

See also my essays:

- 'German Interest in Australian Defence 1900-1914: New insights into a precarious position on the eve of war', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol.40, No.1, 1994;
- 'German Naval Planning in the Pacific, 1900-1914 and Australian Defence Awareness', *War & Society*, Vol. 10, Number 1 (May 1992);
- 'A vigorous offensive': Core aspects of Australian maritime defence concerns before 1914', in D. Stevens (Ed.) *Southern Trident. Strategy, History, and the Rise of Australian Naval Power* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2001).
- 'Japan as a Factor in German Asian Policy before World War I', Australian Association of European Historians Conference, Brisbane, July 2003, published in S. Atzert & A. Bonnell (Eds), *Europe's Pasts and Presents*, (Unley: Australian Humanities Press, 2004).
- 'Australian reactions to German interests in the Netherlands Indies and Timor prior to 1914: A strategic imperative', in J. Moses & C. Pugsley (Eds.) *The German Empire and Britain's Pacific Dominions 1871-1919. Essays on the Role of Australia and New Zealand in World Politics in the Age of Imperialism* (Claremont CA: Regina, 2001)



*HMAS Australia*¹ 1914

10 AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE RESPONSES TO GERMAN EXPANSION: countering the threat

'The German danger is one that every month becomes more menacing.' *Alfred Deakin to Canadian Prime Minister Borden, 10 July 1908.*

'Australia is sea girt...it is vital for the very existence of the Empire that the roads for our commerce and communications should be kept clear'. *Vice-Admiral Herbert King-Hall, Sydney Morning Herald, 26 May 1911.*

'We are today...actually engaged in a struggle to defend our right to continue to live in our own way in this country.' Defence Minister Edward Millen, 1914.

In the early Australian parliamentary debates about as many members spoke of the European as of the Asian threat. Concerns about Japan in defence policy have been widely discussed by historians, but what has been frequently overlooked is the deep seated Australian fear that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance would not last and that there

¹ HMAS *Australia* was one of three *Indefatigable*-class battlecruisers. Ordered by the Australian government in 1909, she was launched in 1911 and commissioned as flagship of the fledgling Royal Australian Navy in 1913. She carried enough coal and fuel oil to give her a range of 6,690 nautical miles (12,390 km; 7,700 mi) at a cruising speed of 10 knots (19 km/h; 12 mph). Armaments were eight BL 12-inch (305 mm) Mark X guns in four twin turrets; the largest guns fitted to any Australian warship.

was a very real possibility of Germany allying with Japan.² This permeates a range of official publications and press commentary. This reflected currents of concern just as powerful about Australia's ability to defend its lines of trade and communication considered essential for the maintenance of the Empire upon whose naval supremacy Australia's survival was believed to depend. This was a 'given'.

While the issue of developing Australian defence concerns and policy trends also needs to be viewed within the contemporary Imperial framework, this has been covered in much detail by earlier historians³, so only some specific issues are highlighted here. A major source of reference is commentary expressed through the main press journals of the day, which reflected an increasing divergence of opinion with Britain as to the realities of threat and the best means of naval defence for the region.⁴ In this respect this section is not a comprehensive overview of the development of naval policy nor of the divergence views with the Admiralty.⁵ Rather the aim is to highlight what Australians believed was the existing and future situation, and the best means to deal with their defence requirements. Australasian reactions to intrusion into what was considered a natural 'British' area of interest was always swift.

Australian uneasiness about its own security arose from the changing balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region which had been occurring since the last decade of the nineteenth century. The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5 and the subsequent carving out of Japanese, German and Russian spheres of influence in China increased apprehension that Australian interests might be ignored by Britain in dealing with its global concerns. There was an increasing Australian distrust of comforting assurances from the Colonial Defence Committee and the Committee of Imperial Defence.

Yet from the beginning the new Commonwealth Government had considerable difficulty deciding on a naval policy. While Britain had allowed considerable independence in the organisation and control of local military forces, its attitude towards naval matters was much less flexible. Under the Colonial Naval Defence Act of 1865 the colonies had been able to acquire naval vessels for coastal and harbour defence. However, the idea of colonies having ocean-going warships was totally opposed on the basis that such an offensive capacity might give rise to incidents involving other powers. In addition, by the 1890s when the Admiralty was advocating a policy of concentration and mobility, colonial navies were regarded as wasted resources, and particularly the limitation on the movements of imperial squadrons subsidised by the colonies was seen as unjustified restraint on freedom of action. The slogan was 'One Empire, one sea, one fleet', with London pushing the idea of colonial contributions to the 'Imperial Navy' without conditions.⁶ It is against this background that rising Australian concerns about the activity of European powers in the Asian-Pacific-Indian Ocean region -specifically Germany- and the vulnerability of lines of trade and communication must be seen.

² P. Overlack, 'Japan as a Factor in German Asian Policy before World War I', Australian Association of European Historians Conference, Brisbane, July 2003, papers published as S. Atzert & A. Bonnell (Eds), *Europe's Pasts and Presents*, (Unley: Australian Humanities Press, 2004).

³ See D. C. Gordon, 'The Admiralty and Dominion Navies, 1902-14', *Journal of Modern History*, 4 December 1961, *The Dominion Partnership in Imperial Defence, 1870-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965); Neville Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901-1914* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1976).

⁴ This despite Neville Meaney's somewhat harsh observation that the press 'in general followed a vacillating and uncertain course in their editorials on external dangers, torn between their deference to British judgement on such matters and the demands made upon them by Australia's special geo-political character'. *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵ See Nicholas Lambert, 'Economy or empire? The fleet unit concept and the quest for collective security in the Pacific, 1909-1914', in K. Neilson & G. Kennedy (Eds), *Far-Flung Lines. Essayson Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman* (London/ Portland: Cass, 1997), 55-83; and his collection of documents in *Australia's Naval Inheritance. Imperial Maritime Strategy and the Australia Station 1880-1909* (Canberra: Maritime Studies Program, 1998).

⁶ Meaney, 75.



Map by Gordon Smith, please acknowledge www.naval-history.net

Recognised threats and the growth of Australian defence consciousness.

Events at the turn of the century highlight the complex relationship between economics and politics in the Pacific. These were inseparably connected: the safety of commerce depended upon effective naval protection, and this could be provided only by an extension of Anglo-Australasian control in the near Pacific. Prior to 1901 the colonies' weakness was that they lacked both the constitutional freedom to act for themselves, and the financial resources to pay for British annexations. The latter in particular was a requirement of any action as far as the Colonial Office was concerned, and a cause of particular heartburn with Australia and New Zealand.⁷ While the colonists were unable to persuade Britain to adopt a more proactive policy in the Pacific, their known interests and the pressure they could bring to bear still forced British governments to hesitate in recognizing foreign claims when they might otherwise have done so.

The menace of cruisers and armed merchantmen was raised frequently in the press and in the Australian colonial and later Commonwealth Parliaments.⁸ As Lord Brassey wrote in the widely-read *Nineteenth Century*, if communications between Australasia and Britain were interrupted, the consequences could be 'fatal...the ocean routes converging on their ports should be guarded by a fleet of sufficient strength to give security to the trade of the empire'.⁹ As areas of colonial acquisition in Africa became scarcer, the Pacific became of increasing interest to the European powers. For the Australasian Colonies, and after 1901 the Commonwealth, fear of foreign penetration of the self-declared Australasian sphere of influence in the Pacific was to dominate defence thinking, and on more than one occasion led to unilateral action - most notably Queensland's annexation of Papua. While nobody actually believed that Australia faced imminent invasion - the Royal Navy was a guarantee against that - there was nevertheless an underlying apprehension about the future and the continent's exposed position. As Neville Meaney put it, for Australians 'isolation was an ambiguous condition'.¹⁰

Opinion was growing that the 'storm centre' of world politics was shifting to the Pacific.¹¹ The largest and oldest ship was the *Cerberus*, an iron armour-plated turret

⁷ See P. Overlack, 'Bless the Queen and Curse the Colonial Office: Australasian Reaction to German Expansion in the Pacific to 1900', *Journal of Pacific History*, 33/2, 1998.

