia and New Zealand could not be present...The whole American concept is amateurish in the extreme.¹³⁰

In frustration, the diplomats authorized Curzon to coordinate with the various governments involved and establish the conditions of the conference(s).¹³¹

On July 19th, the conference delegates entertained discussion of imperial defense. Lee reiterated the British Empire's greatest priorities: "the urgent necessity of replacing the obsolete units of the Empire battle fleet," followed by "the provision and maintenance of adequate bases of operation for the Empire fleet in the Pacific" and "the supply and maintenance of the necessary oil fuel reserves."¹³² He then asked what contributions the Dominions were prepared to donate to those projects. Hughes suggested that amount borne by the Dominions should be divided "on a white per capita basis." Massey quickly agreed to accept proportional shares in the cost. Meighen, however, dissented. He had left Canada with instructions from the House of Commons not to accept any defense commitments.¹³³

¹³⁰David Lloyd George, as recorded in Rowland, David Lloyd George, 541-42.

¹³¹CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 27, July 22, 1921.

¹³²CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 26, July 19, 1921.

¹³³Philip Wigley, Canada and the Transition to Commonwealth (New York, 1977), 127; Graham, Meighen, 63-66.

He refused on the grounds that Canada was not threatened and that the Canadian electorate saw no reason to support expenditure on imperial defense.¹³⁴ Meighen's refusal to contribute caused Hughes and Massey to withdraw their offers. The delegates ultimately affirmed the One Power Standard, but would go no further toward providing assistance to either the Admiralty or the Exchequer than to agree "that the method and expense of such [imperial defense] cooperation are matters for the final determination of the several Parliaments concerned."¹³⁵

The Foreign Secretary proved unable to persuade the United States to accommodate the concerns of the Empire representatives. On 27 July, Auckland Geddes told American Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes that a British party including Lloyd George, Curzon, Meighen, Hughes, and Massey was prepared to arrive in Bar Harbor on August 18th for preliminary discussions. Hughes replied that he was absolutely opposed to such a meeting.¹³⁶ On August 2d, the Imperial Conference viewed with displeasure the American rejection of a preliminary conference. Lloyd George stated:

¹³⁴CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 26, July 19, 1921.

¹³⁵CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 33, August 2, 1921.

¹³⁶Sir A. Geddes to Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, July 29, 1921, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 355.

"I think it will be a gross waste of time to go [to Washington]."¹³⁷ Nine days later, President Harding issued a formal invitation to Britain--none of the Dominions was invited--to attend a Conference on the Limitation of Armament and Far Eastern Affairs to convene in Washington on November 1, 1921.¹³⁸

Shortly after this invitation reached Britain, the Imperial Conference ended. Its delegates reached remarkably few specific agreements. The Dominions affirmed the One Power Standard and the concept of base development without providing any material assistance. Britain, without the Dominions, would attend an upcoming conference on disarmament and Pacific affairs, pending which the Anglo-Japanese Alliance would remain in effect. One historian in fact states that "the concrete results achieved in the field of naval policy and defence were very small."¹³⁹

Nonetheless, the Imperial Conference had important ramifications, if only in terms of options rendered untenable. The positions taken by Meighen and Hughes precluded Dominion contributions toward a naval building program and any possible implementation of the Jellicoe plan

¹³⁷CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 34, August 2, 1921.

¹³⁸Merze Tate and Fidele Foy, "More Light on the Abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, (Political Science Quarterly, LXXIV, 1959).

¹³⁹Roskill, Naval Policy, 298.

for a Pacific fleet, thus sustaining both British strategic weakness in the Far East and the Empire's resulting dependence upon Japanese goodwill. The Dominion leaders also ensured that a united Imperial Conference could neither renew nor abrogate the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Britain prepared for the Washington Conference with imperial unity apparently depending upon the willingness of Japan and the United States to enter a multi-lateral security pact.

CHAPTER 8

THE WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

The Washington Conference rendered compatible the Cabinet's desires to maintain the Royal Navy at a strength at least equal to that of any other power and to prevent the cost of a naval building program from increasing the size of naval estimates. The British Empire Delegation arrived in Washington prepared to accept virtually any program of disarmament that maintained the right of blockade, the development of Singapore, and approximate parity with the American fleet. When the sweeping American proposals to combine a 5:5:3 ratio of fleet strength for the primary naval powers with an interlude in naval construction encountered resistance from France and Japan, Balfour labored to induce the participants to compromise. After laying the groundwork for the successful transformation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, he facilitated a series of disarmament settlements that preserved the American framework while providing Britain an advantage in cruiser strength and a small program of battleship construction.

British preparation for the Washington Conference lacked the gravity normally associated with British diplomacy. Lloyd George himself set the tone at the end of the Imperial Conference when he refused to attend and predicted the delegates would spend their time "blowing off

hot air."¹ Churchill, at the same meeting, ridiculed the American concept of open diplomacy:

Fancy conducting a discussion like that if it is open to the public, and with stating the facts that, while the British Empire were straining every effort to secure universal peace, the Americans were building sixteen battleships and they stood out from the League of Nations, and were starting to arm by land and sea.²

American intransigence toward British proposals for a preliminary conference in London regarding a settlement of Pacific and Far Eastern problems aggravated rather than assuaged the attitudes in Whitehall.³ To Churchill, Lloyd George described the American proposals as "amateurish in the extreme" and complained that if the American government had even "one man with any experience of international affairs they would not have made this muddle."⁴ Leading statesmen, including Bonar Law and Curzon, declined to attend. On August 15, 1921, the Cabinet assigned responsibility for coordinating the British positions to the C.I.D. and thereafter displayed little interest in the preparations until the eve of the B.E.D.'s departure for the

¹CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 34, August 5, 1921.

²CAB 32/2: Imperial Conference Minute 34, August 5, 1921.

³Sprouts, New Order, 135-36. The London location would have enabled the Australasian Prime Ministers to attend.

⁴David Lloyd George, as recorded in Rowland, David Lloyd George, 542.

Conference.⁵ Even the pace at which the Departments forwarded the typical memoranda to Hankey's secretariat lagged in comparison to the staff work produced in preparation for the Armistice.

A memorandum from the Committee on National Expenditure (C.N.E.) shattered any feelings of complacency in Admiralty House.⁶ The C.N.E. comprised a committee of businessmen under Sir Eric Geddes appointed in 1921 to suggest economies of some £100 millions in the budget.⁷ The C.N.E., also known as "the Geddes Axe," sought to force the Board to accept reduction in the Navy Estimates. The C.N.E. compared the Estimates for 1921-22 (£82.48 millions) to 1922-23 (£81.18 millions) and observed that a decrease in general expenditure of over £11 millions was due primarily to deflation and that it was offset by an increase of nearly £10 millions due to capital ship construction, with a net decrease of only £1.3 millions. The Geddes committee further noted that the Navy's personnel strength of 121,000 was only 27,000 less than that of 1914-15. The C.N.E. wanted a definition of the One Power Standard, together with

⁵CAB 23: Cabinet Conclusion 67 (3b), August 15, 1921.

⁶ADM 1/8614/187: Oswyn Murray note indicated the importance of a response, October 13, 1921; /8615/200: Director of Statistics minute described C.N.E. proposals as "unthinkable," October 28, 1921.

⁷Pollard, British Economy, 210; Taylor, English History, 184.

any plans for the placing of ships into reserve. The deficit commission inquired as to whether the seventeen capital ships already in reserve could be relegated to care and maintenance parties. The C.N.E. suggested postponing new construction until after the conference and requested an evaluation of the risk of laying down only two vessels and the docking requirement involved.⁸

In response, Admiralty House prepared a memorandum designed to set forth clearly the premises under which the Board was operating. The Admiralty noted that the Government's expressed naval policy was still the One Power Standard, which, according to the Admiralty, meant that "the Navy should be maintained at sufficient strength to ensure the safety of the British Empire and its sea communications as against any other Naval Power."⁹ The Board stated that "more than absolute equality" would be desirable, but recognized "this is not attainable in the present difficult times, and we shall be put hard to it to obtain absolute equality." The Admiralty made no objections to the concept of naval limitation provided Britain retained, if not her present relative advantage, at least a position of equality. From the Board's perspective, two issues complicated the

⁸ADM 1/8614/187: Observations by Committee on National Expenditure, October 1921.

⁹ADM 1/8615/200: Admiralty Memorandum, "One Power Standard", October 1921.

problem of finding an acceptable level of reduction. The first involved the protection of sea-borne commerce, the defense of which required a substantial number of cruisers. At the hub of a maritime trading network, Britain's livelihood depended on sea communications. The Admiralty considered the Navy's responsibilities in this area to be "infinitely greater than those of any other Power" and that Britain required a larger number of cruisers than other nations. The second issue concerned "modern capital ships, which are the gauge of a country's Sea Power."¹⁰ The Board worried that equality in numbers of ships would leave Britain at a marked disadvantage, as all of the Royal Navy's battleships were of pre-Jutland design.¹¹

The Admiralty plan for retaining at least equality in capital ship strength involved the construction of eight new vessels. The Board hoped to lay down four battle cruisers in 1921-22, followed by four battleships in 1922-23. The battle cruisers, carrying 16-inch main guns, would displace 48,000 tons apiece, while the battleships, armed with enormous 18-inch weaponry, would displace 48,400 tons each. A new pattern of inclined armor, concentrated only over the

¹⁰ADM 1/8615/200: Admiralty Memorandum, "One Power Standard", October 1921.

¹¹Chalmers, Life and Letters of David Beatty, 366. Britain's sole post-Jutland capital ship was the battle cruiser Hood, as her sister ships Anson, Howe, and Rodney had been cancelled shortly after the Armistice.

vitals of the ships, would be raised higher to provide better protection against aerial bombing and plunging fire, while a novel system of "water protection" sandwiched between the side of the ship and her anti-torpedo bulkheads afforded increased safety from submarines. The designs of the new ships, developed in 1920-21 and incorporating lessons from the Battle of Jutland and the newest German battleship Baden, represented a quantum leap past the ships of the American 1916 Program, which were designed before Jutland.¹² These eight vessels would cost some £75 millions, at roughly £15 millions per year over 5 years.¹³

The Cabinet at least partly assuaged the fears of Admiralty House on the issue of capital ship quality during the closing days of the Imperial Conference. On July 19th, the conference delegates reached unanimous agreement to uphold the One Power Standard. Funding, however, proved to be more difficult to resolve. When Hughes of Australia proposed that the Dominions accept shares in the imperial naval budget on a per capita basis of white population,

¹²D'Eyncourt MSS 22: A.C.N.S. Memorandum, "Main Requirements of Design", June 11, 1920; D'Eyncourt MSS 27: Goodall Memorandum, "Battleship Design", July 1, 1920; Preston, The Ship, 24-26.

¹³ADM 116/1775: Admiralty Memorandum, "Naval Policy and New Construction", November 22, 1920. The projected annual costs (in millions of pounds) broke down as follows:

Ship\Year	'21-22	'22-23	'23-24	'24-25	'25-26	Total
Battle Cruisers, 4	9.0	15.5	13.0	0.0	0.0	37.5
Battleships, 4	0.0	2.5	7.5	14.5	13.0	37.5

Meighen of Canada and Smuts of South Africa demurred.¹⁴ The following day, the delegates agreed to a division of a portion of German reparations payments amounting to over £16 millions:

<u>Country</u>	<u>Share</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Britain	86.85%	£14,200,000
Canada	4.35%	£740,000
Australia	4.35%	£740,000
New Zealand	1.75%	£295,000
India	1.20%	£204,000
Minor Colonies	0.80%	£136,000
South Africa	0.60%	£102,000
New Foundland	0.10%	£17,000

Beatty then briefed the delegates on the Admiralty's proposed capital ship building program. Despite further opposition from Meighen, the group adopted Smuts' suggestion to use German reparation payments towards the cost of the proposed capital ships.¹⁵ That afternoon, the Cabinet considered the Admiralty request for approval to start building the four capital ships for which the preliminary funding had been approved on March 17th by the House of Commons during the presentation of the Navy Estimate.¹⁶ The Cabinet agreed that four new capital ships were necessary to meet American and Japanese ships under construction.

¹⁴CAB 32/4: Imperial Conference (Prime Ministers) Minute 26-A, July 19, 1921.

¹⁵CAB 32/4: Imperial Conference (Prime Ministers) Minute 26-B, July 20, 1921.

¹⁶House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series, Volume 126, Columns 2296-2347, 2442-2550.

Despite warnings from the Chancellor of the Exchequer as to the heavy expenditure involved, the Cabinet granted Admiralty House the authority to build the four ships in the 1921-22 naval program.¹⁷

The First Sea Lord delegated the primary responsibility for crafting the Admiralty's proposals for naval limitations to Admiral Ernle Chatfield, the Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff. As Chatfield felt that no proposals for arms limitation were proof against deliberate subterfuge, he sought to determine the "least objectionable."¹⁸ He ruled out the use of either budgetary or manpower ceilings as too easily evaded. Limitation based on the displacement of ships seemed to the admiral similarly susceptible to cheating, so he settled on number of capital ships as the most easily enforced measure for naval arms limitation.¹⁹

Chatfield saw aircraft carriers as a mixed blessing. He was keenly aware of the potential value of naval air support. At the same time, the admiral perceived aircraft carriers as a potential focus for future naval building

¹⁷CAB 23: Cabinet Conclusion 60 (6), July 20, 1921.

¹⁸ADM 1/8615/200: Chatfield Memorandum, October 14, 1921.

¹⁹The Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff reversed the position taken in 1919 by the Director of Plans, who suggested that the limitation of ship size was the most promising method. See ADM 116/1863: Director of Plans Memorandum, "League of Nations: Reduction in Naval Armaments" (attached minutes dated July 1919).

competition:

The number of Aircraft Carriers present in a Fleet Action will decide who is to command the Air, and as Command of the Air is likely to be vital in the next Naval Battle, competition in Aircraft Carriers may, unless regulated, supplant competition in Capital Ships.

Certain that capital ships would be regulated, Chatfield therefore suggested limiting carriers to a percentage of capital ship strength.²⁰

The Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff hoped to eliminate submarines as a lawful weapon of naval warfare. He realized, however, that the smaller powers, particularly France, viewed the submarine as an inexpensive method of coastal defense. As a result, he feared "the whole problem of submarine abolition was so involved as to be impracticable."²¹ His concern on the issue had abated after British experiments indicated that a new underwater detection system, known to the British as ASDIC and the Americans as SONAR, proved increasingly able to locate submerged submarines.²²

By the end of September, while Chatfield labored to put the finishing touches on his arguments, Admiralty House reached a consensus on the two principal naval issues at

²⁰ADM 1/8615/200: Chatfield Memorandum, October 28, 1921.

²¹Ernle Chatfield, It Might Happen Again (London, 1947), 6.

²²ADM 1/8609: Chatfield Minute, July 27, 1921.

Washington: arms limitation and the Far Eastern question. The Board wanted to prevent Japan from advancing any further south than Formosa and advocated "an international guarantee of the territorial status quo" while preserving Britain's right to develop Singapore. The Admiralty dealt at greater length with the question of naval limitation. The Board recognized that "Capital ships and their accessories run away with the money and necessitate undesirable reductions in other important naval services" and concluded that "a substantial reduction should suit our policy." The Admiralty developed a plan for naval limitation based on two premises: that naval strength remained primarily a function of post-Jutland capital ships and that rules for limitation, in order to be effective, must be simple and designed to prevent duplicity. The Board presented a five point plan. First, naval limitation should be based on a limited number of capital ships. Second, the British Empire and the United States should have a margin over Japan of 3:2 (this point implied naval equality between Britain and America). Third, only post-Jutland capital ships should be counted. Fourth, ships should be replaced after twenty years of service. Fifth, the abolition of submarines should be favorably considered. The First Lord sent a memorandum containing the views of the Admiralty to the C.I.D. in early October.²³

²³CAB 21/218: Admiralty Memorandum, "Washington Conference", October 5, 1921.

On October 14th, the Standing Defence Sub-Committee (S.S.) of the C.I.D. considered those recommendations. The subcommittee completely agreed with the Board's analysis. The S.S. endorsed the Admiralty position that the development of Singapore and the right of blockade were non-negotiable, and further agreed that Britain should not accept close technical inspections of her warships. The subcommittee also concurred with the Board's judgment that naval reduction should be based on numbers of capital ships.²⁴

Later that week, the Cabinet also provided the C.I.D. some guidance. The Cabinet members had strongly desired the presence of the Prime Minister at the beginning of the Conference, even though they recognized that at best he could stay only a few weeks. By the middle of the month, however, the press of Parliamentary business, much of which dealt with Ireland, led Lloyd George to decide that he would have to miss at least the initial phase of negotiations. On October 17th, the Cabinet agreed that in his absence, Arthur James Balfour, Lord President of the Council, would head the British Empire Delegation (B.E.D.). Lee, the First Lord, and Geddes, the Ambassador to the United States, would constitute the remainder of the political team, while the naval section comprised Beatty, the First Sea Lord, and

²⁴CAB 21/218: S.S. Minute, October 14, 1921.

Chatfield, the Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff. The ubiquitous Hankey would manage both secretariats. The Prime Minister would join as soon as the Parliamentary and general situations allowed.²⁵

Four days later, Winston Churchill broached an idea to the Standing Defence Sub-Committee. He suggested the adoption of a paper program of naval construction as a bargaining chip. The Admiralty's request for a second installment of four new capital ships (i.e., the 1922-23 battleship component of the proposal that Beatty briefed at the Imperial Conference), as yet unauthorized by the Cabinet, constituted the obvious basis for such a program. The former First Lord explained that the tactic had proved successful in his dealings with Germany before the Great War. Lord Lee quickly supported Churchill's proposal, which the S.S. then approved.²⁶ The authorization of four post-Jutland battleships, for a total of eight new capital ships, would provide a significant counter to the American 1916 Program of sixteen capital ships, for which the Harding Administration still possessed only partial funding.

The following day, the Foreign Office provided the B.E.D. a memorandum that contained its latest appraisal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The F.O. cited communications

²⁵CAB 23: Cabinet Conclusion 80 (7), October 17, 1921; Cabinet Conclusion 77 (5), October 7, 1921.

²⁶CAB 21/218: S.S. Minute, October 21, 1921.

from Geddes in Washington and Eliot in Tokyo to the effect that both the United States and Japan were favorably inclined towards the transformation of the existing treaty into a tripartite agreement. The memorandum reminded the B.E.D. of the need to remove from any draft treaty all military commitments, "for otherwise the United States can never be induced to become a party." The Foreign Office suggested that "the advisability of admitting other parties (especially China) having interests in the Pacific may well be considered" but cautioned that "a multilateral agreement, which does not include the United States, would be of no value to us at all." The memorandum advised the B.E.D. of the desirability of having the Americans "first suggest a formula" for replacing the Alliance but enclosed two separate draft treaties, one by Sir Auckland Geddes and the other by Sir John Jordan of the Foreign Office.²⁷

On October 24th, the Standing Defence Sub-Committee of the C.I.D. sent a memorandum to the Cabinet that defined its aim in preparing for the Washington Conference as achieving "the largest possible reduction in expenditure on armaments, subject to two fundamental considerations."²⁸ First, any

²⁷Foreign Office Memorandum respecting a Tripartite Agreement, October 22, 1921, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 448-50.

²⁸CAB 21/218: C.I.D. Memorandum 280-B, "Washington Conference on Limitation of Armaments", October 24, 1921.

agreement must safeguard "the vital interests of the British Empire." Second, any treaty must possess "a stable character" in order to avoid being:

dislocated by any miscalculations of national or political elements concerned, such as occurred after the Paris Peace Conference, owing to the refusal of the Government of the United States to ratify the instruments drawn up.

The C.I.D. accepted the Treasury's position that failure to achieve an immediate reduction of expenditure on the armed services would eliminate any real possibility of balancing the budget without raising taxes, "which would be politically most undesirable and economically most prejudicial to the nation's interests."²⁹ The C.I.D.'s concern for budgetary consideration, however, did not translate into a defeat for the Navy.

The Standing Defence Sub-Committee accepted completely the Admiralty's viewpoint as presented by Admiral Osmond Brock, Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff. The S.S. agreed that the development of Singapore "should not be interfered with by any agreement reached at the Conference."³⁰ The subcommittee further accepted the Navy's view on the importance of retaining unrestricted use of blockade, so that any "question of the regulation or limitation of

²⁹CAB 21/218: C.I.D. Memorandum 280-B, "Washington Conference on Limitation of Armaments", October 24, 1921.

³⁰CAB 21/218: C.I.D. Memorandum 280-B, "Washington Conference on Limitation of Armaments", October 24, 1921.

methods of warfare should be resisted," and shared the Admiralty's view that a total ban on submarines was "a policy of perfection not very likely to be realized." The S.S. labelled the limitation of naval armaments as "by far the most important task of the Conference at Washington" and agreed with the Board's position "that the only method which is sufficiently simple as to be really practicable is an international agreement as to the limitation of the number of capital ships." The subcommittee decided the best way to achieve their goals was "to allow the other delegations to put forward their proposals, and submit them to criticism." The S.S. also endorsed Churchill's idea "as to putting forward a paper program of capital ship construction, as likely to be undertaken by the British Government." The Standing Defence Sub-Committee concluded by recommending to the Cabinet "that a wide measure of discretion must be left to the B.E.D." on the understanding that major policy questions would be referred to the Empire government concerned.³¹

On November 1st, the Cabinet gave its first collective consideration to major policy decisions for the Washington Conference. The Lloyd George Ministry decided that if

³¹CAB 21/218: C.I.D. Memorandum 280-B, "Washington Conference on Limitation of Armaments", October 24, 1921; Nish, Alliance, 364, suggests that the Cabinet acted in deference to Lloyd George, tentatively scheduled to visit the conference.

France sought a renewal of the British guarantee of French territory, the B.E.D. would seek to promote American ratification and would further seek to use French support for the guarantee to move toward a limitation of aerial armaments. The Cabinet then endorsed Churchill's scheme for a program of naval construction designed as a bargaining chip. The Cabinet agreed that, while adhering to the One Power standard:

full discretion should be given to the principal British Delegate, according to the circumstance of the Conference, to adopt [Churchill's suggestion] in regard to having a paper programme of capital ship construction, to be used for bargaining with a view to inducing the other Powers to reduce their building programmes.³²

In consonance with the C.I.D.'s determination to react to the proposals of other nations, these decisions represented the extent of the guidance provided to the B.E.D prior to the Conference.

The B.E.D. sailed to Washington in the first week of November, under the direction of Arthur James Balfour, Lord President of the Council. Balfour at the time was seventy-three years of age and tired from his labors with the League of Nations. Dining with the Prime Minister, Churchill had laughingly remarked that "if you wanted nothing done, A.J.B. was undoubtedly the best man for the task."³³ Upon receiving

³²CAB 23: Cabinet Conclusion 83 (2), November 1, 1921.

³³Riddell, Intimate Diary, 325.

initial notification from Hankey that he would be asked to lead the B.E.D., Balfour himself replied that he "hoped very much hoped the Prime Minister will think better of it." After suggesting that Bonar Law was better fitted to the task, the Lord President responded to the call of duty: "If there is an important reason for my going, I am ready to go."³⁴

Born to immense wealth and political influence as the nephew of Robert, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, Balfour had held political office, including the premiership, almost continuously since 1874, when he had first won election to Parliament in the family borough of Hertford. Yet Balfour disguised his capacity and willingness for work behind an artful facade of intellectual dilettantism. Underneath his studied detachment, he remained convinced that the aristocracy should play a leading role in British government.³⁵ The Lord President also held firm views about the value of sea power.

Throughout his career, Balfour advocated a strong defense policy. As Prime Minister, he had established the C.I.D. to improve the coordination among the armed services. He had also sponsored the eighteen-pounder gun, which gave

³⁴Arthur Balfour, as recorded Roskill, Hankey, Vol II, 236.

³⁵Dugdale, Balfour, 17-19; Piers Brendon, Eminent Edwardians (Boston, 1980), 68-86.

Balfour's greatest legacy to Britain's defense involved the support for Fisher's revolutionary battleship that had earned him the sobriquet "Godfather of the Dreadnought." During the naval crisis of 1909, he had described "the maintenance of a powerful Fleet" as "the first duty of a Government."³⁶ When the Asquith Ministry considered in 1912 a proposal for universal service, designed to produce a mass army, Balfour had objected to the cost and had asked:

Would not this money be much better spent, from the point of view of national security, upon increasing the Navy?...Remember that a sufficient Navy not only secures your shores, but secures your commerce.³⁷

As Foreign Secretary, during the preparations for the Armistice, Balfour had sharply attacked President Wilson's call for freedom of the seas. He had contended that until such time as the League became "firmly established," that "every attempt to limit the use of Sea Power" merely added "to the relative strength of Land Power: and that in the end militarism would be the only gainer."³⁸

Despite this opposition to Wilson's policy, Balfour possessed a profound sympathy for the United States and hoped to see close cooperation between America and Britain. In 1913, he had written:

³⁶Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Dugdale, Balfour, 31.

³⁷Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Dugdale, Balfour, 53.

³⁸ADM 116/1651: Balfour Memorandum, "Freedom of the Seas", October 23, 1918.

In 1913, he had written:

I am moved by a feeling especially patriotic in its character, for the group of nations who are the authors and guardians of western civilization, [and] for the sub-group who speak the English language.³⁹

With friends in the Republican party of the United States, Balfour had served as vice-president of the Anglo-American Society and as British empire president of the English-Speaking Union. One historian of Anglo-American relations writes: "To Balfour, Anglo-American co-operation was not merely a temporary or tactical expedient but a fundamental policy."⁴⁰ With his beliefs that Britain would require both the friendship of America and the protection of a fleet, Balfour was thus well-suited for his responsibilities as head of the B.E.D. to Washington. Moreover, he had some previous experience with delegations to Washington.

In April 1917, shortly after the United States had entered the war, Balfour, then Foreign Secretary, sailed for America on the S.S. Olympic with some twenty-two specialists from the Foreign Office, the fighting services, and the supply departments. The Balfour Mission was originally a technical delegation designed to increase the efficacy of mobilization efforts within the United States. During his visit to America, the Foreign Secretary met with President

³⁹Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Dugdale, Balfour, 66.

⁴⁰Fry, Illusions, 15-16.

Wilson to discuss war aims and the various secret treaties of the Allied powers.⁴¹

Under the pressure of unrestricted submarine warfare, Britain also sought to influence the course of American naval expansion so as to obtain the greatest possible assistance in the struggle to protect Atlantic shipping. Balfour himself later noted: "Things were dark when I took that trip to America...The submarines were constantly on my mind. I could think of nothing but the number of ships which they were sinking."⁴² Balfour consulted Wilson's adviser Colonel House, while Rear-Admiral Rear-Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair met with Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Benson. The Balfour Mission requested the diversion of American naval construction from capital ships to anti-submarine vessels.

The Wilson Administration then balanced the immediate gain of additional anti-submarine assets against the reduction in the post-war capital ship strength of the United States Navy. House believed that the United States should help the Allies, in exchange for British guarantees of capital ship support in case of American difficulties.⁴³ Benson, however, worried about the possibility that America

⁴¹Dugdale, Balfour, 141-45.

⁴²Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Klachko, Admiral Benson, 68.

⁴³Seymour, Intimate Papers, Vol III, 67.

might have to carry on the struggle against Germany alone should the Allies collapse.⁴⁴ His reluctance to accept a loss of capital ship production prevented any immediate decision.

After Balfour's return to Britain in May 1917, the Cabinet requested that he pursue the issue. The following month, the Foreign Secretary submitted a memorandum to the Cabinet for consideration. Balfour noted that the United States Navy was worried about post-war ramifications if they did not build capital ships and Germany and Japan still possessed significant fleets. He suggested that for four years after the war, ample time in which to build new capital ships: "America should have a right to call upon other Fleets to her assistance, in case of maritime attack."⁴⁵ Balfour raised and rejected the possibility of a mutual defense treaty between Britain and the United States. He described a bilateral agreement as both simple yet adequate and added:

I confess, for reasons of high policy, there is nothing I should like more than a defensive alliance with America, even for four years, as would be capable of extension and development, should circumstances prove auspicious.

Balfour then identified the major flaw with his proposal: "The objection to it arises out of our existing Treaty with

⁴⁴Klachko, Admiral Benson, 69.

⁴⁵Balfour MSS 49699: Balfour Memorandum, "Future Naval Construction in the United States", June 22, 1917.

Japan."⁴⁶ The Japanese government, unfortunately, was not likely to cooperate.

Balfour wrote that there was no logical incompatibility between the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the suggested arrangement, but predicted that an Anglo-American "treaty would produce a very unpleasant feeling in Tokio" (sic). He lauded the Anglo-Japanese Alliance as contributing "to stability in international relations in the Far East." He reasoned that the best way to avoid offending Britain's longtime ally was "to try to associate Japan from the beginning with the new arrangement." Balfour then conjectured that a multi-lateral agreement "would have the triple effect of allaying Japanese fears, of engaging Japanese support, and of advertising the treaty as a protection against Germany."⁴⁷ Balfour admitted the difficulties of limiting any multi-lateral treaty. He pointed out that if Japan was brought in against Germany, Britain could hardly avoid asking France, and if France was asked to join the arrangement, Italy. He concluded by advocating a very broad arrangement. He recommended, in return for the diversion of American shipbuilding resources from the construction of capital ships to the building of

⁴⁶Balfour MSS 49699: Balfour Memorandum, "Future Naval Construction in the United States", June 22, 1917.

⁴⁷Balfour MSS 49699: Balfour Memorandum, "Future Naval Construction in the United States", June 22, 1917.

destroyers, that:

the Governments of the United States of America, Great Britain, France, Italy, Russia, and Japan engage singly and severally to assist each other against any maritime attack for a period of four years after the present war.⁴⁸

The Foreign Secretary relayed his proposals, with Cabinet approval, to House, only to have Wilson categorically reject any formal alliance with the Allied powers.⁴⁹ Balfour's proposal for a general maritime alliance thus proved fruitless. Nonetheless, it indicated both his desire to develop closer relations with the United States and his willingness to see Britain retain her naval superiority.

Circumstance provided Balfour the opportunity to play a major role in Washington. The civilian members of the delegation, Ambassador Geddes and First Lord Lee, were clearly figures of the second rank, while Lloyd George was never able to leave the press of responsibilities in London. Additionally, Admiral Beatty returned to London shortly after the conference opened, leaving Chatfield in charge of the British Naval Section, Washington (BNSW). More importantly, the Cabinet had decided against "a precise and detailed mandate" for the delegation.⁵⁰ Thus, Balfour possessed an unusual measure of autonomy at the conference.

⁴⁸Balfour MSS 49699: Balfour Memorandum, "Future Naval Construction in the United States", June 22, 1917.

⁴⁹Trask, Captains and Cabinets, 119-20.

⁵⁰CAB 23: Cabinet Conclusion 83 (2), November 1, 1921.

On November 11th, the day after he arrived in Washington and the day before the Conference opened, Balfour sent his appreciation of the situation to Lloyd George. The Lord President defined the ultimate aim of the B.E.D. as "the largest possible limitation of armaments consistent with the safety of the British Empire," with the understanding that "satisfactory and durable results" regarding naval disarmament rested upon the resolution of diplomatic issues. Balfour identified the Anglo-Japanese Alliance as "first and foremost" among the obstacles to successful arms limitation, along with "a number of problems regarding China." Balfour explained his intention "to deal with the political side of the Pacific question" before taking on "the subject of naval diminution of armaments."⁵¹ The head of the B.E.D. addressed the future of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and China in two separate treaties--which he had drafted during the Atlantic crossing--which he attached.⁵²

⁵¹The Foreign Office was concerned not so much that the discussion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance precede naval limitation talks as that the discussion take place "only among the parties concerned." See F.O. Memorandum, "General Survey of Political Situation in Pacific And Far East with reference to the forthcoming Washington Conference", October 20, 1921, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 434-448.

⁵²CAB 21/218: Arthur Balfour to David Lloyd George, November 11, 1921; the cable is also recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 466-70, although without the draft treaties.

Balfour sought to replace the Anglo-Japanese Alliance with a tripartite agreement between Britain, Japan, and the United States. His draft comprised three brief clauses: the first called for the three signatories to respect territory in the Pacific and to preserve peace through consultation in case of threat; the second allowed any two of the powers to establish a defensive alliance, provided they notified the third; and the last stated the proposed treaty would replace all existing arrangements. Balfour explained the draft treaty would serve numerous purposes:

- (a) To enable the Americans to be party to a tripartite arrangement without committing themselves to military operations.
- (b) To bring the existing Anglo-Japanese Alliance to an end without hurting the feelings of an Ally.
- (c) To leave it open to us to renew a defensive alliance with Japan if she should be threatened by Germany or Russia.
- (d) To frame a treaty which will reassure our Australasian Dominions.
- (e) To make it impossible for American critics to suggest our Treaty with Japan would require us to stand aside in the case of a quarrel between them and Japan, whatever the cause of the quarrel.⁵³

Balfour sought to square the circle of diverging opinion expressed at the Imperial Conference, bringing America into an arrangement without any military commitments, but retaining with Japan a relationship which held the possibility of military assistance. The junior members of

⁵³CAB 21/218: Arthur Balfour to David Lloyd George, November 11, 1921; the cable is also recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 466-70, although without the draft tripartite treaty.

the B.E.D. raised no objections to Balfour's proposals when he presented them informally over dinner.⁵⁴

On the eve of the Conference, the Lord President met with American Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, primarily to discuss the future of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Balfour presented Hughes a copy of the draft treaty, explaining that it had not been approved by the Cabinet and hence was unofficial. He agreed to Hughes' request to show it to the American contingent, provided it was described as unofficial yet held in secrecy. Balfour then asked Hughes whether he (Balfour) might share the draft with the principal Japanese delegate on the same conditions. Hughes demurred, on the grounds that the term "treaty" would inflame American public opinion should word of the discussions leak out. Balfour then substituted the word "arrangement" every place the word "treaty" appeared in the text. Hughes refused to discuss his remarks at the opening of the Conference, but in all other respects the conversation remained cordial.⁵⁵ Balfour accordingly left the meeting still under the impression that a resolution of the political questions of the Pacific remained a prerequisite to a naval arms limitation agreement.