⁸ A few examples are: *The Bulletin*, throughout November 1902; *The Age*, 17 July 1903, 27 August 1908; SMH, 24 September 1899; *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* (CPD), III, 1901-2 Session, 2963f., 2979f., 3299f., 3592; Vol. 14, 1903, 1772f.

⁹ Lord Brassey, 'Imperial Federation', *The Nineteenth Century*, September 1891, 488.

¹⁰ Meaney, 54.

¹¹ CPD, III, 1901-2, 24 July 1901, 2989.

ship built in 1868 which by 1901 was suitable only for training purposes or as a 'floating fort in Port Phillip Bay'.¹² The most effective was the *Protector*, a steel-protected cruiser purchased in 1884 and which had served in Chinese waters during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. There were also five torpedo boats and various minor vessels.¹³ The Government initially saw its task to integrate the inherited colonial ships while adhering to a limited budget. Later Prime Minister William Morris Hughes, while not ruling out the possibility of an invasion from Asia, held that the major threat came from a coalition of European powers.¹⁴ A. C. Groom (Qld), feared that if they seized the opportunity provided by the Boer War to attack the British Empire, then German cruisers might cause havoc in Australian ports and with trade.¹⁵ Later, Henry Willis (NSW), was concerned that a German-Dutch alliance might give Germany control over the East Indies. These are but some elements of the very mixed first debate on defence that occurred in the new Federal Parliament, and the issues were elaborated upon by various writers in the following years.

Just prior to federation, Captain R. Muirhead Collins, Secretary of the Victorian Defence Department and later first Secretary of the new Commonwealth Defence Department, wrote a memorandum emphasising the importance of an independent Australian naval force. It was predicted that the Pacific would become the new Mediterranean, the scene of competing European powers against which day the Commonwealth had to prepare its defences. It was estimated that the money paid in subsidy to the Royal Navy auxiliary squadron combined with that allocated for local defence would enable the purchase of five second-class cruisers. To mollify London it was added that the result would be a substantial addition to the Empire's fleet, even if not in the form the Admiralty wanted.¹⁶

While the Commonwealth Government adopted the scenario of a possible European threat, insofar as it had a rationale for its naval defence policy this raised complex Imperial problems. The American naval writer Alfred Thayer Mahan (who was an influence on Naval Secretary Alfred Tirpitz) raised the question of what the self-governing Dominions could do, not only for their own immediate security, and that of their trade: 'The prime naval considerations for them are that the English Channel Fleet should adequately protect the commerce and shores of the British Islands.' Thus the safety of the Empire's heartland would ensure that of its parts, with little danger to their trade except from single cruisers. Herein lay the core of the differences between Australia and Britain. As far as Mahan was concerned, non-professional (and even some military) minds needed to keep local and general interests 'in their true relations and proportions'. What Australia needed was not a 'fraction of an Imperial navy', but an organisation of naval force which 'constituted a firm grasp of the universal naval situation'. Australasia's role was to fortify the whole British position in the Far East.¹⁷ The Admiralty stood firm in its view of the essential nature of concentration and mobility of naval forces.

Nevertheless, some action was needed in other directions. The naval writer P. A. Silburn warned that it might well be imagined an enemy 'would gladly risk a dozen of his ships to complete the destruction of Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide ...It is to those very ports that the British shipping...would naturally fly for protection'. To leave the great Dominion seaports undefended was to surrender command of the sea. If every port were sufficiently fortified to give protection to merchant shipping, the commerce destroyers would be helpless, cut off from coal, easy prey for cruisers from the fortified ports. The enemy had to be kept 'out of every place in which he may meet his colliers and from which he may pounce out upon our commerce'.¹⁸ The question was thus posed: the Commonwealth contributed directly £200,000 for the Royal Navy, which was barely sufficient to pay the interest on the cost and upkeep of two battleships. What return was she going to ask for this in time of war? Putting the Admiralty view, P.

¹² Meaney, 55.

¹³ See G. L. Macandie, *The Genesis of the Royal Australian Navy. A Compilation by G.L. Macandie, CBE, Secretary, Australian Naval Board, 1914-1946* (Sydney: Pettifer, Government Printer, 1949), 23.

¹⁴ CPD, III, 1901-2, 3295.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9 August 1901, 3592.

¹⁶ *Parliamentary Papers*, 1901-2 Session, Vol. II, No. 27, 'Report of the Conference of Naval Officers Assembled at Melbourne to consider the Question of Naval Defence of Australia'.

¹⁷ A. T. Mahan, 'The Disposition of Navies', *National Review*, July 1902, 717-9.

¹⁸ P. A. Silburn, *The Colonies and Imperial Defence* (London: Longmans, Green, 1909), 202-3.

A. Silburn stated it would be more effective if Australia's contribution were expended on harbour defences, dockyards and coaling facilities, training ships, and for personnel to man the auxiliary fleet. Then any surplus could be spent on a local navy - which should remain a unit of the Royal Navy.¹⁹

The 1902 Naval Agreement – aggravation with Britain



The loss of control over Australian forces serving in South Africa was at the back of Prime Minister Edmund Barton's mind at the 1902 Imperial Conference, and the debate over local control of defence was part of the resistance to British attempts to obtain greater contributions from the Dominions.²⁰ Nevertheless he accepted an extension of the existing naval agreement, with an increase in the annual subsidy to £200,000. Significantly, Commonwealth control over the movements of subsidised ships in wartime was ended, these now coming under the full control of the Royal Navy. In return for this concession, the Admiralty agreed to station more modern ships in Australian waters. Barton accepted this knowing that Australia could bear neither the cost of establishing its own naval force, nor of keeping it up to date. The debate on the issue lasted three weeks in parliament. Barton's main argument that Australia also had imperial obligations prevailed. There were benefits despite the loss of control in wartime: the new mobility of the subsidised vessels allowed concentration of forces, and Australia would have greater security because of the easier cooperation of the Australasian, China, and Far Eastern Stations.²¹

Nevertheless, there remained the strong feeling that British and Australian interests were not always likely to coincide. Indeed, the Admiralty 'consistently refused to help the Dominions 'play the game' by any rules except their own'.²² *The Bulletin* criticised Barton severely for this surrender of control in what it termed the 'naval tribute' agreement: '...he has fallen in more badly than was generally supposed...compared to Canada, [Australia] has distinctly fallen among thieves'. Under the old agreement Australia paid for the services of a small and inefficient fleet, but at least in wartime it would remain in Pacific waters. Under the new agreement, for more money and the possible removal of the fleet from the Pacific in wartime there might be no defence at all when it is needed, and an enemy could bombard Australia with impunity; '...all the refreshments that the British Government could have offered to Barton won't compensate for the badness of the bargain'. It seemed that every time a premier went to England, there was 'something dreadful to explain' on his return.²³ *The Age* was less strident, although it also opposed any British attempt to centralise control of Dominion defences. Events in South Africa had shown well enough that neither the War Office nor the Admiralty had a monopoly on wisdom. Just because the cost of establishing an Australian Navy was prohibitive, this did not mean the country was tied to the alternative of subsidising the Imperial Navy along old lines.

¹⁹ Ibid., 160-1.

²⁰ CPD, III, 1901-2, 2963, 2979.

²¹ CPD, XIV, 1903, 1779-81.

²² Lambert, 58.

²³ *The Bulletin*, 18 October 1902.



The proposal by then commandant of Commonwealth Naval Forces, William Rooke Creswell²⁴ had much to recommend it: the immediate purchase of a ship to £300 000 would mark a beginning, with a subsidy for an Australian auxiliary squadron on a lighter basis. Ships could be acquired gradually, and the subsidy paid would thus slowly diminish in exact proportions Australia took on the maintenance of its own vessels: '...the Commonwealth should not sanction any agreement...in London for the prolongation of present arrangements.' It appreciated that the Admiralty took a dim view of such ideas, but the formation of an Australian Navy would not necessarily interfere with Imperial control. However, it would end the 'present objectionable policy of taxation without representation' and provide that Australian money would be spent in protection of its own commerce.²⁵

The question to be faced was how Australia could support larger Imperial interests in accommodating the Admiralty, while being nagged by doubts about just how effective Royal Navy protection of its coasts would be, the latter fuelled by a growing nationalistic public sentiment. As *The Bulletin* pointed out in a long and bitter article in November, Australia's maritime problem was that all its important cities and most of its wealth were on the seaboard, as was its best coal supply, and all were open to naval attack. An enemy that occupied Sydney or Melbourne for a few hours could cut the country's principal railway connections, and cable connections were just as vulnerable.

Supposing the enemy appeared and began doing damage ...anywhere north of Rockhampton, and from there all round the north and west and south coast to Adelaide or anywhere off Tasmania, it would be difficult for the eastern States to send assistance if the sea were wholly at the command of the enemy.²⁶

If, as under the new arrangement²⁷ the Admiralty could in theory dispatch ships elsewhere as it saw fit, two or three hostile cruisers which had dodged the British fleet could 'rage up and down the coast as much as they pleased'. The Commonwealth was currently paying for the use of a small British Squadron which was supposed also to 'wander around Maoriland, Fiji and half the South Pacific'. Australia had no control whatever over this Squadron, and the limits of its operations were too vast to provide anything like reasonable security. One British admiral was supposed to have stated that if war really eventuated, the Squadron would probably make for the seat of hostilities regardless of the Agreement, 'leaving Australia at the mercy of any casual cruisers which managed...to dodge the British vessels'. The time had obviously come

²⁴ William Rooke Creswell was appointed first Director of Naval Forces in December 1904. This was in addition to his duties as naval commandant in Queensland and, after 20 October 1904, in Victoria. In January 1905 he was made a member of the Council of Defence and of the Australian Navy Board. Creswell was a persistent advocate for new ships and increased manpower. He was promoted Rear Admiral and became First Naval Member of the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board on 1 March 1911.

²⁵ *The Age*, 13 March 1902.

²⁶ *The Bulletin*, 22 November 1902.

²⁷ On the 1902 Agreement see Gordon, 409.

for the Commonwealth to spend this money and more on a fleet of its own that would be where it was wanted, when it was wanted. And this was not just a local issue- there was more shipping belonging to the Empire to defend between Perth and Townsville than on most of the Empire's coasts. It was also overlooked that Australia kept more gold in its banks (some £20 million) in proportion to population than almost any other country. A few armed cruisers which 'held up' Sydney and Melbourne while the fleet was away could extort a ransom in gold that would amount to more than all the plunder they were likely to get if they held possession of the trade routes to England for two years! Not to mention that if these same cruisers 'raked the seas up and down our coasts, they would be able to destroy more shipping...than they would find on the open ocean in twelve months'. The real difficulty in the proposal to relieve Britain of the burden of defending an immense amount of its own property against this danger lay in the selfish tradition that the fleet should be wholly British controlled.²⁸

To minimise the growing opposition Barton and Defence Minister Sir John Forrest asked for six small torpedo boat destroyers as substitutes for one of the cruisers provided for in the Agreement. The Colonial Office reaction was that 'The Australians do not seem to be able to grasp the principles of naval defence'. The proposal would only give Australia a false sense of security and could well lead to the neglect of coastal defences.²⁹ In Australia the Agreement was seen as a stopgap measure providing naval protection until conditions -mainly financial- permitted local development. Through the speeches of parliamentarians such as Sir John Quick it was clear that Creswell had played a significant part in shaping this attitude.³⁰

Another issue which was raised in Parliamentary debate was also dealt with by a perceptive writer to *The Times* in February 1903, who pointed out that while naval policy on the British side was based on countering a concentration of enemy forces, the principal risk against which Australia had to provide was just the opposite.

There is not the slightest doubt that any such power entering upon hostilities against the British Empire would play the double game of keeping the main line of British defences fully engaged while at the same time preying upon Colonial commerce and making descents upon Colonial ports by means of roving cruisers...When it is the enemy's cue to attack the nooks and corners of the Empire the part of wisdom is to provide ample defences for these places.³¹

Just who this foreign power might well be was stated clearly in the Australian press in July 1903, after the publication of the Foreign Office Blue Book of Anglo-German correspondence on the Canadian preferential tariff, which placed German demands in a 'very audacious light' and showed an 'undisguised attempt at browbeating the British Empire'. The question was not simply one of trade. *The Age* pointed out that the German press had for some time maintained that a consolidated British Empire would be prejudicial to the political as well as commercial interests of Germany, and must therefore be hindered. Germany repeatedly had invited the United States to combine for the purpose of vetoing any commercial ventures which would have the effect of strengthening the bonds of union between Britain and its colonies. Germany's reasons for doing this had been stated quite bluntly by its academics, thus it was clear to Australians that Germany could never be reconciled to the fact of British naval pre-eminence, and was ready 'to go to any safe lengths to destroy it'.³²

In 1902 Britain concluded an alliance with Japan, but Australia was not consulted. The core of the treaty provided that each would remain neutral if the other were involved in war with a third power. Britain and Japan would act jointly only if a fourth power joined the enemy. This arrangement relieved Britain of German and Russian pressure in the Pacific and enabled it to concentrate on European concerns. The five battleships previously present in the Pacific were withdrawn following the conclusion of the alliance with Japan. This and other redistributions reflected new developments in European diplomacy: the increasing menace of growing German naval strength and the development of Anglo-French entente.

²⁸ *The Bulletin*, 22 November 1902.

²⁹ Minute by Sir Montague Ommaney, Permanent Under-Secretary, CO (Colonial Office) 418/26, Tennyson-Colonial Office, 24 April 1903.

³⁰ CPD, Vol. XIV, 8, 9 July 1903, 1912, 1968.

³¹ *The Times*, 2 February 1903.

³² *The Age*, 17 July 1903.

The Age was upset that Admiral 'Jackie' Fisher's new broom had also swept away the type of vessel formerly seen so much in Australian waters and presented as the embodiment of British seapower. The Australian Station was evidently like a paddock to which old and worn out animals were sent in ignorance of their approaching end. This was the sort of squadron for which Australia has been paying a subsidy. The lesson was that Australia had better begin to acquire some vessels of her own.³³ In December 1903 Creswell criticised the misconceptions underlying a defence policy to date devoted to a large land force. Australia had to concentrate on supplementing the first line of defence, the Royal Navy, and the logical step in this direction was to take responsibility for the protection of coastal commerce.³⁴

However the bottom line was that Australia needed Britain more than the reverse, and all protestations of Imperial loyalty would be ineffective in securing ships if this did not fit in with Admiralty plans. The Pacific interests of Australia and New Zealand were peripheral to the main concerns of British defence planners, whose emphasis changed markedly in the following years with the growth of the German battle fleet and the concern for defence centred on the North Sea. In reality, Australasian concerns with security were well founded, given the planned merchant warfare operations of the German East Asian Cruiser Squadron.³⁵