⁵⁴Fry, Illusion, 163-64.

⁵⁵Hankey Memorandum, November 11, 1921, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 470-71.

Contrary to the Lord President's expectations, Secretary Hughes presented the first plenary session of the Conference on Limitation of Armaments on November 12th with a comprehensive and detailed set of proposals for the reduction of naval strength. He listed four principles for arms reduction:

- (1) The elimination of all capital ship building programs, either actual or projected;
- (2) Further reduction through the scrapping of certain of the older ships;
- (3) That regard should be had to the existing naval strength of the conferring powers;
- (4) The use of capital ship tonnage as the measure of strength for navies and a proportionate allowance of auxiliary combatant craft prescribed.⁵⁶

Hughes proposed a curtailment to current construction combined with an aggressive program of scrapping existing vessels, amounting to 30 capital ships of almost 850,000 tons for America, along with smaller cuts for the other powers. The Secretary then proposed specific future strengths by numbers and tonnage for the American, British, and Japanese fleets according to a 5:5:3 ratio, with capital ship totals of 500,000 and 300,000 tons respectively. He continued by proposing a replacement schedule for capital ships which included both a ten year "naval holiday" from new building and a life cycle of twenty years per vessel.

⁵⁶CAB 33/1b: B.E.D. Memorandum 76, "The Proposal of the United States for a Limitation of Naval Armaments"; also published in United States, Department of State, Conference on the Limitation of Armament: Washington November 12, 1921 - February 6, 1922 (Washington, D.C., 1922), 78-93.

New ships would be limited to a maximum displacement of 35,000 tons. Hughes then announced similar provisions for the reduction of auxiliary combatant craft, including escort vessels, aircraft carriers, and submarines. Hughes concluded by forming the chief delegates of the five major powers (America, Britain, France, Italy, and Japan) into a Committee on Limitation of Armaments and, together with the primary representatives of the four smaller nations attending (Belgium, China, Netherlands, and Portugal), into another for Pacific and Far Eastern Questions. The delegates agreed to hold the next plenary session on November 15th.⁵⁷

Hughes stunned his audience with the boldness and specificity of his proposals. The American plan, known to only eleven men before its public disclosure, reflected the work of a small bipartisan committee, appointed by President Harding, which included Elihu Root, Henry Cabot Lodge, and Theodore Roosevelt.⁵⁸ Harding had excluded Anglophobic Admiral William Benson from the planning process after the former Chief of Naval Operations wrote Secretary Hughes a

⁵⁷CAB 33/1b: B.E.D. Memorandum 76, "The Proposal of the United States for a Limitation of Naval Armaments"; also published in United States, Department of State, Conference on the Limitation of Armament: Washington November 12, 1921 - February 6, 1922 (Washington, D.C., 1922), 78-93.

⁵⁸Thomas Buckley and Edwin Strong, American Foreign and National Security Policies, 1914-1945 (Knoxville, 1987), 65-66.

memorandum accusing the Lloyd George Government of using "propaganda for disarmament and other features tending to keep the United States in a position subordinate to the British Empire."⁵⁹ Benson fought long and hard to prevent any reduction in the American 1916 building program, but kept his struggle strictly within official channels. As a result, no word reached British naval circles of the Hughes plan. Two naval historians record a contemporary account of the impact of the Secretary's proposals on Admiral Beatty, who reputedly leaned forward in his chair like a:

bulldog, sleeping on a sunny doorstep, who has been poked in the stomach by the impudent foot of an itinerant soap-canvasser seriously lacking in any sense of the most ordinary proprieties.⁶⁰

The admiral noted that Hughes' proposals "certainly caused considerable surprise in many quarters, not excluding the American naval clique."⁶¹ Arthur Willert, in charge of the Publicity Section of the B.E.D., later wrote that "the suggestion knocked everybody backward by its brutal simplicity."⁶² Balfour was also surprised, but took careful

⁵⁹William Benson, as recorded in Klachko, Admiral Benson, 189. Benson argued in vain against the 5:5:3 ratio, suggesting that France should be allowed the same strength as Japan in order to prevent an Anglo-Japanese combination against America.

⁶⁰Sprouts, New Order, 155.

⁶¹David Beatty, as recorded in Roskill, Last Naval Hero, 308.

⁶²Arthur Willert, Washington and Other Memories (Boston, 1972), 157.

notes on the back of a number of envelopes supplied by Hankey.⁶³

Balfour and Hankey immediately departed for lunch. They discussed Hughes' speech, and Balfour laid out the basic outline of his reply based on the notes taken that morning. He would approve the spirit and principle of the speech but suggest certain reservations as to specific detail. These reservations would focus on the abolition of the submarine, the strength of the auxiliary vessels, and the replacement schedule for capital ships.⁶⁴

Admiral Beatty gave Hughes' proposals a mixed review. He accepted the multi-lateral cuts in existing naval strength. Beatty strongly opposed the ten year hiatus in capital ship construction, however, on the grounds the war had forced Britain to forego heavy ships in order to produce the necessary anti-submarine vessels, and in consequence, the suppliers of capital ships were in desperate economic straits.⁶⁵ He wrote: "The difficulty will be in carrying out the proposed 10 years Naval Holiday" as "we have already...had a holiday of 5 years the result of which has

⁶³Dugdale, Balfour, 236; Riddell, Intimate Diary, 335-36.

⁶⁴Roskill, Hankey, Vol II, 241-42.

⁶⁵Beatty was following a line of argument he had presented to the Cabinet in December 1920. See CAB 16/37/3: N2 + N4, Admiralty Memoranda, "Naval Construction", December 14 and 20, 1920.

almost broke the armament firms of the Country." The admiral extrapolated that "another 10 years would require a large subsidy from the government which would defeat the Economical objective." In addition, the inevitable result at the end of the proposed holiday would be "a hectic period of feverish building" by all parties concerned, which would prove "greatly more expensive than a steady but very small building programme."⁶⁶ Beatty made no issue of the 35,000 ton size limit for capital ships, despite its incompatibility with the Admiralty's battle cruiser design (48,000 tons). He may have worried about the adverse publicity that opposing the constraint could have created, or, more likely, he may have believed that D.N.C. Tennyson D'Eyncourt would successfully modify his designs to meet the reduced limit. Beatty's criticisms would color the thinking of the B.E.D. during the early part of the Conference.⁶⁷

The Admiralty team rapidly prepared for the B.E.D. a paper along similar lines. The memorandum stated that the British delegation was in complete agreement with the proposals of the United States Government with regard to the capital ships to be retained, arrested in construction, and

⁶⁶David Beatty, as recorded in Roskill, Last Naval Hero, 308-09.

⁶⁷The similarity between Balfour's initial reactions and Beatty's detailed analysis is remarkable. Willert, Washington, 157, notes that Beatty passed Balfour "an obviously anxious note," which probably contained Beatty's thoughts, during Hughes' speech.

scrapped respectively by the British Empire, the United States and Japan. The paper then described the proposed naval holiday as neither "in the best interest of the economical conditions of the countries concerned" nor "likely to lead to a stable and durable condition of armament reduction." The BNSW surmised that at the end of a ten year building holiday, governments would desire to replace their aging vessels only to find their construction capacity atrophied:

There would follow, therefore, a period of feverish activity in the shipbuilding world. Armour plate and gun manufactories would be revived at great cost and all other specialized concerns whose products are required to bring to life a modern capital ship would once more be brought to life, the process of revivification being attended by considerable outlay.⁶⁸

Such a period might last six or seven years, with as many as six ships under construction at the same time. Thus, "spasmodic" cycles would cost more than the same construction stretched across the entire life cycle of the fleet. The Admiralty section instead recommended "the substitution of a low and steady rate of ship construction," which would reduce the expenditure necessary for a given size fleet. Furthermore, in the eyes of the BNSW, such a policy would have the added benefit of "diminishing the warship-building potentialities" of the nations involved

⁶⁸CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 1st Conference, Appendix I, November 13, 1921; ADM 116/2149: Views of the Admiralty Section regarding the American Proposals, November 13, 1921.

(e.g., two docks continuously occupied, rather than six docks used seven years of twenty), thus being more likely to produce feelings "of mutual confidence" than "intermittent outbursts of naval rivalry."⁶⁹

The BNSW also introduced some additional reservations. They agreed to the 5:5:3 ratio, with the proviso that it remained "subject to revision" in case Germany or Russia showed "any tendency to recreate their naval power." The memorandum then argued that the safety of the British Empire depended on the ability of the Royal Navy to secure Britain's sea lines of communication, particularly as pertained to foodstuffs, a task that required numerous cruisers beyond those allocated to the battle fleet.⁷⁰ Such cruisers, the BNSW argued, constituted "a purely defensive requirement" and hence should be excluded from any limitation imposed on fleet strength.⁷¹ The memorandum closed by advocating "the total abolition" of the submarine, although recognizing the difficulty of such a course.⁷²

⁶⁹CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 1st Conference, Appendix I, November 13, 1921; ADM 116/2149: Views of the Admiralty Section regarding the American Proposals, November 13, 1921.

⁷⁰The BNSW here reflected arguments produced earlier in the Admiralty memorandum, "One Power Standard", October, 1921.

⁷¹At that time, the Royal Navy possessed 322,000 tons of fleet auxiliary tonnage and 180,000 tons dedicated to the protection of sea communications. See ADM 116/2149: Notes on Auxiliary Combat Craft, November 13, 1921.

⁷²CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 1st Conference, November 13, 1921.

Beatty and Lee met with the B.E.D. on the afternoon of November 13th, when the First Sea Lord presented the views of the naval staff. In the process of discussion, the B.E.D. agreed that the naval force of France and Italy "could not be regarded as negligible," as Hughes had implied. The British commission then considered and rejected any possibility of limiting the operating range of submarines. The British delegation generally accepted the views expressed by Admiral Beatty. After the meeting, Hankey prepared a summary of Beatty's analysis for the Foreign Secretary. At the conclusion of the telegram, which would reach London the next morning, Balfour indicated his intention of accepting Hughes' proposal "as regards numbers of capital ships" while emphasizing the "widespread and special responsibilities of British Navy" and pointing out that "certain aspects of the scheme require further study" and therefore "should be referred to a commission."⁷³

Alexander Flint, secretary to the BNSW, separately sent a précis of the American proposals directly to the Admiralty Board.⁷⁴

On November 15th, Balfour presented the views of the B.E.D. to the Conference. He began by reminding those

⁷³CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 1st Conference, November 13, 1921. The telegram alone is recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 472-73.

⁷⁴ADM 1/8615/207: BNSW Memorandum S-1, November 13, 1921.

present that "the British Empire and Great Britain...are more profoundly concerned with...matters naval than it is possible for any other nation to be" because of Britain's dependence on sea-borne transport of foodstuffs. He then expressed "admiration and approval" for the general nature of the proposal, but noted that it skipped over any discussion of the navies of the smaller European powers and avoided the question of land armaments to focus on the battle fleets of the major powers. He described the American proposition as "reasonable" and, playing to the audience, pronounced: "We think it should be accepted; we firmly believe it will be accepted."⁷⁵

The elderly British statesman then made clear that the B.E.D. was not rendering unqualified approval. During his summation of Hughes' plan, the Lord President noted that it:

omits all consideration for the time being of those European nations who have diminished their fleets, and who at present have no desire, and I hope never will have any desire, to own fleets beyond the necessities that national honor and national defense require.⁷⁶

He was obviously referring to the absence of naval quotas for France and Italy. After stating that the occasion was ill-suited for going into detail, Balfour added: "There are

⁷⁵CAB 30/3: 2nd Plenary Session, November 15, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 96-104.

⁷⁶CAB 30/3: 2nd Plenary Session, November 15, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 96-104.

details which can only be adequately dealt with in committee." He discussed at length Britain's desire to limit more severely the tonnage allocation for the submarine class and perhaps the size of individual submarines. Before closing, the Lord President briefly noted the B.E.D.'s other two major concerns: "questions concerning replacement" and "questions concerning cruisers which are not connected with or required for fleet actions." Balfour's mention of the need for technical experts foreshadowed the difficult negotiations ahead.⁷⁷

The remainder of the Conference featured the process of negotiation whereby Britain, Japan, France, and Italy became reconciled to the American proposals and, to a lesser degree, those proposals evolved to conform to specific national interests. The British position, as stated by Balfour, involved a willingness to accept the Hughes plan conditional upon resolution of five issues: integration of France and Italy into the allocation of capital ship strength; acceptance by those nations and Japan of their allotted strengths; the replacement scheme; recognition of the British requirement for cruisers dedicated to the protection of sea lines of communication, apart from those serving with the battle fleet; and limitation of submarines.

⁷⁷CAB 30/3: 2nd Plenary Session, November 15, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 96-104.

France desired a return to her pre-war position as third naval power, and her unwillingness to accept Hughes' decision to base future allocations on current strength levels would nearly wreck the Conference. In the words of the British naval attaché in Paris, France "quite agrees to everyone else reducing their navy but do not think it should apply to them."⁷⁸ Moreover, she saw submarines as an inexpensive, efficient means of coastal defense, a position that greatly bothered Britain. Italy simply desired naval equality with France. Japan strongly desired multi-lateral naval limitation, but believed her national interests required, and her present strength justified, a ratio of 70% of the Anglo-American fleets, rather than the 60% that Hughes proposed. As neither the French nor the Japanese showed any immediate desire to accept the proposals of the United States, the B.E.D. initially spent much of its time analyzing the issues of submarines, capital ship replacement, and cruiser allocation.

The B.E.D. held its second formal session on the afternoon of November 15th. After settling details of procedure regarding meetings and the press, the delegates discussed the proposals by Secretary Hughes. Responding to a comment from Australian delegate Senator George Pearce on the importance of cruisers "over and above the ships

⁷⁸ADM 116/2150: Alexander Ramsay to Admiralty, December 21, 1921.

required as complementary to the battle fleet," Beatty explained that "the Naval Staff had carefully considered the essential need of stationing cruisers and auxiliary vessels abroad for the protection of Imperial communications." It was essential, from the Navy's viewpoint, that the B.E.D. "insist on a 'ration' of auxiliary vessels over and above those required for the main fleets."⁷⁹ Beatty's comments received general concurrence. The Canadian representative, Sir Robert Borden, then inquired as to the feasibility of modifying the proposed ten year holiday into a five year holiday. Beatty fended him off by stating that he was waiting for information from London, but that he thought "in the course of detailed expert examination the disadvantages of the American proposal would become obvious."⁸⁰ The B.E.D. finished their meeting with a discussion of how to limit the submarine. Beatty made the point that limiting a certain class of vessel by size, according to national advantage, might lead to a competition in terms of alternative proposals for reduction and that total abolition might be easier to defend.⁸¹

⁷⁹CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 2nd Conference, November 15, 1921.

⁸⁰The BNSW separately recommended criticism of the spasmodic building that would result at the end of a naval holiday, together with an invitation to the Americans to draft new proposals. See ADM 116/2149: Note to First Sea Lord for Technical Committee, November 15, 1921.

⁸¹CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 2nd Conference, November 15, 1921.

Later that evening, the B.E.D. received guidance from the Prime Minister. Lloyd George stated that the C.I.D had considered the Hughes proposals the day before (November 14th), and that the Cabinet had reviewed the C.I.D. conclusions, which were being relayed separately, that morning (November 15th). He firmly rejected Beatty's call for a slow and steady approach to naval construction: "The sovereign virtue of the naval holiday consists in the fact that there will for ten years be a complete cessation of capital shipbuilding."⁸² Using the Admiralty's claim that Jutland had given rise to a new standard of capital ship against them, the Prime Minister noted that a construction freeze would prevent the "existing fleets" from being "rendered obsolete by the appearance of superior capital vessels." Furthermore, he claimed, such an advantage "far outweighs the convenience of keeping armament plants in moderate activity by spreading replacements slowly over the ten years' holiday period." Lloyd George valued the naval holiday so highly as to assert that it "also outweighs the inconvenience of having to make a sudden expansion of shipbuilding plants at the end of the period." He then opined that he would rather "keep the necessary plant in existence by subsidies than mar the effect to world peace of

⁸²Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 475-76.

the ten years' holiday by building new battleships."⁸³ The Prime Minister concluded the first portion of his telegram with a blunt warning to his First Sea Lord: "We should regret our country taking the lead in such a proposal [the slow, steady construction alternative]."⁸⁴

Lloyd George then addressed the consequences in light of "possible building of submarines and aircraft." He noted:

Britain and the United States will be committed to powerful, costly, but obsolescent fleets of battleships almost all of pre-Jutland design. These battleships will run much greater risks even from existing submarines than would the new ships which were projected.⁸⁵

The Prime Minister then observed that the Hughes plan would restrict the development of capital ships, while "submarine development in numbers may still be considerable and in design unlimited." Nor did he think that the implementation of the Beatty plan would improve the situation, since "the bulk of the ships constituting the British and American

⁸³Both the BNSW and the Board of Trade desired to maintain a large ship-building capacity in the private sector in order to retain the element of competition. See ADM 116/2149: Naval Holiday and Arms Subsidies, November 14, 1921; Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 484-85.

⁸⁴Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 475-76.

⁸⁵Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 475-76.

lines of battle would still remain at a disadvantage compared to the constantly improving submarines." Lloyd George therefore recommended that "acceptance of the American proposal...carry with it the most rigorous restriction of submarine construction, if not indeed their complete abolition." The Prime Minister conceded the impossibility of regulating developments in air power because of the close relationship between civil and military aviation.⁸⁶

In this cable from London, Lloyd George displayed once again his lack of faith in the battleship. His description of capital ships as both "powerful" and "costly" hearkened to the Fisher era, when such vessels were regarded almost as a strategic panacea.⁸⁷ His use of the word "obsolete" to describe the proud squadrons that had accepted the surrender of the High Seas Fleet, however, revealed the shift in naval defense paradigm that marked the thinking of the British Cabinet. In 1919, Lloyd George had convinced Bonar Law that spending money on the construction of battleships would be "a big mistake."⁸⁸ After launching an investigation into the

⁸⁶Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 475-76.

⁸⁷Clark Reynolds, Command of the Sea: The History and Strategy of Maritime Empires (New York, 1974), 402-35.

⁸⁸David Lloyd George, as recorded in Riddell, Intimate Diary, 255.

future role of the capital ship, the Prime Minister had insisted that "it was very necessary to obtain the views of men who favoured the 'little ship'."⁸⁹ In November 1921, he had highlighted the vulnerability of capital ships to submarines. Lloyd George believed that the development of capital ships would inevitably fall further behind advances in submarine and aerial technologies. He curtly dismissed the future of existing battleships, which ran "much greater risks" from submarines.⁹⁰

The Prime Minister's assessment, while probably exaggerating the vulnerability of the capital ship to the submarine, nonetheless reflected the inability of capital ships to protect shipping from submarine attack. After all, at the height of the German submarine campaign in 1917, the First Sea Lord had informed him:

We are absolute masters of the situation as far as surface ships are concerned, but it must be realized...that this is all quite useless if the enemy's submarines paralyse, as they do now, our lines of communications.⁹¹

Lloyd George recognized quite rightly that while new construction techniques might reduce the vulnerability of capital ships, command of the sea's surface was not

⁸⁹CAB 2/3: C.I.D. Minute 135, December 23, 1920.

⁹⁰Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 475-76.

⁹¹Admiral Jellicoe, as recorded in Patterson, Jellicoe Papers, Vol II, 160-62.

sufficient to enable Britain to conduct the sea-borne trade necessary for her survival. This concern for the security of Britain's international commerce also appeared in the considerations of the C.I.D., which followed within a day.

The C.I.D. provided the B.E.D. four primary conclusions. First, the committee supported "the limitation of the number of capital ships." The C.I.D. skirted the issue of "the ten years' holiday" versus "a slow and continuous replacement policy" as "a matter for the Cabinet to decide." Second, the defense advisory panel exhorted the B.E.D. "to minimize the activities of submarines, if not secure their total abolition." Third, the C.I.D. recognized that the Washington powers had to be concerned with the naval developments of "non-signatory Powers" (i.e., Germany and Russia). Fourth, the committee voiced concern over any limitation of Britain's cruiser strength. The C.I.D. wrote:

The number of British cruisers must be based not upon the number of cruisers maintained by other Powers but upon the length and variety of sea communications over which food and other vital supplies for the United Kingdom must be transported.⁹²

This final reservation concerning the Britain's need for additional cruisers reinforced earlier analysis by the naval staff of the B.E.D.⁹³

⁹²Marquess Curzon to Sir Auckland Geddes, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 476-77.

⁹³See p. 335 above.

The early communications between the B.E.D. and the Cabinet established a pattern that later events seldom disturbed. Both sides agreed to accept capital ship limitation, to limit submarines insofar as possible, and to seek an extra allowance of cruisers beyond those needed for duty with the fleet. The major dispute within the British government concerned the wisdom of the naval holiday. The Cabinet, lacking naval representation, opposed any expenditure of funds on a technology distrusted by many, including the Prime Minister. The B.E.D. and the Admiralty opposed the holiday for several reasons. First, they worried about its effect on the ship-building industry and unemployment. After polling the major naval arms manufacturers, the Admiralty endorsed a continuous program of two ships every three years as the most effective means of reducing subsidies and unemployment.⁹⁴ Second, both the B.E.D. and the Admiralty were concerned with the difficulties of meeting the replacement schedule, which called for Britain to lay down fourteen ships between 1932 and 1934. The First Sea Lord explained to the rest of the delegation that "it was impossible even at present to build fourteen ships simultaneously."⁹⁵ Third, capital ship

⁹⁴ADM 1/8615/206: Admiralty telegram, November 15, 1921.

⁹⁵CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 3rd Conference, November 16, 1921. At the naval subcommittee meeting that day, the United States recognized that other nations might have difficulty maintaining armament plants. See ADM 116/2149: Note to

supporters feared that a naval holiday would preclude improvements in the capital ship and soon "the position of the capital ship will have depreciated enormously in comparison with new submarines and aircraft."⁹⁶

On November 17th, Balfour cabled the views of the B.E.D. on the naval holiday to the Foreign Secretary. The Lord President acknowledged the popular support evoked by the holiday, but emphasized the need "to examine the dangers involved in it and not to imperil the security of the British Empire."⁹⁷ He indicated that the American Navy was having second thoughts about the implications of their own proposals, and that Japan, France, and Italy would raise separate objections. Balfour made two observations on the Prime Minister's reference to government subsidy of armament firms: first, that costs would be high and future ministries might not be able to sustain such a course; and second, that other countries might nationalize their naval construction plant and thus maintain a superior ability to produce warships. He noted the holiday would probably produce "periodic and violent spells of armament activity at immense

First Sea Lord for Balfour's Committee, November 16, 1921.

⁹⁶ADM 116/1776: Admiralty Memorandum, "United States Proposals for the Reduction of Armaments", November 21, 1921.

⁹⁷Arthur Balfour to David Lloyd George, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 480-81.

cost." The Lord President then suggested that if the holiday were to eventuate, it should be extended to "all other combat craft as well as to capital ships" in order to prevent the Americans and Japanese from improving their positions with regard to auxiliary craft.⁹⁸ Balfour also rebutted the notion that a slow and steady building program would not improve the survivability of capital ships against air and submarine attacks. He assured the Cabinet that his naval experts had been instructed to avoid making premature commitments with regard to the proposed naval holiday.⁹⁹ This telegram from Balfour clearly indicated that opposition to the ten years' holiday was not limited to crusty admirals whose visions extended only as far as the view from the bridges of their battleships.

In a separate telegram that night, Balfour gave the Cabinet a general review of the progress of the Conference. He explained the division of the Conference into two main branches: one dealing with China and the Pacific, and the other with naval limitation. He also described the establishment of a technical subcommittee of naval experts.

⁹⁸The BNSW originated the idea on November 16th. See ADM 116/2149: Note to First Sea Lord for Balfour's Committee, November 16, 1921. When Beatty proposed it to the B.E.D., they concurred. See CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 4th Conference, November 17th, 1921.

⁹⁹Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 480-81.

Balfour concluded by explaining that the involved nature of committee work on the American proposals "renders difficult any forecast at the present time."¹⁰⁰ He correctly assessed the obstacles in the way of any naval agreement.

The following afternoon, Balfour and Beatty met with Hughes in an attempt to resolve the capital ship question. The immediate issue concerned the advisability of permitting the technical subcommittee to discuss capital ship ratios for France and Italy. The British delegates explained their position that the size of the Royal Navy "cannot be considered without relation to possible French and Italian navies." Hughes agreed, but pointed out that Japan's consent to the 5:5:3 ratio was the sine qua non of a lasting agreement and should be secured before "embarking on any subsidiary problems."¹⁰¹ The three agreed that Hughes and Balfour would discuss the relative strength of the three major powers with Baron Kato. Hughes recognized that while Britain had agreed to a naval strength relative to that of America and Japan, the absolute strength of the Royal Navy was "subject to satisfactory arrangements being reached in regard to numbers of French and Italian capital ships."

¹⁰⁰ Arthur Balfour to David Lloyd George, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 482-83.

¹⁰¹ Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 486.

Finally, the Anglo-American delegates decided to move very cautiously with regard to the proceedings of the technical subcommittee--in effect, reserving the crucial decisions at the diplomatic level. Balfour subsequently reported the contents of the meeting to the Foreign Secretary.¹⁰²

On November 18th, Balfour met with Hughes and Baron Tomosaburo Kato. The chief delegate from Japan, who also attended the naval subcommittee, stated his dissatisfaction with Hughes' proposal that Japan accept 60% of the capital ship strength of the Atlantic powers and demanded an increase.¹⁰³ Hughes explained that his plan reflected existing strengths rather than national requirements, which could be subject to "endless and inconclusive discussion."¹⁰⁴ He then stated that according to his experts, Japan was entitled to only 50% of the Anglo-American strength. Balfour declared his support for the American approach, despite his opinion that "the British Empire stood more in need of battleships than the United States." Kato, tacitly

¹⁰²Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 486.

¹⁰³The B.E.D. had known for three days Japan desired a capital ship ratio of 10-10-7, together with a strength in aircraft carriers equal to the United States and Britain, and that Japan was not prepared to scrap either the Mutsu or the Aki. See CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 3rd Conference, November 16, 1921.

¹⁰⁴Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 489.

accepting Hughes' methodology, then expressed his desire to check the accuracy of the American calculations. The meeting ended on a cordial note.¹⁰⁵

That same day, Hankey met with Sadao Saburi, the Secretary-General of the Japanese delegation, to discuss the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Balfour had wanted to cover the Alliance with his counterpart, Baron Kijuro Shidehara, but the latter's illness had prevented a meeting. The Lord President thus authorized Hankey to discuss the issue with Saburi, who indicated Japan's willingness to transform the Alliance into a tripartite arrangement. Hankey explained the American concern to avoid security commitments and delivered numerous documents outlining the British position.¹⁰⁶ The timing of these meetings reinforced the relationship between any future naval limitation agreement and the ultimate disposition of the Alliance.

Diplomatic talks thus proceeded in parallel with naval discussions. On November 23rd, the Lord President provided Baron Kato--Shidehara had not yet recovered--copies of the

¹⁰⁵ Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 489.

¹⁰⁶ Hankey to Balfour, in Enclosure 1, Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 505-09.

draft tripartite agreement given to Hughes.¹⁰⁷ Shidehara then modified the proposal into a purely consultive pact. After receiving Shidehara's scheme on the morning of November 26th, Balfour discussed it with Root and Lodge that afternoon. The Americans were inclined to accept but suggested that the arrangement be modified to include France.¹⁰⁸ By this time, each of the three major naval powers had proposed slightly different versions of a multi-lateral agreement designed to replace the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the latest (American) version requiring the participation of France, as yet unaware of the negotiations.

The Japanese naval section, meanwhile, continued to oppose the capital strength ratio of 5:5:3. They pressed for a definition of existing strength, explained by their American counterparts as post-dreadnought ships with keels laid, by percentage complete. The Japanese were not satisfied with the American decision to include ships under construction (i.e., not yet prepared to fight). Vice-Admiral Hiroharu Kato's naval section disputed the figures provided by the United States Navy, with regard to completeness and to the exclusion of pre-dreadnought ships.

¹⁰⁷Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 505-08.

¹⁰⁸Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 512-13.

The American delegation gave some ground and raised their calculation of Japan's existing strength from 49% to about 58% of the U.S. Navy, but refused to agree to Japan's desired 70% ratio.¹⁰⁹

The B.E.D. considered the discussions between Japan and the United States on the afternoon of November 28th. Chatfield briefed the delegates on the latest developments in naval arms limitation. American naval authorities, after a careful refutation of Japanese objections, thought that Japan might accept the Hughes proposals. The admiral anticipated being asked at the next subcommittee meeting to evaluate the 5:5:3 ratio. He intended to answer that the proposal seemed reasonable from "a world-wide point of view" and that Japan "could accept the 5:5:3 ratio safely and remain as strong as any of the Western Powers would be in the Pacific Ocean."¹¹⁰ Chatfield then turned to the latest sticking point between the United States and Japan, the fate of the Mutsu. The Japanese, who claimed the battleship was fully complete and practically in commission, certainly wanted to retain their newest capital ship. The Americans, Chatfield estimated, would want to keep as compensation two

¹⁰⁹ADM 1/8615/207: BNSW Memorandum S-2, November 24, 1921.

¹¹⁰CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 8th Conference, November 28, 1921. This presentation reflected views expressed in a paper that Chatfield wrote the previous day. See ADM 116/2149: B.N.S.W. Memorandum, "The 5-5-3 Ratio", November 27, 1921.

more battleships of the Maryland class, each almost 90% finished, thus retaining a 3:2 advantage in post-Jutland capital ships completed. Britain would probably receive authority "to design and build two new capital ships of 35,000 tons."¹¹¹ The three major naval powers were thus on the verge of a naval limitation agreement. Balfour sent Curzon a telegram which apprised the Cabinet of the situation on November 30th.¹¹²

Balfour called on Baron Tomosaburo Kato, the chief delegate from Japan, early the afternoon of December 1st to discuss naval limitation. Kato explained that he was personally convinced of the need for naval limitation, but that he needed some assistance in order to portray concession of the 60% ratio of capital ships to Japanese public opinion as something other than capitulation.¹¹³ The Japanese delegate explained to Balfour that his naval advisors still believed Japan was entitled to a ratio of 70% based on the American formula of existing strength. Balfour

¹¹¹CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 8th Conference, November 28, 1921. This presentation reflected views expressed in a paper that Chatfield wrote the previous day. See ADM 116/2149: B.N.S.W. Memorandum, "The 5-5-3 Ratio", November 27, 1921.

¹¹²Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 524.

¹¹³Japanese naval historian Hiroyuki Agawa, in The Reluctant Admiral: Yamamoto and the Imperial Japanese Navy, notes that Kato felt obliged to accept naval limitation due to the rising cost of the Japanese battlefleet, which in 1921 absorbed one-third of the national budget.

noted that if Japanese recalcitrance caused the Conference to fail, the United States would surely embark on a large program of capital ship construction that would worsen Japan's strategic position. Kato then discussed the strategic position in the Pacific and suggested that "Japan's objections would be removed if America would undertake to observe the status quo as regards fortifications in the Pacific," mentioning Manila, Guam, and Hawaii by name. Balfour immediately pointed out that "there was a distinct difference between Manila and Guam, which are respectively within 1,318 and 1,360 miles of Japan, and Hawaii, which is 3,374 miles distant." Kato conceded the point and then emphasized the political difficulty of scrapping the battleship Mutsu, paid for by the savings of Japanese schoolchildren and already serving with the fleet. Balfour then obtained Kato's permission to share his views with Hughes.¹⁴ At no point in the conversation had either delegate referred to the development of Singapore.

Balfour facilitated the unraveling of the tangled skein of security issues. Armed with Kato's concessions to Hughes' proposal, the Lord President called upon the Secretary of State. After Balfour recounted his conversation with Kato, Hughes noted that allowing Japan to retain the Mutsu "would make a bad hole in the American

¹⁴CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 10th Conference, Appendix I, December 2, 1921.

proposal" and that America also had several ships close to completion, to which Balfour agreed. Hughes then suggested a new arrangement whereby:

America and Japan should reciprocally agree that if either one or the other were to desire to erect fortifications in the Pacific, the opposite party should be notified, and should then have the right to terminate the whole of the naval agreement.

Balfour gently dismissed the Secretary's counter-proposal as introducing "a certain element of instability" and induced him to carry the Japanese proposal to President Harding.¹¹⁵ The Lord President then sent a report of his discussions to the Foreign Secretary.¹¹⁶

Balfour then received London's comments on his report dealing with the deadlock between America and Japan. The Prime Minister related the C.I.D.'s conclusions. First, Britain should accept Japanese retention of the Mutsu, with the United States and Britain each being allowed two new vessels in compensation, as the British fleet would gain the greatest relative strength and the new construction would reduce unemployment on the Clyde and Tyne. Second, despite Admiralty objections, Britain should accept the naval holiday with regard to capital ships. Lloyd George here again demonstrated his loss of faith in the capital ship:

¹¹⁵CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 10th Conference, Appendix II, December 2, 1921.

¹¹⁶Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 529-30.

We cannot exclude from our minds the possibility that in ten years time the march of science in aviation, in submarines, torpedoes, shells and explosives may render it impossible to construct an inexpugnable capital ship especially within the tonnage limit governing replacements.