The reality of the German threat

From 1884 Australia faced the reality and implications of German colonial annexations (technically protectorates) in the Pacific. Writing in 1899, the former High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, Sir William des Voeux, stated that in the tradeoff for Germany acquiring Samoa, British acquisition of the two largest Solomon Islands was a distinct advantage to Australia

because foreign influence is thus pushed further off from...Australia and New Guinea; and there is also removed an angle of German possessions which intruded into ours in a manner which might some day have become very inconvenient.³⁶

Australian concerns in the Pacific cannot be separated from European developments. The growth of Anglo-German animosity as a result of German colonial and naval expansion under Wilhelm II's exercise of 'world policy' cast great suspicion on Germany's motives. By the turn of the century, German aim of cutting trade routes and supply lines between Australasia and Britain in the event of a conflict was suspected, and heightened defence concerns.³⁷

The deeper reasons for concern are to be found in Germany's wide-ranging plans for economic and strategic penetration of the Asian-Pacific region. Now more than ever before, the acquisition of colonial territory had more than just status value as the indicator of a world power.³⁸ Given the expansionist imperative of Wilhelmine Germany, it was inevitable that increasing pressure would be applied in colonial matters, particularly after 1897 when Samoa figured prominently in the domestic propaganda campaign supporting the passage of the naval construction legislation. At the time of the parliamentary passage of the First Naval Law, Foreign Secretary Bernhard von

³³ *The Age*, 21 February 1905.

³⁴ AA Melbourne, MP153/S3/1903/5539, Creswell-Chapman, 29 December 1903.

³⁵ See P. Overlack 'German Commerce Warfare Planning for the Australian Station 1900-1914', *War & Society*, 14:1, (May 1996), 17-48.

³⁶ 'The Anglo-German Agreement', *The Times*, 13 November 1899.

³⁷ See P. Overlack 'Australian Defence Awareness and German Naval Planning in the Pacific, 1900-1914', *War & Society*, 10:1 (May 1992), 37-51.

³⁸ The contrary view is taken by Hermann Hiery in *The Neglected War. The German South Pacific and the Influence of World War 1* (Honolulu, 1995), 1, 11-12. Unfortunately Hiery ignores German archival holdings which support this. See my reviews: Hermann Hiery, *The Neglected War: The German South Pacific and the Influence of World War I* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), in *Journal of Military History* (Michigan State University Press), October 1996; H. J. Hiery (Ed.), *Die deutsche Südsee 1884-1914. Ein Handbuch*, (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000), in *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 65, July, 2001.

Bülow stated that Samoa was proof that 'overseas policy can only be pursued with plentiful naval power'.³⁹



One inevitably is drawn back to German world-political aims. Naval Secretary Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz clearly stated that by the twentieth century Germany would come into conflict with Britain 'in some part of the earth, be it out of economic rivalry or as a consequence of colonial disputes'.⁴⁰ Tirpitz wanted Samoa in particular as a station for the German trans-world cable and as a coaling station on the way to the main naval base at Tsingtau in northern China. A mid-Pacific position would be even more important once the Panama Canal was completed. He insisted on the acquisition of Samoa because this would be 'of great strategic value to the Navy, a highly valuable base'.⁴¹ The historian Hans Delbrück expressed a widely-held view when he wrote in 1899 that 'We wish to become a world power and pursue colonial policy in the grand manner. There can be no stepping backwards'.⁴²

Without this understanding of the internal forces at work in Germany, no proper explanation is possible for the reluctance to depart from what seemed to Australasians to be unimportant remote outposts. The British Foreign Office had been persuaded by the Admiralty that only potential bases on the actual *route* to East Asia were important, so the Pacific could be ignored - an error in view of German plans for commerce warfare in the region and against the US and Canadian Pacific coast. The idea of a conflict of European powers in the region was not as hypothetical as it might sound. A. T. Mahan in *The National Review* in 1902 commented that

The elements of future conflict in that, until now well-named Pacific, Ocean are already discernable. It seems far from impossible that the German *Drang nach der See*, to which the Emperor William has given so mighty an impulse, may tempt Germany to impose upon Holland some arrangement...by which the Germans would obtain a certain control of...the splendid Dutch colonial possessions.

However, Britain could be certain that in Australia a keen watch would be kept on developments in the Pacific.⁴³

From 1908 to 1912 Anglo-German relations were dominated by the question of competitive naval armaments. German foreign policy was seen as aggressive, and the writings and speeches of politicians, given academic credence by political scientists and historians, created the belief in British minds that German economic progress and direct competition, German striving for political hegemony on the Continent, and Tirpitz' construction program were incompatible with the security of the Empire. These factors brought forth public emotions which at times reached panic level. It made little difference whether the threat was real or not, for the *belief* that it was real played a large part in determining British policy. The dictates of geographical and psychological isolation also influenced Dominion attitudes.

³⁹ J. Lepsius et.al., *Die Große Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914* (Berlin:Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1922-7), Vol. XIV, i, No. 4053, Bülow-Foreign Office, 1 April 1899.

⁴⁰ Tirpitz' comment to Saxon military attaché, quoted in V.R. Berghahn, 'Zu den Zielen des deutschen Flottenbaues unter Wilhelm II', *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 210, February 1970, 67.

⁴¹ GP, Vol. XIV, ii, No. 4107, Tirpitz-Bülow, 11 October 1899.

⁴² Quoted in E. Kehr, *Schlachtflottenbau und Parteipolitik 1894-1901* (Vaduz:Kraus Reprint, 1975), 384.

⁴³ *National Review*, January 1902, 711.

That string of islands from Hong Kong to not far from the north coast of Australia might any day be secured by Germany. Again, Holland might some day be incorporated in the German Empire, and Java, Sumatra, and the Moluccas would then pass into German possession...People in Australia had been living like people in an enchanted island...The isolation of Australia was a delusion...

Australia was entirely dependent upon British command of the sea, and if this were lost, then Australia's position would be as perilous as that of Britain itself: 'The coast would be in the grip of the enemy's cruisers', and even if there were no bombardment, Australia would be gradually forced to accept any terms of surrender.⁴⁴ It was perceptions which were important, and for Australia and New Zealand, given Germany's vigorous naval policy, its presence in the Pacific was enough to suggest expansion whenever an opportune moment might present itself.

As far as Australia was concerned, what was to be feared was that German colonial harbours 'may be used for coaling stations and strategic bases from which her cruisers could issue forth in time of war and pray upon our intercolonial commerce or shell our coastal towns'.⁴⁵ Concern about Germany's intentions had been growing in the press for some time, and there is no doubt that educated and travelled Australians were well aware of the German mentality. In a similar tone in May 1902, *The Globe*, in an article entitled 'Australia's Peril. The Islands in the Pacific', complained that various Australian Premiers had urged the necessity for annexing the more important islands in view of the extension of the Pacific cable and shipping routes, but invariably failed to impress the Colonial Office with a due sense of the gravity of the situation. Germany was now securely established 'at the very threshold of the Commonwealth', with naval bases situated so as to give her many advantages in wartime.⁴⁶

The threat was real, and was seen as such. In the 1903 British naval estimates debate, it was stated that the idea of a naval war remaining a 'limited liability' was a delusion. If Australia were pressed by Germany, it would 'not have to contend only with the foreign squadron...but against the whole maritime strength...'⁴⁷

Implications of the 1905 CID 'Report on Colonial Defence'

In December 1904 Creswell presented an alternative defence policy that was intended to satisfy both Australian and Imperial needs. He quoted Mahan and drew on examples from the Russo-Japanese War to argue that the world's 'war storm centre' had moved to the Pacific. Australia by virtue of its geographical location was well positioned to be a major bulwark in the Eastern hemisphere. What was needed was a primary naval base complemented by a naval force, and here Creswell advocated a strong destroyer component.⁴⁸ However the limitations of the 1903 Naval Agreement and the opposition of Defence Minister J. W. McCay was the reality.⁴⁹ Pre-federation concentration on militarily fending off raids on coastal cities predominated, and McCay pointedly rejected Creswell's alternative of local naval defence.⁵⁰

The Government formed in 1905 by George Reid took the view that Australian defence efforts should concentrate on land-based military development. Reid believed that as long as the Royal Navy provided protection for Australia, the country did not need a naval force of its own. Creswell, now Commonwealth Naval Director, disagreed strongly with this view, maintaining that Australia's basic defence depended on effective sea power.⁵¹ 'The sea is the only leveler between great and strong nations and smaller and numerically weaker ones. It is at our hands to make use of', he stated. *W. R. Creswell, 1905.*⁵²

⁴⁴ *The West Australian*, 11 August 1903.

⁴⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, 3 May 1905.

⁴⁶ *The Globe*, 18 May 1906.

⁴⁷ *Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates* (PD) Vol. CXIX, col. 1048-1050, 17 March 1903.

⁴⁸ AA Melbourne, MP729/S1/04/5468, 'Remarks upon the Defence Scheme for the Commonwealth of Australia', 3 December 1904.

⁴⁹ McCay had experience in the South African War and had studied Australian defence; his view was that it should begin 'from within and working outwards'. CPD, Vol. XIV, 15 July 1903, 2133.

⁵⁰ AA Melbourne, MP729/S1/05/5018, 'Memorandum on Council of Defence', 12 May 1905.

⁵¹ PRO (UK Public Record Office), Cab.17/48, 'Australia-Naval and Military Defence, 1905-1910', Memorandum of J.W. McCay, Minister of Defence, 10 May 1905.

⁵² AA- Melbourne, B173/S/905/144, 'Council of Defence. Report by the Director of the Naval Forces upon the

In October 1905, Lt. Col. W. T. Bridges, the Chief of Intelligence, wrote a secret commentary on a memorandum by the Colonial Defence Committee. The British believed that territorial aggression against Australia was impossible except on a large scale, and this could not be attempted until the Royal Navy were defeated. Therefore, 'the contingency of territorial aggression by a large force conveyed in transports need not be taken into account as one of the requirements of Australian defence'. Given this, the question to be decided for Bridges was should the Commonwealth then make no preparation for resisting possible territorial aggression and restrict its defences to meeting raids by cruisers? ⁵³

An ensuing period of inactivity was succeeded by the second Deakin Government which gave more support to Creswell's view. Deakin's position was that the naval Agreement with Britain had never been popular, because funds were not directed to any specifically Australian purpose. Apart from the hotly debated issue of the subsidy paid to the Royal Navy which is divergent here, particular concerns rested on the urgent need for a local naval force for coastal defence, and the belief that naval power must of necessity be used to defend Dominion seaborne trade. ⁵⁴ The view of the Government's special advisor, Colonel J. F. G. Foxtan, was that the annual subsidy was the only practicable method of sharing the defence burden, 'though as a tentative and temporary arrangement only'.⁵⁵ As a 'subsidyite' Foxtan was suspect: the lead article in *The Age* of 11 June 1909 stated that '...his personal opinions are quite unrepresentative of public opinion in the Commonwealth'.



It demanded that Defence Minister George Pearce, who 'thoroughly comprehends...the nation's defence aspirations' be appointed co-delegate to provide balance. 'We cannot afford to hazard our existence...it is well within the scope of things probable we should be invaded by a foreign foe before...a proper system of defence established'. The Government suggested it could create new coaling or general naval stations in Australia, or there might be a subsidy to increase commercial steamship traffic capable of conversion to auxiliary cruisers in wartime.⁵⁶

The Colonial Office pointed out that as the naval defence of Australia would probably take place thousands of miles away in European waters, it was against good strategy and common sense to tie up ships on the Australian Station. This was the crux of the disagreement. Creswell's Memorandum for the CID made the point that what Australia required was a line within the defence line of the Imperial fleet that would give security to naval bases, principal ports, and commerce.⁵⁷ In February *The Age* already had commented that a naval policy of self-help was slowly being forced on the Commonwealth by the inexorable logic of events. As had been stated in *The Times* earlier, a consideration which had to be paramount in the minds of British planners was the protection of Britain's food supply: 'If the routes by which foodstuffs are brought to the United Kingdom were blocked by any naval combination, even for...three or four

Matters referred to in the Interview regarding "Defence" appearing in the Melbourne "Herald" of 12th June 1905'.

⁵³ AA-Melbourne, B173/S/905/187, Bridges-Minister of Defence, 16 October 1905. Some progress was made. By 1905 there was a clear presentation of procedure in time of anticipated threat. See AA-Melbourne, P1049/1911/06, 'Instructions for the Distribution of Intelligence on the Australian Station in Time of War, 1905'. A complete list of signal and transmitting stations is provided.

⁵⁴ *Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute*, Vol. XXXVI, 1904-5, 48.

⁵⁵ J.F.G. Foxtan, 'The Evolution and Development of an Australian Naval Policy', *Commonwealth Military Journal*, Vol. 1, 1911, 658.

⁵⁶ PRO, CO (Colonial Office), 418/37, Deakin-Northcote, 28 August 1905.

⁵⁷ Foxtan, 661.

weeks, there would be the beginning of an acute famine'. The massing of heavy squadrons in order to convey fleets of merchantmen, and to 'strike titanic blows' at any enemy which might menace them, would be the essential feature of Britain's future maritime campaign. The danger was that any naval combination directed against Britain with its main objective the negation of naval supremacy and the harrasing of mercantile trade 'would at once throw into a tangled mass the whole of the naval defensive network' which Britain had attempted to weave around her distant colonial possessions. One thing was clear: Australia needed its own carefully planned scheme of harbour defences, including forts and mines, and 'several really serviceable cruisers assisted by torpedo boats'. In the absence of such defences the coasts of the States were open to attack. The Commonwealth's most urgent duty was to set its own defences in order.⁵⁸



In mid-June a statement by Deakin on defence (now out of Government but less than a month before becoming Prime Minister again) needs was met with universal approval and was 'everywhere the subject of animated discussion'. The Melbourne *Herald* termed it 'A great statement' on what was the supreme question for the Commonwealth:

A new international situation has been established and the balance of power in the north Pacific has most materially altered...it is madness for Australians to live in a fool's paradise of fancied security. Yet the man who would not sleep at night without his house insured against fire witnesses indifferently a supineness on the part of those charged with responsibility in regard to defence by which he risks seeing the coasts of Australia insulted, its shipping burned in the ports of Melbourne and Sydney by hostile cruisers.

Germany was active in the Pacific and the strength of its fleet obliged Australians to review the whole situation. As Deakin indicated, Australia now was within striking distance of sixteen foreign naval stations: 'It is even very doubtful if we are prepared to meet a dash at our weak spots delivered by two or three fast cruisers'. He was of one mind with Creswell in recognising Australia's dependence on maritime commerce and the necessity of taking early action to protect coastal shipping, and urged the immediate purchase of 'submarines, torpedo boats, and torpedo boat destroyers, the last of which would be sea-going'.⁵⁹ While Creswell declined to comment specifically, he expressed 'a sense of relief' that the matter finally had been seriously adopted by a 'statesman of Mr Deakin's eminence'. It was absolutely essential to make plain in Australia 'what is assuredly a life and death matter'.⁶⁰

In June the *Herald* expressed concern that not only was naval defence 'exceptionally weak', but there had been no consideration of the nature of the defence required. While world conditions had increased the risks to Australia, the country's means of meeting them had decreased. The existing situation provided no protection for overseas trade valued at £100 million annually, beyond the range of batteries at port approaches. Any threat to coastal trade would cause insecurity which would 'dislocate and cripple to the stopping point' important industries such as mineral and coal mining, and railway operations. The result would be a cessation of the export trade which was vital to Britain. Even worse, there was no provision for intelligence about an enemy. It quoted Creswell's comment that 'the sea is the only leveller between great and strong nations

⁵⁸ *The Age*, 21 February 1905. See the author's article 'The Function of Commerce Warfare in an Anglo-German Conflict to 1914', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.20, No.4 (December 1997), 94-114.