Third, Britain would not necessarily replace capital ships as fast as the Hughes plan allowed, when minor delays would allow far more economical construction by obviating the need for retaining excessive construction capacity. The C.I.D. also agreed that Britain should press for the abolition of submarines and, if frustrated, retain "entire freedom in building anti-submarine craft."¹⁷

With these instructions, Balfour met with Kato and Hughes on December 2nd. Kato repeated at greater length his presentation of the previous afternoon, with the distinction that Japan desired the status quo with regard to bases as well as fortifications. Hughes replied in great detail. He linked American acceptance of the status quo in the Pacific to Japanese acceptance of both the capital ship agreement of 15:15:9 (end state) and a four power treaty in the Pacific to replace the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Hughes further made clear that America could not accept any limitation of the development of Hawaii, which he described as too far from Japan to serve as an offensive base. Balfour reiterated his advocacy of the capital ship agreement "on the grounds of

¹⁷Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 526-28.

general policy." He supported Japan's proposal to maintain the status quo in the Pacific as reasonable and opined the effect of those two proposals together with the quadruple Pacific arrangement would be to ensure the safety of Japan. The meeting ended cordially, Kato reserving acceptance pending word from Tokyo.¹¹⁸

The following day, Balfour dispatched a pair of telegrams to Curzon. The first one reported the State Department meeting with Hughes and Kato. The second one related a brief conversation at the end of the meeting between Hughes and Kato concerning the proposed four power treaty intended to replace the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Kato had explained that he was waiting on instructions from his government, but that the Japanese delegation to the Conference accepted the quadruple arrangement and that he saw no reason to believe he would receive instructions to the contrary. They had discussed approaching French delegate René Viviani, whom Hughes described as quite sensitive at the relatively minor role thus far allowed to France. Balfour also sought confirmation of his authority to accept the proposed four power treaty.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 533-34.

¹¹⁹Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 535.

On the afternoon of December 7th, the B.E.D. met for the eleventh time. Balfour informed the delegation that he had received from Hughes a draft agreement regarding the Pacific. He described the quadruple treaty, involving the United States, Britain, Japan, and France, as closely resembling the British proposals. He had a meeting scheduled with Hughes and Kato, and, if the latter agreed, Hughes would ask France to associate. After minor revision, the B.E.D. accepted the draft four power treaty.¹²⁰

That night, the Foreign Secretary sent guidance to the B.E.D. regarding the four power arrangement for the Pacific. Curzon welcomed the enlargement of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance to include America. He noted that Britain had "always contemplated a tripartite arrangement with the United States."¹²¹ He took a less positive view, however, toward other participants. The Foreign Secretary predicted "the admission of France, although tolerable if required to secure the adhesion of America, will probably seriously diminish the value of the proposed substitute for alliance in Japanese eyes." Curzon flatly opposed including Italy, who had "no substantial interests in the Far East and whose inclusion, in the Foreign Secretary's opinion, "would in all

¹²⁰CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 11th Conference, Appendix, December 7, 1921.

¹²¹Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 539-40.

probability lead to similar and embarrassing requests" by other small powers.¹²²

The following day, December 8th, Admiral Chatfield received a visit from a Japanese naval officer, Katsunoshin Yamanashi.¹²³ Yamanashi, at the behest of Japan's senior naval representative, Vice Admiral Hiroharu Kato, wanted to discuss matters concerned with Pacific security. He suggested that Japan would accept the status quo with regard to bases and fortifications if the United States did so at Manila, Guam, and Hawaii, whereupon Chatfield told him, as Hughes had told Kato, that the United States might agree to Manila and Guam, but not to Hawaii, which was at least 3,000 miles from Japan. Yamanashi then asked about Singapore and Hong Kong, probably the real reason for the visit. Chatfield told him Britain would probably agree to leave Hong Kong as it was, but not Singapore. Yamanashi seemed satisfied with this, and suggested that the delegates could move quickly if the admirals agreed.¹²⁴

Two days later, Secretary Hughes convened the 4th Plenary Session of the Conference on the Limitation of Armament. He then yielded the floor to Senator Henry Cabot

¹²²Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 539-40.

¹²³Chatfield refers to him as a captain, while the conference record lists him as a rear admiral.

¹²⁴ADM 116/2149: Chatfield Note, December 8, 1921.

Lodge, who read to the assembled delegates the text of the Four Power Treaty between the United States, Britain, France, and Japan. The first clause called for the signatories, in the case of controversy among themselves, to "invite the other High Contracting Parties to a joint conference." The second clause required the participants to "communicate with each other fully and frankly" in the case of outside aggression. The third clause defined the life of the treaty as ten years and thereafter until one year beyond denunciation by one of the contracting parties. The final clause established that ratification of the treaty by all parties would terminate the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.¹²⁵

Balfour rose to deliver a eulogy to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. He noted that the Alliance, which he had concluded originally in 1902, had "been the cause of much searching of heart, of some suspicions, of a good deal of animadversion in important sections of opinion in the United States."¹²⁶ Balfour acknowledged that American opinion could rightly point out that the original conditions that had given rise to the agreement no longer endured, but then asked that same opinion to recognize that the ties forged

¹²⁵CAB 30/3: 4th Plenary Session, December 10, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 146-180.

¹²⁶CAB 30/3: 4th Plenary Session, December 10, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 146-180.

between Britain and Japan had "stood the strain of common sacrifices, common anxieties, common efforts, common triumphs" through two wars. He explained that Britain, faced with the choice of offending America by retaining the Alliance and offending Japan by denouncing it, had long desired to replace the existing treaty with one "which should embrace all the Powers concerned in the vast area of the Pacific." Balfour concluded by manifesting his hope that the Four Power Treaty would facilitate a naval arms agreement.¹²⁷

That same day, Balfour received a pointed cable from Curzon asking for information concerning the status of the ten years' holiday. The Foreign Secretary claimed that the Cabinet was concerned about American press reports "to the effect that the British naval experts have pointed out to the American naval experts that the scheme as announced by Mr. Hughes, however well meant, will not work in practice."¹²⁸ He further declared that the Cabinet had received little information about developments at the

¹²⁷CAB 30/3: 4th Plenary Session, December 10, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 146-180.

¹²⁸Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 544-45.

Conference beyond a letter from Hankey.¹²⁹ Curzon flatly stated:

The ten years' absolute naval holiday in capital ship construction originally proposed by the United States ought to be accepted definitely as the policy to which Great Britain will subscribe.

He then criticized the notion of British naval experts helping out their American counterparts, an action that he described as "a gratuitous and even a wanton task." Curzon went so far as to suggest that "admirals on both sides" were pursuing a joint game to frustrate the desires of their "governments and peoples."¹³⁰

The Foreign Secretary was careful to explain, however, that the naval holiday did not extend to "cruisers and small craft."¹³¹ He stated that "the purely naval interests of Great Britain" would be satisfied by "a ten years' absolute naval holiday in capital ship construction" and either

¹²⁹That statement appears very curious in light of Balfour's frequent cables to Curzon. The Lord President first raised the subject on November 17th and on the 28th had provided a significant analysis of both the Mutsu arrangements and the "exceptional difficulties" of implementing the ten years' holiday. Balfour had at that time written to the Cabinet that the "Americans admit mistake of launching the idea before realizing impracticability." Roskill, Hankey, Vol II, 253, notes that Churchill originally drafted the telegram and probably supplied the bombastic tone.

¹³⁰Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 544-45.

¹³¹Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 544-45.

"perfect freedom in the construction of smaller craft" or "the abolition of submarines plus a limited construction of smaller craft." Curzon concluded by suggesting the House would not be pleased if the B.E.D failed to secure a naval holiday.¹³² These instructions from London once again indicated a greater concern for anti-submarine capability than for battleships.

The Cabinet cable elicited a double response. First, Beatty submitted a note denying the charge of insubordination. He wrote:

I have read Telegram No. 101 to Mr. Balfour with the utmost amazement, and I desire to place on record that there is no foundation in fact for the statements therein made, that the British Naval experts are working in collusion with the United States Naval experts to frustrate the views of the Governments of both countries.¹³³

Two days later, Balfour sent Curzon a telegram with greater explanatory value. He stated that on the evening following Hughes' proposals, Lord Lee had dined with the Secretary of the Navy, who "had already realised holes in 10 years' holiday and was much disturbed by discovery," while the Cabinet's views had not reached the B.E.D.¹³⁴ In that

¹³²Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 544-45.

¹³³ADM 116/1176: Beatty Note, December 10, 1921.

¹³⁴Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 552.

circumstance, Balfour judged, discussions were inevitable, and he had in fact approved of them. He refrained from pointing out the obvious falsehood of the charge of failing to keep London informed. On November 17th and 28th, he had submitted detailed analyses of the naval holiday to the Foreign Secretary. In the latter telegram, Balfour pointed out the ludicrous situation that would come to pass under the Hughes plan, whereby the three major powers would have to begin constructing 27 capital ships within a two year period.¹³⁵ The Lord President refused to endorse the naval holiday. He claimed that "refusal of Japanese to surrender Mutsu...destroys 10 year holiday at least in its original form."¹³⁶ From that point forward, however, Balfour no longer attempted to sway the Cabinet to oppose the naval building holiday.

On the afternoon of December 12th, the Committee on Limitation of Armament met briefly. The delegates modified the naval subcommittee to include the heads of delegations

¹³⁵CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 8th Conference, November 28, 1921. Also recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 519-21. In a separate paper to the Cabinet, the Admiralty argued the difficulties of expanding Britain's naval building capacity after a long dormant period. Capital outlay for armor plate plant would cost some £30 millions, with annual subsidies for slips, plate, and gun mountings running to £5-6 millions per year. See ADM 116/1776: Admiralty Memorandum, "American proposals for the Limitation of Naval Armaments", November 30, 1921.

¹³⁶Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 552.

as well as both a civilian and a naval expert. In practice, that meant the head of delegation plus his naval minister and senior admiral. The new group was called the Subcommittee of Fifteen on Naval Limitation.³⁷

The new arrangement served to allow the naval experts to modify Hughes' proposals for capital ship retention and scrapping in order to accommodate Japan's desire to retain the Mutsu while preserving the 5:5:3 ratio.

Theodore Roosevelt, the American naval expert, developed a naval limitation proposal that would enable Japan to retain the Mutsu. The three major naval powers would agree to the 5:5:3 ratio for capital ships while maintaining the status quo in the Pacific with regard to fortifications and bases. In order to retain the Mutsu, Japan would agree to scrap the Settsu, thus retaining 10 (2 post-Jutland) capital ships of 313,300 tons. The exchange would increase the total displacement of Japan's fleet by 13,600 tons. In compensation, the United States would receive permission to complete two ships of the 1916 Program, Colorado and Washington, and scrap the older North Dakota and Delaware. America would thus retain 18 (3 post-Jutland) ships of 525,850 tons, increasing her total capital ship tonnage by 25,200 tons. Britain in turn would be

³⁷CAB 30/9: 3rd Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 12, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 442-444.

allowed to construct two new vessels of 35,000 tons and then to scrap 4 ships of King George V type: Ajax, Centurion, Erin, and King George V. Britain would then possess 20 (3 post-Jutland) ships of 578,050 tons, a reduction in her fleet displacement of 26,400 tons. This proposal would increase the end state tonnages authorized to 525,000 tons for the British and American fleets and 315,000 for Japan and, with Mutsu arrangements excepted, maintain the ten years' naval holiday. The entire proposal was contingent upon successful incorporation of France and Italy.¹³⁸

The B.E.D. did not immediately agree to Roosevelt's proposal, as British naval experts sought a displacement larger than the 35,000 ton standard for their two compensatory ships. Capital ship design, for any given size, involves trade-offs between hitting power, armor protection, speed, and range. Increased displacement allows improved performance in any of the above qualities (larger vessels, surprisingly, move through the water more efficiently). British designers traditionally chose relatively large ships in order to obtain the offensive power and the range necessary for their naval doctrine. The Hood, for example, exceeded 41,000 tons, while the newest American battleships displaced only 32,600 tons each. Given the need to protect capital ships against the airplane and

¹³⁸ADM 1/8615/207: BNSW Memorandum S-9, December 21, 1921.

the submarine in the relatively enclosed waters of the Mediterranean and the North Sea, the Admiralty chose a displacement of 45,000 tons for Britain's newest capital ships. On November 21st, in response to a query by Beatty, the Controller had opposed the 35,000 ton limit on capital ships and stated that 45,000 tons "is considered minimum to meet satisfactorily attacks from existing guns, torpedoes and aircraft, and to embody adequate speed and radius of action for British Empire needs." On December 7th, the Admiralty informed the BNSW that ships of 35,000 tons, with adequate protection against torpedoes mounting 750-lb warheads, could carry only nine 15-inch guns, rather than the 16-inch guns specified in the 45,000 ton designs.¹³⁹ On December 13th, Balfour therefore argued to Hughes and Kato that Britain should receive permission to build two battleships of 45,000 tons, on which much money, time, and labor had been expended, while scrapping four ships of the King George V class. Kato agree, but Hughes demurred. They adjourned to consult their naval advisors.¹⁴⁰

The following day, Balfour, Hughes, and Kato met again to discuss compensation for the Mutsu. Balfour reiterated his arguments of the day before, emphasizing that within the

¹³⁹ADM 1/8615/207: Admiralty telegram, December 7, 1921.

¹⁴⁰Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 556.

classes being scrapped, British ships were both heavier and newer. In the newer classes, however, advantage rested with the American vessels. The three leaders agreed that if Britain were to build two ships comparable to the Hood, she would have to scrap a battle cruiser in addition to the four King George Vs. Britain would retain an advantage of 50,000 tons (575,000 versus 525,000) to compensate for the age of her pre-Jutland ships. Discussion then focused on the impact of the super-Hoods on the replacement schedule. The extra displacement of those vessels would force Britain to choose between new capital ships of less than 35,000 tons displacement or maintaining only fourteen full size vessels. Hughes then repeated Roosevelt's original proposal, whereby Britain would retain a similar advantage of 53,000 tons (578,000 to 525,000). The three men then took a brief recess to consider the two alternatives in conjunction with their naval experts. Lee and Chatfield suggested that the matter should be referred to London.⁴¹

Balfour raised a new issue upon resumption of the discussion. On Chatfield's urging, he brought to the attention of the American and Japanese delegates the difference between British and American methods of determining displacement. American displacement figures

⁴¹Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 558-59.

included fuel oil and water, while British legend tonnage did not.¹⁴² Thus the British figures represented a slightly larger vessel (35,000 legend tons equals 37,000 tons by the American standard). Balfour explained the additional weight would enable designers to provide additional protection against air and sea menaces and that British experts considered the difference essential to the construction of the properly balanced ship.¹⁴³ This line of argument impressed neither Hughes nor Kato. The meeting thus ended without result.¹⁴⁴

On the morning of December 15, Balfour amplified his argument about the importance of the difference in tonnage calculations. Hughes accepted the British position, and then appealed to Balfour to forego the super-Hoods as violating the spirit of the limitation agreement. Balfour accepted the standard size limit of 35,000 tons (now 37,000 tons) for Britain's compensatory ships.¹⁴⁵ Chatfield, however, remained dissatisfied and continued to press his

¹⁴²Ernie Chatfield, It Might Happen Again (London, 1947), 5.

¹⁴³ADM 116/2129: BNSW Memorandum, "Naval Staff Counter to Mutsu", December 14, 1921.

¹⁴⁴Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 559-60.

¹⁴⁵Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 560-61.

view that tonnage limitation remained susceptible to subterfuge and that numbers of capital ships were much more easily verified.¹⁴⁶ The three major naval powers thus agreed to Roosevelt's scheme, as modified by the change in tonnage standard (5:5:3 ratio, capital ship limitation of 35,000 tons, the ten year naval holiday, Mutsu arrangements excepted, and status quo in the Pacific), conditional upon the inclusion of France and Italy.

The Conference had its first major indication of the attitude of France toward arms limitation on November 21st. Aristide Briand, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, spoke eloquently of the desire in France for peace, a prospect impaired by "the moral aspect of the problem in Germany." He quoted extensively from a recent publication by General Erich Ludendorff, who described war as "a natural phenomenon" and "the last and only decisive factor in the settlement of political questions." Briand addressed the German capacity for rearmament, including factories, war materials, and seven million trained soldiers. He concluded by explaining that France requested the Conference to declare its understanding of French intentions to maintain a sizeable army.¹⁴⁷ France thus asked the delegates to exclude land armaments from limitation.

¹⁴⁶ADM 116/2149: Chatfield Memorandum, December 16, 1921.

¹⁴⁷CAB 30/3: 3rd Plenary Session, November 21, 1921.

That same day, the British Cabinet received two divergent communications regarding the intentions of France. From Washington, Balfour sent record of an interview in which Briand expressed the view that the American participation in the naval conference was motivated primarily by the Harding Administration's desire for political gain that would result from tax reductions following naval disarmament. Briand further declared that Hughes was ignorant of conditions in Europe and the Far East. Balfour therefore concluded that Briand had realized that "France had nothing to hope for from the United States" and that "co-operation with Britain was essential for France."¹⁴⁸

From Paris, however, the British Ambassador had a very different outlook. Lord Hardinge explained that French public opinion had viewed the Washington Conference "with a certain amount of apprehension" as France appeared to lack a prominent position in disarmament discussions.¹⁴⁹ The best France could hope for was a divergence of American and British interests requiring the services of a mediator. Balfour's response to the Hughes plan, however, had

¹⁴⁸Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 489-90.

¹⁴⁹Lord Hardinge to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 490-93.

virtually eliminated that possibility. The Hughes plan itself had caused the greatest unrest. French defense needs, dictated by a large coastline and overseas colonies, necessitated a large force of "light cruisers and, above all, submarines." British attempts to abolish these craft had been aimed at France, with a view to dominating the Mediterranean. The Senate Naval Committee had thus increased the number of submarines authorized over the next three years from 36 to 60. In Hardinge's opinion, France would demand authorization to build to the position of third naval power.¹⁵⁰

The second meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament took place on the morning of November 23rd. In accordance with guidance from Lloyd George, Balfour raised the question of the limitation of land armaments.¹⁵¹ Briand replied that France constituted a special case--since the Conference was unwilling to guarantee assistance, France would decide her own requirements. He countered by suggesting subcommittees on aircraft, gases, and the laws of war. Briand refused to accept any limitation on French military strength without international guarantees, however,

¹⁵⁰Lord Hardinge to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 490-93.

¹⁵¹Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 494.

and stated that on that subject he "had received a very explicit mandate" from the French Parliament.¹⁵² That afternoon, the Committee on Program and Procedure with respect to Limitation of Armament established the subcommittees suggested by Briand.¹⁵³

On November 24th, the B.E.D. received two related cables from London. After the C.I.D. considered the French intentions of resisting any limitation of military and aerial strength, combined with possible expansion of their submarine forces, Curzon sent his personal appreciation of the position to Balfour. The Foreign Secretary predicted:

The situation of this country vis-à-vis France will become impossible if British Navy is to be restricted in accordance with the American proposals while the French army continues on the scale of at least a hundred divisions together with overwhelming aviation and the intention to build a very large fleet of submarines.¹⁵⁴

After describing the French Army as "a serious menace to the peace and freedom of Europe", he pointed out the degree to which the Royal Air Force was outnumbered by its French

¹⁵²CAB 30/9: 2nd Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, November 23, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 422-444.

¹⁵³CAB 30/8: 2nd Meeting of the Committee on Program and Procedure with Respect to Limitation of Armament, November 23, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 410-416.

¹⁵⁴Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 495-97.

counterpart. Curzon then noted the decision by the French Senate to construct 24 additional submarines beyond the 12 already funded. He wrote: "We cannot contemplate a situation where Great Britain would be in a few years at the mercy of France if present happy relations were to deteriorate." The Foreign Secretary urged Balfour to enlist American assistance to achieve "a general disarmament rather than disarmament by Britain alone." He concluded by rejecting a naval arms limitation agreement by the three major powers without French participation.¹⁵⁵

The Foreign Secretary then sent another cable which contained the views of the Prime Minister. Lloyd George took a similar line to that followed by Curzon: he disputed the French need for a massive army, he worried about the potential of a French air attack on Britain, and he regarded growth in the French submarine fleet as "the most serious matter of all." The Prime Minister stated:

France dominates the sea approaches to the United Kingdom from the south and could make the English Channel and the Mediterranean Sea impossible for British sea-borne trade by the use of her submarines.¹⁵⁶

He noted that in a war with France, Britain would require "a

¹⁵⁵Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 495-97.

¹⁵⁶Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 497-500.

very large force of destroyers and small craft"--in fact, a much larger force than the American proposals would permit. Lloyd George then reiterated his bias in favor of smaller vessels: "The capital ships of Great Britain are becoming obsolete as regards resisting attack by submarines and air attack." He urged the abolition of the submarine, and suggested Balfour adopt "an uncompromising attitude regarding M. Briand's military and possible air proposals" as a bargaining chip.¹⁵⁷

Later that same day, Balfour sent a reply to London that registered his unhappiness over his recent instructions. He emphasized the importance of countering the "post-Jutland naval programme of the United States."¹⁵⁸ While that goal remained possible, according to Balfour, France was in a position to frustrate its achievement. The Lord President explained that France was being asked to accept an extraordinarily subordinate naval position in the world, and that antagonizing France by opposing the size of her military forces was an act of folly. He characterized risking a probable naval arms agreement in an attempt to secure an improbable military limitation treaty as "not the

¹⁵⁷Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 497-500.

¹⁵⁸Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 503-05.

highest wisdom." Balfour indicated his intention of attempting the abolition of submarines but admitted little hope of success.¹⁵⁹

On November 25th, the Admiralty provided the Cabinet with the latest information from France. Captain Alexander Ramsay, the naval attaché in Paris, had reported on November 18th that France intended to claim pride of place as "the third naval power."¹⁶⁰ The French would likely request agreement to build to such a position, although they would probably not do so. French naval officials thought America desired submarines as "le moyen de défense de côtes à bon marché" (inexpensive coastal defense), and did not understand Britain's lack of desire to have submarines for colonial defense. Lastly, France wanted compensation for not having built during the war. Five days later, Ramsay reported again. This time, he conveyed the French intention to refuse to accept any limitation of submarine strength below that of the strongest power. He explained the French willingness to limit capital ship strength as a means of reducing the gap between British and French sea power. Ramsay then cited a work by French Captain Raoul Castex that, in his opinion, clearly supported the German methods

¹⁵⁹Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 503-05.

¹⁶⁰ADM 116/1776: Admiralty Memorandum, "Washington Conference on Limitation of Armaments", November 25, 1921.

of unrestricted submarine warfare. The French interpreted British opposition to the submarine as an attack on themselves.¹⁶¹ The Admiralty also forwarded Ramsay's information to the B.E.D., with emphasis on the French intention to demand a submarine strength equal to that of the strongest powers.¹⁶²

Early on the morning of November 27th, Lloyd George answered Balfour's request of the 25th for Cabinet reconsideration of policy guidance. He explained that the C.I.D. saw "the enormous French armies" as a "menace to European peace." Lloyd George dismissed "the claim of France and consequently of Italy to build up to the standard of the 3rd naval power."¹⁶³ He was far more concerned with the growth of hostile submarine fleets in European waters. He suggested allowing the Latin powers to expand their capital ship strength in exchange for "the virtual abolition of the submarines or at least the prevention of new building of submarines of any kind." If France and Italy refused to limit their battlefleets, Lloyd George advised Balfour to accept a capital ship treaty with America and Japan. If

¹⁶¹ADM 116/1776: Admiralty Memorandum, "Washington Conference on Limitation of Armaments", November 25, 1921.

¹⁶²ADM 1/8615/207: Admiralty telegrams, November 26, 1921.

¹⁶³Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 513-16.

they persisted in building submarines, however, then Britain:

could agree to no limitation upon the smaller vessels, light cruisers, destroyers, etc. which would be vital with a deadly submarine menace so near her doors and... to protect our food supplies from the submarine menace.

Here, the Prime Minister indicated a willingness to spend money to prepare against the one naval threat he genuinely feared.¹⁶⁴

On the morning of December 9th, Balfour talked with Hughes about the ratio of capital ships to be allocated to France under the naval limitation proposal. After a meeting with Viviani and Shidehara to place the finishing touches on the four power arrangement for Pacific security, the Anglo-American delegates stayed behind. Balfour informed Hughes that Viviani had approached the Lord President with instructions from Paris "to the effect that France was likely to ask for the same proportion as Japan."¹⁶⁵ Hughes said he regretted not formally raising the issue with France, but he believed agreement on the Japanese ratio took priority. The Secretary of State noted that France possessed seven modern capital ships displacing about

¹⁶⁴Marquess Curzon to Arthur Balfour, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 513-16.

¹⁶⁵Hankey Note, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 548.

170,000 tons, together with some older vessels. He stated that in his discussions with Viviani and French Ambassador Jules Jusserand, the French delegates had implied that their nation would be content with an allocation of about 175,000 tons although she would prefer authorization to build to the level of the third power. Hughes had suggested that he thought 175,000 tons was a fair allocation. Balfour, at that time, refrained from speculating on the effect of the French demand on the British position, although Hughes had already acknowledged the linkage.¹⁶⁶

The agreement of Britain, Japan, and the United States to accept the 5:5:3 ratio, as modified to include the Mutsu arrangements, collided with French intransigence. On December 15th, the Subcommittee of Fifteen met to discuss American addenda to the original proposals whereby France and Italy would receive a quota of 175,000 tons of capital ships. French Admiral F.J. de Bon made the first public profession of France's position toward capital ship limitation. He declared that the situation in which France found herself was "entirely different from that of the three powers whose ratio had already been settled."¹⁶⁷ France, who

¹⁶⁶Hankey Note, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 548.

¹⁶⁷Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 561-62.

had possessed 28 capital ships in 1914, had lost over 210,000,000 working days which would have been spent on the fleet. Her current strength of 7 modern ships and 3 older vessels was "quite insufficient for her great mission in the world." France could not build now, but could not agree never to do so. The French required at least ten ships, and if 35,000 tons were to be the standard, France must be authorized a capital ship limit of 350,000 tons. As her holiday began in 1915, she required permission to build in 1925. Italian Senator Carlo Schanzer then briefly summarized his country's willingness to accept the naval holiday and a minimal capital ship ratio, subject to equality with France.¹⁶⁸

Hughes had little patience with de Bon. When the admiral refused to change his position the following day, Hughes cabled Briand, then in London en route for France. The Secretary of State reported the provisional naval limitation agreement between the United States, Britain, and Japan, based upon the original 5:5:3 proposals as modified to include the Mutsu arrangements. He explained that the settlement was "dependent upon an appropriate agreement with France and Italy with respect to their capital ships."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 561-62.

¹⁶⁹CAB 30/9: 4th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 22, 1921.

Hughes noted that the three major naval powers had accepted the situation as it existed, rather than as they desired it to be. They had scrapped 40% of their capital ship strength, which, if applied to France, would reduce her navy to 102,000 tons. He proposed instead to allow an increase of the present strength of 164,000 tons of capital ships to an authorization of 175,000 tons. Hughes then declared that if "France desires a greater relative strength, the obvious answer is that this would be impossible of attainment." If there were no cuts, the Secretary noted, the American and British Navies would outnumber the French by "more than 6-1." He characterized the suggestion that France build 10 ships of more than 300,000 tons as raising "the greatest difficulties," in fact precluding any capital ship agreement. Hughes obliquely referred to American financial contributions to the French economy before requesting Briand to reconsider the French position.¹⁷⁰

The following day, at French request, the naval experts met in the morning. Admiral de Bon argued against the American proposal to limit France to 175,000 tons with respect to capital ships. He complained about the

¹⁷⁰CAB 30/9: 4th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 22, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 446-472. Balfour, in his report to the Cabinet, indicated Hughes was prepared to use "the financial screw." See Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 562.

artificiality of talking about tonnage limitation, when every nation would build the largest allowable ships. The admiral then explained that the current French fleet was skewed by the experience of the war and repeated his claim that France needed more than five battleships. Roosevelt replied that the basis of calculation involved existing capital ship strength rather than past policy, such as Britain's Two Power Standard, or building plans, such as Japan's progress toward a fleet of eight battleships and eight battle cruisers.¹⁷¹ Lee interjected that Britain could not accept a weaker fleet with respect to France. At 3:1 before the war, the current position in capital ships was 20:7, reducing eventually to 15:5 under the Hughes' proposals. He sympathized, however, with the French desire to calculate in numbers of ships rather than tonnage. The meeting ended with no satisfaction for the French.¹⁷²

The same day, Beatty fired his last salvo at the naval holiday. The First Lord had returned to London in late November to protect the Navy against the predatory advances of the Geddes Committee.¹⁷³ He wrote a memorandum to the

¹⁷¹Roosevelt ignored the fact that the British intended to maintain a two power standard against Japan and France.

¹⁷²ADM 116/2149: Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, December 17, 1921.

¹⁷³Roskill, Last Naval Hero, 311-12, notes that Beatty wrote his mistress that he would be "more use soothing Lloyd George and keeping him straight' over the current Navy Estimates than by remaining in Washington."

Cabinet comparing the cost of a ten year holiday followed by mass replacement with a gradual replacement program.¹⁷⁴ In Beatty's estimation, the ten years' holiday would cost some £20 millions more than a replacement program. He estimated that the naval holiday would increase the cost of the unemployment dole by a further £20 millions. The admiral argued that the continuous building program would improve the efficiency of the fleet with regard to personnel and design. He also declared that capital ships would thus keep pace with aircraft and submarines. Beatty concluded by stressing the economic value of a steady building program.¹⁷⁵ The Cabinet took no apparent notice of his arguments.

¹⁷⁴The following tables of capital ship strength reflect Beatty's comparison:

<u>Original</u>	<u>Britain</u>	<u>United States</u>	<u>Japan</u>
1922-25:	22 + 2 - 4 = 20	18 + 2 - 3 = 17	10 = 10
1932-35:	20 + 4 - 7 = 17	17 + 4 - 5 = 16	10 + 2 - 2 = 10
1933-36:	17 + 3 - 4 = 16	16 + 3 - 3 = 16	10 + 2 - 2 = 10
1934-37:	16 + 3 - 3 = 16	16 + 3 - 3 = 16	10 + 2 - 2 = 10
1935-38:	16 + 2 - 3 = 15	16 + 2 - 3 = 15	10 + 1 - 2 = 9
1936-39:	15 + 1 - 1 = 15	15 + 1 - 1 = 15	9 + 1 - 1 = 9

<u>Modified</u>	<u>Britain</u>	<u>United States</u>	<u>Japan</u>
1922-25:	22 + 2 - 4 = 20	18 + 2 - 3 = 17	
1924-27:			10 + 1 - 1 = 10
1925-28:	20 + 2 - 2 = 20	17 + 2 - 2 = 17	
1927-30:			10 + 1 - 1 = 10
1928-31:	20 + 1 - 1 = 20	17 + 1 - 1 = 17	
1929-32:	20 + 1 - 4 = 17	17 + 1 - 3 = 15	
1930-33:			10 + 1 - 2 = 9
1932-35:	17 + 2 - 3 = 16	15 + 2 - 2 = 15	9 + 1 - 1 = 9
1933-36:	16 + 2 - 2 = 16	15 + 2 - 2 = 15	9 + 1 - 1 = 9
1934-37:	16 + 2 - 3 = 15	15 + 2 - 2 = 15	9 + 1 - 1 = 9
1935-38:	15 + 2 - 2 = 15	15 + 2 - 2 = 15	9 + 1 - 1 = 9
1936-39:	15 + 1 - 1 = 15	15 + 1 - 1 = 15	9 + 1 - 1 = 9

¹⁷⁵ADM 116/2149: Admiralty Memorandum, "Proposals for a Modified Building Holiday", December 17, 1921.

On December 18th, the BNSW reviewed the situation optimistically. They expected the United States to approach Britain with a request to allow an increase in the French capital ship authorization to 210,000 tons (six ships). They believed the Cabinet would accept the adjustment in order to save the agreement and therefore decided to seek recompense. In their view, the tonnage method of calculating capital ship strength was severely flawed and should be replaced by numbers of ships, a position apparently shared by the American naval experts.¹⁷⁶ The substitution of a numbers basis of limitation instead of aggregate tonnage for capital ships would have the effect of allowing Britain to build the 48,000 ton ships desired by the Royal Navy. The meeting ended with the rosy view that the claim of the naval staff was logical and that "Mr. Balfour can see it through and enable us to retrieve our lost position."¹⁷⁷

The B.E.D. met for the fourteenth time on Monday morning, December 19th. Lee raised the issue of submarines, suggesting that Britain request the opportunity to present

¹⁷⁶Sprouts, New Order, 188, quotes the American naval experts as agreeing "that it would be a good thing for England to make a 'beau-geste' and allow France six battleships" but deciding to "stand by our original percentage basis and let suggested modifications come from some other Power."

¹⁷⁷ADM 116/2149: BNSW Memorandum, "French Ration of Capital Ships", December 18, 1921.

the case for abolition in open session, if possible within the week. Geddes seconded Lee's proposal, whereupon Balfour drafted a note to Hughes to that effect. During the meeting, the B.E.D. learned that the Associated Press was reporting from Paris that Briand had instructed Albert Sarraut, his Colonial Minister, to accept the American naval program.¹⁷⁸ This information completely undercut the intention of the BNSW to trade an increase in capital ship strength for France in return for the substitution of a numbers basis for naval limitation.

That afternoon, Balfour met with Hughes to discuss the submarine question. The Secretary of State informed the Lord President that he personally supported the abolition of submarines, but that his naval advisors opposed the idea. An Advisory Body of the American delegation, according to Hughes, regarded the submarine as "the only defensive instrument which a weak Power with an extensive seaboard could employ."¹⁷⁹ He further expected that Japan, France, and Italy would oppose abolition, as well as nations outside the Conference. Hughes suggested that rather than extending the ratio system to submarines he desired to institute a

¹⁷⁸CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 14th Conference, December 19, 1921.