⁵⁹ *The Herald*, 12 June 1905.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 13 June 1905.

and smaller and numerically weaker ones. It is at our hands to make use of. Action had to be taken.⁶¹

In his strong response to the *Herald* article Creswell stated that he was in complete agreement with the statement that naval defence was extremely weak. The reason for this was that with the exception of a torpedo boat for Victoria in 1892, there had been no renewal of vessels since 1884, and the *Cerberus* dated from 1870. What then was the character of the force required for Australia's defence? The matter had never properly been considered, and there was 'no reasoned clear statement of our position, as the basis upon which our defence should be organised'. Australia was guaranteed against invasion for conquest by the supremacy of the Royal Navy, yet it was against invasion that all efforts had been concentrated on land-based defences, leaving other vital interests exposed. The main concern had to be with the protection of sealanes, which changes in world conditions could well endanger. One MP stated that as the Dutch Consort was a German, his sympathies would lie with German policy for the annexation of the Netherlands. 'German interests would increase in New Guinea...the possibility of such a change of affairs, together with the increase of the German Navy, is a menace to the safety of Australia'.⁶² If the Netherlands were to be incorporated into Germany, the Indies 'will form a barrier between Australia and the Eastern seas, and will flank our trade communications with Europe'. From there, Germany could mass stores and men ready for operations against Australia. A Russo-German rapprochement, trouble on the Afghan border with Russia, and Germany in the Mediterranean would absorb all British resources, and leave Australia 'open to any scheme of aggrandisement prepared and launched from the erstwhile Dutch colonies'. Germany wanted a possession in a temperate climate for its surplus population, and there was 'no Monroe doctrine to keep Germany from taking possession say of Western Australia'.⁶³

The Report on Colonial Defence considered by the CID in November 1905 recognised the changes which had been taking place in the Far East, where the naval situation had profoundly changed. Germany, the United States and Japan had entered the ranks of first-class naval powers, and although the superiority of the British fleet over the fleets of the two strongest navies was maintained (the 'Two-Power-Standard'), its strength in relation to the naval forces of the rest of the world had diminished. It was acknowledged that the rise of German naval power, demanding an increased concentration of British ships in European waters, increased the difficulty of making the requisite naval forces available to maintain British superiority in the East.⁶⁴ It was precisely this which caused alarm in Australia.



Britain's reliance on the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which conveniently 'relieved the Admiralty from the necessity of attempting to re-establish our naval

⁶¹ AA Melbourne, B173/S/905/144, 'Council of Defence. Report by the Director of the Naval Forces upon the Matters referred to in the Interview regarding "Defence" appearing in the Melbourne "Herald" of 12th June 1905'

⁶² CPD, Vol. XIV, 15 July 1903, 2151.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ PRO, Cab. 5/2, Secret, CO 1018/09, 'Colonial Defence', 3.

superiority in the Far East over any probable combination of powers', was not well accepted by the Australian public or press. That this convenient arrangement for Britain could not be regarded as permanent was recognised since the Alliance terminated in 1915. Appropriate planning would have to be implemented to cope with the situation which might arise when it was not longer possible to assume that the Japanese fleet would be acting in concert with the British in wartime, but might even act against Britain, alone or in combination with some other power. That the power might well be Germany was recognised in the Report. It also made clear that the Dominions could not necessarily count on immediate naval assistance if they came under threat. Another chilling prospect was that naval action in remote waters 'might have to be postponed until by the clearing of the situation in home waters adequate naval force could be brought to bear'. What would have alarmed and outraged Australian legislators, had they been aware of it, was the decision that if the 'temporary surrender' of local naval superiority in distant waters was 'a contingency that must in certain circumstances be contemplated', the Admiralty would be faced with a material qualification of the previous guarantee to protect British territory.⁶⁵

It was estimated that the most formidable scale of attack that existing defences were calculated to meet was bombardment by a squadron of battleships accompanied by two or three armed transports conveying a maximum landing force of 4 000 men. However, it was considered highly improbable that a European naval Power would be able to mount such an attack, but to an enemy whose naval and military forces were concentrated in their neighbourhood, such an expedition might be a practicable operation. The major calculation would be that there was a reasonable probability that these operations would be completed before the Royal Navy could intervene. This line had always been uppermost in Australasian thinking, hence the strong opposition to *any* acquisition of territory by European powers in the Pacific throughout the nineteenth century. The ruckus the Colonial Governments caused over the Germans in New Guinea, Samoa and smaller island groups is ample evidence of this. Indeed, the CID Report acknowledged that

the most formidable combination of two naval Powers that could be arrayed against us is probably that of Germany and Japan- a combination the possibility of which cannot be left out of consideration if the Anglo-Japanese Alliance is terminated.⁶⁶

This Report, received in July 1906, certainly came as a shock to Australians, describing as it did a possible raid on Australia as being of 'secondary importance'. This might have been true enough from an Imperial viewpoint, but quite unacceptable to a Dominion which was pressing to be allowed to defend itself. Following from the proposals of the Australian Naval Officers' Committee, planning was implemented for a flotilla of 24 torpedo vessels, with personnel of 2000 at an annual maintenance cost of £170 000. Deakin, now back in Government, did not adopt the proposal in its entirety mainly for financial reasons, but asked Parliament for eight of the coastal destroyers and four first-class torpedo boats, as well as sending two naval officers to Britain to obtain all necessary information to implement this program. A leading naval architect who was a member of the Admiralty committee on designs was also invited to Australia.⁶⁷

The CID Report, while recognising the probability of a massive attack to neutralise British naval superiority in European waters, also uncannily anticipated exactly what the German operational plans for Australasian waters directed:

With a view to impairing our...concentration in war, and inducing us to weaken our main fleets, the enemy may endeavour to create a widespread feeling of insecurity and alarm throughout the Empire by...raiding our sea-borne trade and threatening distant portions of the Empire...

⁶⁵ Ibid, 3-4.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁷ Jose, xxvi-xxvii.

It would be necessary to take a 'vigorous offensive' against such activity in order to prevent the disturbance of trade and the demoralisation which would ensue from random depredations.⁶⁸ When the presence of a commerce raider was reported, it was considered desirable to bring it into action as soon as possible, wherever, which pointed to the necessity of concerted action not only for direct pursuit, but also with a view to intercepting it at obligatory points of passage. This was the thinking behind the need for mobility of British naval vessels, unhampered by Dominion considerations-

It is for this reason that under the Naval Agreement of 1903 the cruisers on the Australian Station are not necessarily confined in war to the waters of that Station...to ensure that all the ships of the enemy...may be dealt with at the earliest possible moment wherever they may be found. Closely concerted offensive action...will afford the only effective protection to Australian floating trade, whether on the high seas or in local waters.⁶⁹

Given this, there was little British liking for Creswell's submission for a separate Commonwealth Navy, which was also considered at the meeting. His proposal comprised 3 cruiser destroyers, 16 torpedo boat destroyers, 15 torpedo boats (1st and 2nd class), the acquisition of which was to be extended over seven years at an estimated cost of £2 300 000 for construction and maintenance alone. Creswell defined its purpose as providing

a defence not designed as a force for action against hostile fleets or squadrons, which is the province of the Imperial fleet, but as a line necessary to us within the defensive line of the Imperial fleet...that will give security to our naval bases, populous centres, principal ports, and commerce.

As far as the CID was concerned, this was based on an 'imperfect conception of the requirements of naval strategy...and of the proper application of naval force.' In a scathing condemnation of Creswell's proposal, the Memorandum stated that

There is therefore no strategical justification...for the creation at great expense of a local force of destroyers...the employment of a naval force as "a purely defensive line" is a misapplication of maritime power opposed to every sound principle of naval strategy...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...the Royal Navy must be one and undivided.

A separate Australian navy was rejected on the grounds that it could not find in any effective organization of the Empire's naval forces a role commensurate with the cost of its creation.⁷⁰ Undaunted, in his first annual report as Naval Director in 1906, Creswell again emphasised the need for a protective force based on destroyers for the protection of trade routes: it was 'strange' that a sea trade valued at £100million had been left out of consideration. Upon this trade depended 'the whole business and industrial life of the Commonwealth'.⁷¹

1907: 'Political changes...are unceasing'.⁷²



Perhaps Creswell was stating the obvious when he wrote to Deakin that the paramount concern in defence policy had to be trade and open coastal routes; unin-

⁶⁸ PRO, Cab. 5/1, Report of CID 25 May 1906, Confidential Memorandum 'Australia', 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 2-3.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 10-11.

⁷¹ 'Defence of Australia (10 October 1905) Reports by Captain Creswell, Naval Director', Parliamentary Papers, Defence of Australia, No.66, in Lambert, *Australia's Naval Inheritance*, 119.

⁷² 'Captain Creswell's Memorandum of 6th March 1907 for the Hon.A. Deakin, Prime Minister, on leaving for the Colonial Conference', in Macandie, 176.

interrupted sea communication was a *sine qua non*. However the implication of interruption went further than many had yet contemplated. 'Trade arteries' was the exact description of Australian waterways and their importance for the nation's industry. Distance from foreign attack was a factor rapidly diminishing, with foreign bases being established in the Pacific, advances made in coaling at sea, indeed with oil fuel presented no difficulty. He saw Australia's primary defence considerations as: the growth of naval power in countries bordering the Pacific, and political changes affecting the possession of colonies in close proximity. It was not inconceivable that in the future Japan could be arranged against Britain with a European power. Again he saw Germany as the most likely candidate. A foreign power which could base supplies within one and a half day's steam of Australia and where armaments could be quietly prepared for years 'would seriously menace our existence'. This would make defending Australia 'a matter of extreme difficulty, or, it may be frankly admitted, impossibility'. Attack from main bases in the North Pacific was a new factor which seriously lessened the value of the old strategic position and made naval development an imperative need.⁷³

For considerable time Deakin had been concerned about the German colonial presence. Rumours that the United States might withdraw from its part of Samoa meant that Germany almost certainly would acquire the only good harbour at Pago Pago when it incorporated the American territory into its own Samoan colony. This 'would be a matter of the gravest concern to the people of this country'.⁷⁴ Within a year he could state that 'the moderate man is inclined to believe that the German danger is one that every month becomes more menacing'. He was concerned at Germany's growing naval strength as a threat to Britain and imperial trade, and the German attempt to acquire naval bases which were critically important for its far-ranging cruisers in the Pacific.⁷⁵ The question of control - whether any naval force was to be 'Colonial' or 'Imperial' - had always been at the top of the Australian agenda, and was to dog discussions in the coming years. The result of the Imperial Conference of 1907 was that both Parliament and public in Australia became increasingly suspicious of proposals from London, and adopted the attitude that they were not prepared to let the Government do what it liked without supervision, lest it be railroaded by London into unacceptable concessions.



So it was opportune for Deakin's campaign for local control that the invitation he extended to the United States for its 'Great White Fleet' to visit Australia during its round-the-world tour in 1908 brought the message home in London, not without some annoyance that he had acted on his own in the matter. The visit was an immense success, as the reports and broadsheet size photographs in the press show. Australians

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ AA-Canberra, CP78/1/47/1803, Deakin-Northcote, 23 December 1907.

⁷⁵ Deakin to Canadian Prime Minister Borden, 10 July 1908, Deakin Papers 15/2250, Box 38, Folder 45, in N. Harper, *A Great and Powerful Friend. A Study of Australian American Relations between 1900 and 1975* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1987), 10.

literally went wild in the streets. The American Navy was put forward as an example of 'one of the greatest nation-making agencies which exist, and which we ourselves do not possess, but which we hope to possess by the sure and steady expansion of our marine and maritime effectiveness'. Admiral Sperry's majestic flotilla stood for equity, order, peace, and a general sense of security. The millions being spent on the naval construction program in Germany was a mutual menace. The American force was welcomed 'in the dim hope that its influence will remain with us...for our greater security'.⁷⁶ Was London listening?

This period also saw Britain considering increases to its building program, including the floating of a loan large enough to cover its expenses for the following four years. This was taken as a sign of the effect of German activity on British public opinion. *The Age* observed that the chances of Germany abating her naval ardour were not considered large, for she had irrepressible economic needs which forced her to attempt the acquisition of colonies for the development of her commerce, but at least now she would see that Britain was intent on maintaining her supremacy at sea. If Britain maintained a consistent building program, Australia would not be exposed to the danger that

..in any war engaging Britain in the next few years her most likely enemy will be at liberty to dispatch numbers of cruisers no longer serviceable in European seas to harry the coasts and commerce of the Commonwealth.

Yet since all her strength would be concentrated to protect the heart of Empire, this would leave the exposed limbs to fend for themselves. All this pointed to the imperative necessity of 'expeditiously acquiring an Australian navy, to be composed of such vessels as...will best counter the mortal menace of the raiding cruiser'.⁷⁷

The 1908 visit of the American Fleet provided enough public opportunities for expression of the feeling that the time had come for Australia to provide for her own naval defence needs. Given that in the past two decades Germany and France had expanded in the Pacific to Australasian detriment, and at any time could become hostile, it was difficult to understand Britain's 'want of policy'. While those two powers had been keen to secure every available position in the Pacific, Britain had been reluctant or indifferent: 'There is an entire absence of any intelligent British activity in the Pacific'. These things came home with particular force to Australians, who could not pretend to be indifferent 'when we see Germany marching over the Pacific with an amazing stride'.⁷⁸ Perhaps emboldened by the euphoria the visit of the American Fleet brought forth, there were statements of real criticism and disaffection directed toward British naval policy, a feeling which had been under the surface for some time, expressed in Parliament by more forthright politicians but never before so widespread or publicly expressed:

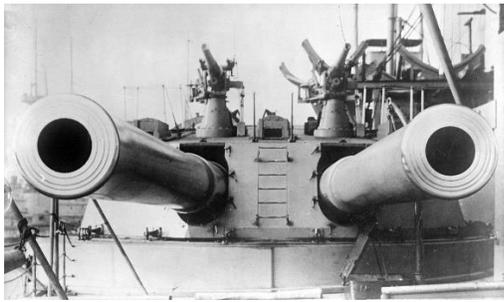
...Australians feel no sort of confidence in Imperial guidance...for many years...there has never been an English Minister capable of taking comprehensive grasp of Austral and Pacific interests...By her weakness and indifference in the great affairs of the Pacific, she is showing to us that we have no ground for security in her management.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ *The Age*, 21, 22 August 1908.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 August 1908.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 31 August 1908.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*



The 1909 German 'Dreadnought scare' and the

Australian Fleet Unit.