¹⁷⁹CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 15th Conference, Appendix II, December 20, 1921. Also see Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 567-68.

universal ceiling of about 40,000 tons per nation, but worried that premature efforts by Britain would appear self-interested and prevent any limitation, such as a resolution against misuse. Balfour withheld a general reply, but observed that the British naval experts "did not regard submarines as the powerful defensive weapon which popular fancy painted them."¹⁸⁰

The B.E.D. met again the next day, December 20th. Balfour opened the meeting by reporting the results of a morning session of the Subcommittee of Fifteen. Hughes had read his December 16th appeal to the French Government to accept a ratio of 1.75 with respect to the 5:5:3 capital ship authorizations for America, Britain, and Japan, and the response from Briand. After claiming that "the preoccupation of France is not the offensive point of view, but uniquely defensive," Briand had agreed to instruct his delegation to cooperate with respect to capital ships but that such cooperation did not extend to auxiliary craft (light cruisers, torpedo-boats, and submarines), which defended the vital interests of France.¹⁸¹ Hughes had

¹⁸⁰CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 15th Conference, Appendix II, December 20, 1921.

¹⁸¹CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 15th Conference, Appendix I, December 20, 1921. Also recorded in CAB 30/9: 4th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 22, 1921; U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 446-472.

privately indicated to Balfour that the French delegation was "probably in the embarrassing position of receiving conflicting instruction from M. Briand in London and from the French Admiralty in Paris." Balfour had then arranged with Hughes to move the issue to the full Committee on the Limitation of Armament. Chatfield urged the group not to allow the French an increase in capital ship tonnage. The B.E.D. then debated the proper forum for the pursuit of the submarine question. After much discussion, Balfour convinced his colleagues to make the case at committee level, accept a compromise (with prior agreement from Hughes), and then make a public statement at a plenary session.¹⁸² He then relayed this intention to the Cabinet.¹⁸³

On the morning of December 22nd, the fourth session of the Committee on Limitation of Armament began with a summary of the naval limitation discussions. Hughes announced the tentative naval limitation agreement: 5:5:3 capital ship ratio, including the Mutsu and four compensatory ships; 35,000 ton maximum displacement for replacement capital ships; and status quo in the Pacific with regard to fortifications and bases; all arrangements remaining "dependent upon a suitable arrangement with France and

¹⁸²CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 15th Conference, December 20, 1921.

¹⁸³Arthur Balfour to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 569.

Italy." Hughes then summarized the discussion of the Subcommittee of Fifteen on December 15th, in which Admiral de Bon had demanded for France an allocation of 350,000 tons of capital ships. The chairman next presented his letter of December 16th to Briand, which had been sent with the knowledge of the French delegation. Hughes subsequently read Briand's reply, which accepted the proposed ratio of 1.75 for capital ships, but not for auxiliary craft, and then mentioned Admiral de Bon's continued desire to increase the French allocation to six capital ships or to arrange a settlement with respect to auxiliary vessels prior to agreeing to a capital ship understanding. He concluded by asking the French delegation to explain their position to the full committee.¹⁸⁴

De Bon again pled special consideration: other nations had increased their naval strength in war, while France had not. France willingly accepted, according to the admiral, a limit of 7 ships, her present strength, and desired a program of gradual replacement, in accordance with the schedule proposed by Hughes. The French delegation, in keeping with instructions from their government, had agreed to the enormous concession of a limit of five capital ships. Such a strength left her, from a naval perspective,

¹⁸⁴CAB 30/9: 4th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 22, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 446-472.

"practically disarmed," while with six ships she "could still create a living organization." This reduction mandated retention of greater numbers of light craft and submarines. The British Empire question in regard to abolition of the submarine took precedence, in de Bon's view, as it would inform general progress. In response to a comment by Hughes that U.S. proposals had not limited numbers, only maximum size of vessels and maximum aggregate tonnage, the French admiral stated that smaller capital ships were foolish. If France should build, her battleships would displace the full 35,000 tons, and the only question concerned her total tonnage: 175,000 or 210,000 tons. He suggested that the Conference should address the future of submarines. The chairman held that question for the afternoon session.¹⁸⁵

Later that day, in the Columbus Room of the Pan American Building, the Committee on Limitation of Armament resumed discussion with regard to restrictions on the use of submarines. Lord Lee summarized the existing position: agreement on capital ships without any commitments on smaller vessels. He then presented a comparison, by nation, of the existing aggregate submarine tonnages with the American proposals and described as "very strange" the idea

¹⁸⁵CAB 30/9: 4th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 22, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 446-472.

that a Conference on limitation would allow increases.¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, he noted, maritime nations would be forced to increase their anti-submarine capacities. On behalf of the B.E.D., Lee proposed "total and final abolition." Submarines, the First Sea Lord claimed, had little value against legitimate naval targets, as proved by recent experience. They worked only against merchant ships, against which they were dreadfully effective. Lee noted that Britain had been reduced to a mere seven weeks' supply of food and pointed out that other nations would have been affected by British capitulation. He indicated that Britain would be willing to abolish her large and efficient submarine fleet. If, as he suspected, other powers would reject abolition, then Britain would not overthrow the capital ship agreement, but would welcome suggestions for submarine reduction.¹⁸⁷

The other delegates quickly confirmed Lee's suspicion that they would not support abolition. Colonial Minister Albert Sarraut answered for France. He claimed submarines were both legitimate and necessary, and further argued

¹⁸⁶ Lee presented the following figures:

	<u>America</u>	<u>Britain</u>	<u>Japan</u>	<u>France</u>	<u>Italy</u>
Existing Tonnage	83,500	80,500	32,200	28,360	18,250
Hughes' Proposal	90,000	90,000	54,000	-	-
Permitted Growth	6,500	9,500	21,800	-	-

¹⁸⁷ CAB 30/9: 5th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 22, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 474-502.

against any tonnage limitations. Sarrault reiterated the French opposition to linking submarine allowances to a proportion of capital ship strength. Schanzer emphasized the difficulty of settling the future of submarines due to the absence of other powers. Hanihara also opposed abolition. Hughes sought to emphasize the one point of agreement within the Committee, opposition to illegal use of submarines. He then shared with the delegates the findings of the technical commission appointed by President Harding. The Advisory Committee found submarines to have legitimate naval functions, despite the reputation of the weapon being tarnished by flagrant misuse in the recent conflict. Hughes' advisors therefore recommended that "unlimited warfare by submarines on commerce should be outlawed," while opposing any limitation in size. After his presentation, the committee adjourned until the next day.¹⁸⁸

On December 23rd, the Committee on Limitation of Armament met for the sixth time. De Bon took issue with Lee's position that submarines had little value against warships. He mentioned their effect on fleet operations, their ability to defend enclosed areas, and their functions as scouts. Then, almost as if deliberately attempting to bait the British representatives, de Bon stated that the

¹⁸⁸CAB 30/9: 5th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 22, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 474-502.

submarine "has shown itself especially efficient against the merchant marine." The admiral urged the need to restrict illegal submarine activities, while emphasizing the scope remaining for legitimate commerce destruction. He opposed any limitation on the size of individual submarines, while claiming that "90,000 tons is the absolute minimum for all the navies who may want to have a submarine force."

Balfour, in reply, returned to Lee's point that the primary purpose of submarines was the eradication of maritime trade. He asserted that "from Admiral de Bon's own speech it is clear that the main object they serve is the destruction of commerce." Balfour then urged the committee to ban the sub. De Bon, in a rather strange volte-face, claimed he had not supported submarine activity against merchant marine, but merely cited German usage. On that note, the meeting adjourned.¹⁸⁹

The following day, the Committee on Limitation of Armament met again. Sarrault amplified Schanzer's point that other nations would not be limited by a decision to abolish submarines taken by the Conference. He suggested a general conference of all nations at which more effective decisions might be reached. Balfour replied. France had stopped all work on the limitation of land armaments by her

¹⁸⁹CAB 30/9: 6th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 23, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 504-530.

declaration of danger. Now she proposed a sea policy of a vast submarine fleet. The Lord President sought to identify the threat. He pointed to a resurgent Germany, with land forces and submarines. He then suggested that submarines would be useless as a means to protect merchant trade and could serve little purpose beyond attacking Britain. While conceding that those nations present at the Conference could not legislate for the rest of the world, Balfour predicted that the moral example of five major powers abolishing subs would influence others. He placed into record a statement from the B.E.D. that "the use of submarines, whilst of small value for defensive purposes, leads inevitably to acts which are inconsistent with the laws of war and the dictates of humanity." Hughes suggested abolition should be abandoned as hopeless, due to technical disagreement as to the value of submarines, and limits (such as numbers, tonnage, and usage) considered. The Secretary of State concluded by suggesting 60,000 tons for the United States and Britain, with others nations retaining the status quo (according to his figures: Japan, 31,452 tons; France, 31,391 tons; and Italy, 21,000 tons).¹⁹⁰

Later on December 24th, the full arms limitation committee resumed its discussions. Balfour promptly

¹⁹⁰CAB 30/9: 7th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 24, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 532-556.

accepted Hughes' latest proposals. De Bon, however, remained adamantly opposed. He stated that a force of 90 boats (each about 1000 tons) allowed 15 to 20 units for action, which he called "a minimum limit." Further limitation he described as "equivalent to abolishing the whole French program." De Bon indicated that the French delegation could not accept Hughes' figures and would have to refer them to their government. Schanzer stated Italy's willingness to accept virtually allotment of submarine tonnage that met her requirement for naval parity with France. Hanihara rejected the newest proposal, which would limit Japan to 31,000 tons. He stated Japan needed 54,000 tons, which he claimed represented a minimum figure for actual defensive requirements.¹⁹¹ Hughes then scheduled a delay of three days to allow the French delegation to await instructions from Paris.¹⁹²

The BNSW view of submarine warfare during the Conference remained generally consistent with earlier Admiralty analysis. Commander J.G. Bower, of the Admiralty

¹⁹¹Hanihara may well have been attempting to apply to submarine strengths the 5:5:3 ratio, under which the figure of 54,000 tons reflected Japan's proportion of the original proposal of 90,000 tons for the United States. If this reading is correct, he would have settled for 36,000 tons against 60,000 for Britain and America.

¹⁹²CAB 30/9: 8th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 24, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 558-566.

Plans Division, argued that the laws of war were useless as a check to submarines. Failing abolition, Britain could not agree to any limitation on auxiliary craft. He also admitted arguments against abolition: Britain was five years in advance of other nations, such as Italy and France, whose submarine forces were both small and inefficient. Submarine forces, furthermore, lost much of their effectiveness without fleet support, an arena in which only the United States could compete with Britain.¹⁹³ Beatty advised Chatfield that if abolition failed, he should attempt to limit aggregate submarine tonnage rather than the size of individual ships. The First Sea Lord sought to reduce the possibility of a large fleet of small submarines based near the English Channel, where restrictions on size--and hence range--would have only minor impact.¹⁹⁴ By the end of the month, with the delegates suggesting that usage might be the only aspect of submarine warfare subject to limitation, the BNSW prepared a position paper on the rules of submarine engagements against merchant shipping. The memorandum advocated "support for existing rules of visit and search against submarines," along with the requirement to place crews and passengers in a place of safety prior to sinking

¹⁹³ADM 116/2149: BNSW Memorandum, "Submarines", December 4, 1921.

¹⁹⁴ADM 1/8615/207: Admiralty telegram, December 23, 1921.

vessels carrying contraband. These strictures, if followed in wartime, would have greatly reduced the effectiveness of submarines. The BNSW believed, however, that "the adoption of any such rules would not constitute adequate safeguard" and that the B.E.D. should reserve the right, as long as submarines existed, to retain a free hand against them.¹⁹⁵

The Committee on Limitation of Armament convened its ninth session on the morning of December 28th. Sarrault explained that his government could not accept the latest proposals from America. He stated they had concluded that:

it is impossible to accept a limitation below that of 330,000 tons for auxiliary craft and 90,000 tons for submarines, without imperiling the vital interests of the country and of its colonies and the safety of their naval life.¹⁹⁶

Sarrault claimed that France needed these types of ships "for the protection of her territory," perhaps in one last effort to extract the military guarantee to which Briand had made reference in late November.¹⁹⁷ Balfour attacked the

¹⁹⁵ADM 116/2149: BNSW Memorandum, "Rules for Submarine Warfare against Merchant Shipping", December 27, 1921.

¹⁹⁶CAB 30/9: 9th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 28, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 568-588.

¹⁹⁷See p. 373 above. Hardinge, from Paris, described France as "desperately anxious for a British guarantee against German attack" and claimed that the "French insistence on submarines...is really intended to provide a bargain counter." See Lord Hardinge to Marquess Curzon, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 581-82.

French increase in submarine strength. He asked how "a fleet of capital ships limited to 175,000 tons required 90,000 tons of submarines to scout for it and protect it?" He declared that such a submarine force was "intended to destroy commerce" and promised to place the issue publicly before the full Conference. Balfour concluded by stating that a fleet of 90,000 tons of submarines would cause Britain to reserve "the full right to build any auxiliary craft which she considered necessary to deal with the situation."⁹⁸ This exchange, which reflected the animus between France and England following Versailles, marked the final breakdown of negotiations to extend the 5:5:3 ratio to auxiliary vessels.

The Committee on Limitation of Armament then turned its attention to establishing a division between capital ships and cruisers. At the end of the morning session on December 28th, Hughes offered the following resolution:

No ship of war other than a capital ship or aircraft carrier hereafter built shall exceed a total tonnage displacement of 10,000 tons and no guns shall be carried by any such ship with a caliber in excess of 8 inches.⁹⁹

⁹⁸CAB 30/9: 9th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 28, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 568-588.

⁹⁹CAB 30/9: 9th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 28, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 568-588.

Lee agreed with the need for an upper limit to cruisers lest "it would be possible to build so-called light cruisers which would be capital ships in disguise," but he worried that Hughes' formula would permit a carrier to mount heavy guns, becoming, in his words, "a capital ship with the addition of flying appliances." He suggested a modification of Hughes' resolution to preclude aircraft carriers from carrying guns greater than eight inches.²⁰⁰ That afternoon, De Bon questioned size limitation of cruisers, as he felt limitation of armament defined the class. After some further discussion, the Committee accepted, for all practical purposes, the limits of 10,000 tons and 8-inch guns for cruisers.²⁰¹

That same afternoon, Hughes presented proposals for the limitation of aircraft carriers. He started with the aggregate tonnage originally presented (80,000 tons for the United States and Britain, with 48,000 tons for Japan) and extended the capital ship ratios to France and Italy (28,000 tons each). The Secretary avoided the presentation of a detailed replacement program. He recommended a size limit

²⁰⁰CAB 30/9: 9th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 28, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 568-588.

²⁰¹CAB 30/9: 10th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 28, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 590-604.

of 27,000 tons per vessel, which would carry guns not to exceed eight inches. Lee's suggestion limiting capital ship armament to 16-inch guns was unanimously approved.²⁰²

This discussion resumed during the 14th session of the full disarmament committee on December 30th. Acton complained that the allowance of 28,000 tons would allow Italy only a single aircraft carrier, which would inevitably require refit and repair. He requested that the Italian allowance be increased to 54,000 tons to allow for a second carrier. Lee expressed sympathy for this position, and then explained his view of the aircraft carrier as a "fleet weapon." He asserted that "the number of airplane carriers should be adequate and proportionate to the size of the fleet."²⁰³ Britain had five carriers, four of which, in Lee's view, required replacement. Since submarines had not been limited, the First Lord stated that "it would be impossible to reduce the number of airplane carriers for fleet service." He further indicated that "the tonnage laid down in the original American proposals was inadequate." De Bon estimated that France required 60,000 tons, which would

²⁰²CAB 30/9: 10th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 28, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 590-602.

²⁰³CAB 30/10: 14th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 30, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 670-682.

provide three small aircraft carriers. Kato similarly rejected the proposed Japanese allowance of 48,000 tons as providing a carrier and a half. He expressed Japan's desire for three full-sized carriers, or a total of 81,000 tons. Hughes then submitted a new proposal, allowing the United States and Great Britain 135,000 tons (5 carriers at 27,000 tons), Japan 81,000 tons, and France and Italy 60,000 tons, to which all present assented. The Secretary of State then suggested that due to the experimental nature of the aircraft carriers, as Lee had noted, they might be replaced at whatever interval each government found appropriate.²⁰⁴ The other delegates promptly agreed. The full committee then turned over the responsibility of drafting the final naval limitation agreement to the technical subcommittee.²⁰⁵

The aircraft carrier agreement underwent further modifications at the hands of the naval experts. The American delegation desired to convert two partially built battle cruisers into aircraft carriers, but could not reduce their designed displacement (43,500 tons) to less than 33,000 tons. During the first week of January, they

²⁰⁴The free replacement clause extended only to those aircraft carriers designated as experimental, defined as those existing or under construction before November 12, 1921. See ADM 1/8615/207: BNSW Memorandum, December 30, 1921.

²⁰⁵CAB 30/10: 14th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 30, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 670-682.

requested permission to produce two carriers of this size, while not increasing their aggregate carrier tonnage.²⁰⁶ The Japanese supported this request, as they desired to transform two of their battleships into carriers. The B.E.D. extracted two concessions in return for their agreement. First, the size exemption was extended to include any of the signatories and, more importantly, ships built purposefully as aircraft carriers, to enable the Admiralty to use materials collected for two of the super-Hoods toward new ships. Second, the B.E.D. wanted permission to add anti-torpedo bulges up to 3,000 tons displacement to the battle cruiser Renown, whose sister ship Repulse had already been thus altered, and such bulging became a general provision.²⁰⁷

The cumulative effect of the various exceptions and exemptions to Hughes' original proposals went far to ameliorate the B.E.D.'s concerns with the ten years' naval building holiday. The Mutsu arrangements entitled Britain to construct two new capital ships of 35,000 tons displacement. The aircraft carrier agreement, which allowed the participants to replace existing warships at their own

²⁰⁶By this time, work on the draft naval agreement was "in an advanced state," according to Lee. See CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 17th Conference, January 2nd, 1922.

²⁰⁷CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 21st Conference, January 9th, 1921; ADM 116/2149: BNSW Note, "Technical Committee Meeting", January 3, 1922.

discretion, authorized Britain to construct five additional major vessels, two of 33,000 tons displacement each, for a total of 135,000 tons. The addition of anti-torpedo bulges offered the opportunity for further construction, which could involve capital ships, while no limits were placed on the production of auxiliary vessels. The Admiralty therefore had vast scope to employ Britain's major shipbuilding firms during the so-called holiday.

When H.W. Malkin of the Foreign Office Section asked on January 6th "whether, in the draft Naval Treaty, any mention should be made of the ten years' holiday," the B.E.D. decided that the issue was no longer very important and should be left to the Americans.²⁰⁸

The American delegation made a final effort to secure limitation of the submarine. On December 28th, Elihu Root, former Secretary of State, gave practical effect to the recommendation of the Advisory Committee of the United States when he delivered to the Committee on Limitation of Armament a series of resolutions restricting submarine attacks on merchant shipping. Root hoped to mobilize world opinion and in that manner influence belligerent governments. His first resolution stated that the signatory powers recognized certain of the existing laws of war: submarines were required to stop and search merchant vessels

²⁰⁸CAB 30/1a: B.E.D. 20th Conference, January 6th, 1922.

before capture or even attack; they were likewise required to place crews and passengers in a place of safety before destruction; and when these conditions could not be met, submarines were required to desist from attack. His second resolution stated the signatory powers recognized "the practical impossibility of using submarines as commerce destroyers" without violating the laws of war and hoped for future universal prohibitions against unauthorized use. Root's third resolution stated that the signatory powers would try violators as pirates.²⁰⁹

The following morning, when the Committee resumed its discussions, the delegates took a remarkably similar line. Balfour praised the spirit of the Root Resolutions but suggested a team of lawyers might profitably review the text, eliciting concurrence from around the table. Root opposed this suggestion vigorously, albeit with humor:

It would be far from his thought to say anything derogatory about the members of the profession of which he had been a humble member for more years than he cared to remember. They were the salt of the earth; they were the noblest work of God; they were superior in intellect and authority to all other people whatsoever. But both this Conference and his life were approaching their termination.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹CAB 30/9: 10th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 28, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 590-602.

²¹⁰CAB 30/10: 11th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, December 29, 1921. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 604-626.

Root implored the Committee to deal directly with his proposals.

The reaction of the British delegation, although containing certain reservations, was generally favorable. The full B.E.D. first considered the resolutions on December 31st, 1921. Geddes explained that the technical subcommittee had already modified Root's first resolution slightly where it described the requirement of a blockading vessel to search a merchant ship, by removing any possible restriction of the search to the immediate vicinity of the confrontation, in order to accommodate British blockade practices. He then explained that "there was no agreed part of international law which covered the question of torpedoes fired from a submarine at a ship with passengers on board which would not stop."²² By codifying the absolute requirement for submarines to comply with the same restrictions as surface ships (which Germany had found an impossibility), the Conference would drastically reduce the operational effectiveness of submarines against merchant shipping, at least for governments that chose to adhere to international law. Chatfield then voiced his opposition to the third resolution. He worried about the possibility of a naval officer being ordered to conduct unlimited submarine warfare and then facing the choice of "being shot by his own

²²CAB 30/1a: 16th B.E.D. Conference, December 31, 1921.

country for disobedience or shot by another for breaking international law." He suggested that "it was rather heads of state than their tools who should be tried and punished."^{2:2} It was probably this concern for the fate of naval officers that caused the BNSW, two days earlier, to describe the Root Resolutions in a draft letter for the Foreign Secretary as "generally sound," but "too vague."^{2:3} Balfour's consistent support for the Root Resolutions led him, at Root's behest, to call upon Baron Kato on January 4th, 1922, in order to derail any attempts to link the anti-submarine clauses with limitations on the arming of merchant ships. Hankey subsequently noted that Balfour "shared Mr. Root's desire for passage of the submarine resolutions."^{2:4}

The Committee on Limitation of Armament began a key discussion of the Root Resolutions on January 5th. Schanzer raised a series of questions with regard to the right of a merchantman to carry defensive armament, which Hughes skated over by declaring that:

all the representatives present accepted the proposition that merchant vessels--a category well known--stood where they were under the law, and that this Resolution defined the duties of

^{2:2}CAB 30/1a: 16th B.E.D. Conference, December 31, 1921.

^{2:3}ADM 116/2149: Draft letter to Curzon, December 29, 1921.

^{2:4}Hankey Note, January 5, 1922, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 585-587.

submarines with respect to them.²¹⁵

After that fine piece of obfuscation, the Committee assented to Root's first resolution. This consensus relieved the B.E.D.'s concern over maintaining Britain's right to the use of defensively armed merchant ships (DAMS).²¹⁶ Schanzer then raised the question as to the legality of a submarine operating against a merchant vessel attempting to run a legal (i.e., effective) blockade. Balfour ridiculed the notion that submarines could not themselves make a blockade effective but could legally attack merchant vessels attempting to run a blockade made legal by the presence of surface warships. The Committee then accepted Root's resolution against "the use of submarines as commerce destroyers" both as binding among themselves and as an invitation to other nations, and adjourned.²¹⁷

On January 6th, the Committee on Limitation of Armament finished its consideration of the Root Resolutions. Schanzer again voiced a concern, this time as to whether submarine officers were not being subjected to greater

²¹⁵CAB 30/10: 15th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, January 5, 1922. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 684-712.

²¹⁶ADM 116/2149: Technical Subcommittee Meeting, December 31, 1921.

²¹⁷CAB 30/10: 15th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, January 5, 1922. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 684-712.

hazards than the officers of surface ships in the commission of like acts. Hughes then modified Root's original proposal to subject any violator of the laws of war to trial for piracy, whereupon the Committee gave its assent.²¹⁸ Balfour later admitted the clause "caused me some anxiety," but concurred in the belief that "we may confidently expect that [as far as violators go] neither the Government nor sailors will be British."²¹⁹ The spirit of Root's original resolutions thus emerged from the Committee only slightly altered, and presented to any nation desirous of adhering to the laws of war a formidable obstacle to the use of submarines against sea-borne commerce.

On February 1, 1922, Charles Evans Hughes convened the fifth plenary session of the Washington Conference. After a discussion concerning China, the Secretary of State announced that the Committee on Limitation of Armament had reached agreement on a naval treaty. Hughes dwelt extensively on the similarities between the final treaty and the original proposals. He informed the Conference of the limitations placed upon new capital ships: displacements not to exceed 35,000 tons and main guns not to exceed sixteen

²¹⁸CAB 30/10: 16th Meeting of the Committee on Limitation of Armament, January 6, 1922. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 714-740.

²¹⁹Arthur Balfour to David Lloyd George, January 13, 1922, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 598-601.

inches. He explained that the Treaty identified which vessels each country would initially retain: for the United States, 18 ships with an aggregate displacement of 500,650 tons; for Britain, 22 ships of 658,450 tons; for Japan, 10 ships of 301,320 tons; for France, 10 ships of 221,170 tons; and for Italy, 10 ships of 182,800 tons. The final agreement differed from the original American scheme with respect to capital ship provisions in two minor regards: first, the inclusion of France and Italy; and second, Japan's retention of the new battleship Mutsu. America would be allowed to complete two new ships of the West Virginia class and then scrap two older vessels presently retained, while Britain would be allowed to build two new ships not to exceed 35,000 tons each and then scrap four older vessels. Hughes also provided details of scrapping and replacement procedures.²²⁰

Hughes then addressed the subject of aircraft carriers and their limitation. The Treaty embodied the spirit of the proposals with regard to this class of vessel, limited to a maximum size of 27,000 tons displacement--each power could build two carriers of not more than 33,000 tons--and main guns not to exceed eight inches. Britain and the United States received an allotment of 135,000 tons; Japan, 81,000

²²⁰CAB 30/3: 5th Plenary Session, February 1, 1922. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 182-276; for the treaty, see ibid., 1573-1611; Buell, Washington Conference, 371-91.

tons; and France and Italy, 60,000 tons each. All existing vessels were categorized as experimental and could be replaced at any time.²²¹

Hughes glossed over the far greater difference between the treaty and his proposals with respect to limitations upon auxiliary combatant craft. He briefly acknowledged that "the provisions relating to auxiliary craft contained in the proposal made on behalf of the American government were not carried into the final agreement." He hurried on to note that these ships were limited to a maximum size of 10,000 tons and main guns of eight inches. Hughes failed to explain why the Conference powers placed no limit on their holdings of cruisers, destroyers, or submarines.²²²

The Secretary of State then relayed the final two major provisions of the new treaty. First, the United States, Britain, and Japan agreed to maintain the status quo as of February 1922, with certain limited exceptions, with regard to the fortification of their Pacific possessions. Second, the Treaty would remain in force through December 31, 1936, and thereafter until two years beyond notice of denunciation by one of the contracting parties. Hughes concluded his

²²¹CAB 30/3: 5th Plenary Session, February 1, 1922. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 182-276.

²²²CAB 30/3: 5th Plenary Session, February 1, 1922. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 182-276.

presentation by remarking that the agreement would diminish "the burdens of naval armaments," end "the race in competition of naval armaments," and leave "the relative security of the great naval Powers unimpaired."²²³

Root then introduced a companion treaty based upon resolutions by the Committee on Limitation of Armament from January 5th, 6th, and 7th condemning certain practices in the late war. This treaty focused primarily upon submarine warfare. Article I required submarines to stop and search merchant vessels before seizure. It further required submarines, as an absolute prerequisite to sinking captured vessels, to place crew members and passengers in a place of safety--life boats not constituting a sufficient haven. The subsequent articles invited other nations to accept these conditions as laws of maritime warfare and to treat transgressors as violators of the laws of war (i.e., as pirates).²²⁴

The results of the Washington Naval Conference completely satisfied neither the British Cabinet nor the Admiralty. The limitations on capital strength and future construction provided considerable relief to the beleaguered

²²³CAB 30/3: 5th Plenary Session, February 1, 1922. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 182-276.

²²⁴CAB 30/3: 5th Plenary Session, February 1, 1922. Also recorded in U.S. State Department, Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 182-276.

Exchequer, but Beatty and his colleagues would have far preferred the slow and steady approach to the ten years' naval holiday. The British entitlement to construct two new battleships, which increased the relative strength of the fleet and provided British naval construction firms with much-needed employment, would draw grudging assent from the Cabinet. These differences of opinion reflected the divergent evaluations of the capital ship as seen from Westminster and Whitehall. Both statesmen and sailors, meanwhile, regretted the B.E.D.'s failure to secure the abolition of the submarine.

The results of the Washington Conference, nonetheless, protected British national security aims with remarkable effectiveness. Balfour, in his final appreciation of the Conference, wrote to the Prime Minister that:

in all essentials the safeguards of our Naval position...have been fully secured. Nor has this result been achieved at the cost of any other nation. The financial burdens of the great Naval Powers have been alleviated with no injury to national honor or diminution of security.²²⁵

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance became a four power treaty involving the United States and France, and the transformation took place in such a manner so as not to

²²⁵Arthur Balfour to David Lloyd George, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 643-45.

offend Japan.²²⁶ Britain retained both the right of blockade and the right to fortify Singapore, while neither the United States nor Japan would establish new bases in the Pacific. The treaty based on the Root Resolutions offered protection against unlimited submarine warfare from any signatory willing to honor its commitments. Furthermore, French intransigence over the submarine issue influenced the American delegation to accept the British arguments against the limitation of cruisers and destroyers without engaging in a competition for superiority in auxiliary combatant craft. On the importance of anti-submarine capabilities, at least, the British naval community shared a common viewpoint. From the perspective of the supporters of the capital ship, there were two positive aspects of the 5:5:3 ratio. First, the new rules created a relatively level playing field on which Britain would not have to fear overwhelming competition based on unmatched finances. In the words of Britain's Director of Naval Construction:

Naval Architects should welcome the new rules, as they are really comparable to the rule for racing yachts. Certain limitations are laid down and it

²²⁶British Ambassador to Japan Sir Charles Eliot wrote to the Foreign Office on January 7, 1922: "Minister for Foreign Affairs informed me yesterday that Japanese government were on the whole satisfied with results of Washington conference so far. They regretted termination of the Anglo-Japanese alliance but recognized that a good understanding with America was essential and would not have been possible had bilateral agreement continued." See Sir C. Eliot to Sir E Crowe, as recorded in Butler and Bury, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1st Series, Vol XIV, 588-589.

is the Naval Architect's work to produce the best results subject to those limitations, and the best designer will produce the best ship.²²⁷

And, for the morale of the senior service and its partisans, the Royal Navy, with its existing margin of superiority in capital ship numbers and aggregate tonnage, avoided manifest surrender of its maritime supremacy for the remainder of the decade.

²²⁷D'Eyncourt MSS 40: D'Eyncourt Note, July 4, 1922.

CONCLUSION

British participation in the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922 reflected a number of competing and sometimes contradictory influences. The most venerable of these, undoubtedly, was the British tradition of maritime supremacy. The Great War, however, exposed cracks in the edifice of Churchill, Fisher, and Mahan. More importantly, the experiences of the war discernibly weakened the union of frocks and pea coats. Both groups perceived the challenge of emerging technologies to the dominance of the capital ship, but while the politicians, particularly Cabinet members familiar with the full details of the 1917 U-boat campaign, focused on the potential threat of the submarine and, to a lesser degree, the airplane, the admirals looked with complete confidence to countermeasures such as anti-torpedo bulges, ASDIC, and depth charges.

Nonetheless, the British tradition of command of the sea, despite its battering in the Mediterranean and North Sea, was not so dilapidated as to have completely lost its support in either Whitehall or Westminster. All respectable legislators understood the need to protect Britain's maritime commerce. Furthermore, both the voting public and the Conservative backbenchers, swept to Parliament in the Coupon election of 1918 and ably represented by Walter Long, generally accepted the opinion of Jellicoe and Beatty that the capital ship still constituted the dominant force

afloat. Thus, the prime minister proved unwilling to risk the political consequences of disowning the One Power standard even as he established the Bonar Law Enquiry.

This loss of faith by leading members of the Lloyd George ministry would not have mattered except for two independent circumstances. First, the United States aimed to compete for command of the seas. Before and during the Paris Peace Conference, President Wilson and his representatives repeatedly threatened to build the "world's greatest navy." The Cecil-House compromise of 1919 left intact the 1916 building program of the United States Navy. The First Lord warned the Cabinet in October 1919 that Britain needed either to induce the United States to abate the 1916 program or to commence capital ship construction in order to avoid the sacrifice of sea supremacy, a warning repeated throughout 1920.

The other factor that bore heavily on the British willingness to come to Washington was the condition of His Majesty's Exchequer. Britain saw her income from both shipping and overseas markets decline significantly during the conflict. The war increased the national debt to an alarming degree, and many British loans, particularly those to Russia, appeared irrecoverable. The United States, however, showed no inclination to forgive its loans to Britain. The Committee on National Expenditure, or "the Geddes axe," espoused classical economic theory, which

called for reduced government spending, and Chancellor Austen Chamberlain found the service estimates the most fertile field for reductions. The Imperial Conference of 1921 revealed the Dominions' unwillingness to assume a significant share of the burden of imperial defense.

From 1919 to 1921, the Cabinet and the Admiralty shared a willingness to negotiate a naval arms limitation agreement with the United States. Both groups shared the opinion that the possibility of war with the United States ranged from remote to non-existent. The Cabinet hoped to avoid spending money on the construction of capital ships, the value of which appeared uncertain, while the Admiralty understood the Cabinet's uncertainty and feared the loss of parity, let alone supremacy. To be certain, both groups desired through the negotiating process to retain supremacy. The Admiralty simply valued that goal more highly. After the conclusion of the Paris Peace Conference, however, the paralysis of the Wilson administration precluded any serious discussion of naval disarmament. Only the inauguration of President Harding offered the Lloyd George government the chance to make a deal.

The decision of the Cabinet to send Balfour to Washington reflected concern for the national treasury, fear of the loss of naval supremacy, and apprehension that capital ships did not represent the wisest allocation of scarce resources. The Cabinet revealed its greater concern

for Britain's anti-submarine defenses during the Conference by confirming Balfour's acceptance of Hughes' capital ship reduction proposals; directing Balfour to accept the ten years' holiday for capital ships, over strenuous objections from the B.E.D. and the Admiralty; repeatedly instructing Balfour to seek the abolition of submarines; and refusing to permit any limitation of Britain's auxiliary craft. The Lloyd George ministry did not believe that capital ships provided an adequate safeguard against the menace of submarine warfare against merchant shipping.

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