On 13 November 1908 Andrew Fisher had taken office in a Labor Government with George Pearce as Defence Minister. While passionately committed to Australian defence, both were, as Meaney puts it 'men of limited education and ordinary circumstances'.⁸⁰ This was to determine how their views were treated in London.

Within a few weeks of Germany's announcement of its naval construction program, there broke in the British press an agitated realisation that it would provide Germany with a fleet capable of challenging Britain's supremacy at the most, and destroying the principle of the Two-Power Standard at the least.⁸¹ Senator Clemons emphasised the 'enormous strides which had recently and unexpectedly been made by Germany in...naval construction'.⁸² *The Argus* highlighted both Australia's vulnerable position in, and natural future to expand in the Pacific: 'Those islands represent the natural sphere of influence of the Commonwealth and of New Zealand'. Had Australia seriously awakened to a recognition of its destiny in the vast region?⁸³ The inhabitants of the Dominions could not comprehend German naval policy. Why did the strongest Continental Power also wish to become a first-class naval power, unless it were to attack Britain?

Feeling became particularly aroused when news arrived that the New Zealand Government had approved the gift of a Dreadnought to the Royal Navy. Its value lay more in its symbolism than in any possible change to the balance of forces. In a leading article equating Imperial security with that of Australia, the *Sydney Morning Herald* advocated that the Dominions provide a ship, which 'would have a moral effect far exceeding in value the intrinsic worth of the vessels as fighting machines.' It would be evidence to Germany of Imperial solidarity. The difficulty lay in keeping a scattered Empire secure.⁸⁴ The *New Zealand Herald* wrote under its banner headline of 'The Naval Crisis' that no room was left for doubt that Britain felt her supremacy on the seas was being seriously threatened by the 'amazing naval activity' in Germany. The Empire had to set itself with the utmost determination, and if necessary sacrifice, to maintain that supremacy upon which national greatness depended.⁸⁵ The clipping in the folio in the Bundesarchiv-Berlin has the marginal comment: 'Gone mad!' in the Kaiser's thick blue pencil.

Any development which was a menace to the heart of the Empire was a menace to the whole. Australians' enthusiasm for British naval supremacy was only concern for the 'perpetuation of a type of civilisation and political system under which Australia enjoyed all the essential prerogatives of an independent community'. The quarrel was with that those Germans who desired the destruction of the British Empire and who would immediately act to achieve this the moment they believed German naval resources to be adequate.⁸⁶ What would be Australia's plight if an enemy were off the coast while local forces remained in their present state of disorganisation? It would be the average man who would be hardest hit if the British fleet came off the worst in the

⁸⁰ Meaney, 175.

⁸¹ British suspicions concerning the German naval program had been raised despite Chancellor Bülow's cautious foreign policy, and by 1902 the Admiralty had concluded that the German Navy was directed against Britain and began countermeasures. See Marder, *Anatomy*, 456f; *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, 104ff.

⁸² CPD, Vol. XLIX, 1909, 963.

⁸³ *Argus*, 29 December 1909.

⁸⁴ SMH, 22,23 March 1909.

⁸⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, 23 March 1909.

⁸⁶ SMH, 30 March 1909.

first engagements. Australian export trade, valued the previous year at £64 million, would be paralysed. Wool could not be sold, for who would ship it? Insurance companies would raise premiums, but the risk might well exclude any cover being offered. Wheat, butter, coal, copper, tin and other commodities would not be exported. Sheep would go unshorn, farms untilled, mines would be idle, and all those involved in these industries and associated transportation would become unemployed.⁸⁷ The *Sydney Morning Herald* commented sharply on the defence available if a warship threatened Sydney:

All we need to do is...rule that it comes within the meaning of the item "Metalware, wrought and malleable, 25 percent" and inform the captain that...he has rendered himself liable for prosecution...Some persons may even be so discourteous as to start pitching shells into Sydney from off Bondi, and we will get even with these by putting a thumping duty on shells and explosives. If the worst comes to the worst, we can declare them to be prohibited imports and go to bed satisfied that Australia is safe...⁸⁸

June brought one of *The Age's* strongest attacks on German policy and presumed intentions. Germany needed a temperate land to which it might direct its surplus population. South America was made inaccessible by the Monroe Doctrine, and South Africa was near enough to Britain to be defended - but it was otherwise with Australia. Germany saw a rich continent, sparsely populated and defended by unarmed and untrained peace lovers, situated too distant from Britain to be held secure if its naval power were broken.⁸⁹ The problem of foreign, particularly German, possessions closeby again was raised: the prize was the 'future suzerainty, political and commercial, of the Southern Pacific. By supineness we may irretrievably lose our present commanding position'. The region was the 'natural sphere of influence' of Australia and New Zealand. Had Australia awakened to a serious recognition of its destiny in that vast region?⁹⁰

The term 'an Australian Navy' increasingly was being used, and its function as the first line of defence emphasised. *The Age* stated that

The work required by Australians of their local navy is, to quote Captain Creswell's 1907 report, 'purely Australian defence against raiders that may escape the British fleet, not, as is so commonly believed, engagement with a naval power that has already overcome the British navy.' All this is a repetition of truths which have been emphasised again and again...

It outlined 'certain fundamental principles'. The number of vessels forming an Australian Navy had to be sufficient to patrol the principal trade route from Fremantle to Thursday Island; to cooperate with the fixed military defences guarding ports; protect the entire coast of the Commonwealth against raids; and vessels had to have repair facilities available locally to make them independent of overseas supplies. To maintain personnel there had to be an infrastructure of naval militia, cadets, officer training colleges, naval scholarships, and training ships. It was also accepted that vessels and personnel had to be capable of being merged with the Royal Navy in wartime.⁹¹ The British construction program from 1909 aimed to restore the margin of superiority in European waters in the face of rapid German battleship increases. It also involved a further weakening of the British presence in the Pacific, and so increased Australia's alarm and the demand for a separate Australian Navy.

The 1909 Imperial Conference was seen as an opportunity to press once again for Australian control of naval defence. While the *Sydney Morning Herald* saw it as desirous to do whatever possible to perfect Imperial solidarity, that sentiment did not prevent it from stating clearly that Australians must be prepared by their own strength to protect the country. A victory in the Atlantic did not necessarily guarantee immunity for Australia, which could still be exposed in the Pacific. It was better to recognise that position and to prepare for it.⁹² As the *Queensland Worker* put it, if Australia did not push its case hard, any Australian Navy would still end up being 'a little thing the country

⁸⁷ SMH, 29 March 1909.

⁸⁸ SMH, 14 April 1909.

⁸⁹ *The Age*, 4 June 1909.

⁹⁰ *Argus*, 18, 29 November 1909.

⁹¹ *The Age*, 12 June 1909.

⁹² SMH, 14 August 1909.

would be able to carry around in its lunch bag and amuse itself with floating in a basin'.⁹³ In parliament, W. M. Hughes declared that the most effective way Australia could help defend the Empire was by defending itself, thus freeing imperial forces for service elsewhere: 'The Pacific is now -or will soon be- a centre no less important than the North Sea...save for our alliance with Japan, never were a people in such a parlous position as we are'.⁹⁴ However, the *Sydney Mail* saw the real possibility of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance being replaced on its expiry by a German-Japanese one, and 'things would then be distinctly uncomfortable for Australia'.⁹⁵

The 1909 Agreement which provided for a fleet unit led by an *Indomitable*-class armoured cruiser, three *Bristol*-class light cruisers, six *River*-class destroyers, and three submarines met with general approval.⁹⁶ As far as *The Age* was concerned, the arrangement was 'entirely satisfactory to Australian national sentiment', and while providing the best form of defence for Australia, still constituted 'a really effective part of Imperial defence whenever and wherever Imperial interests are assailed'. It was seen as a considerable victory for Deakin that the Commonwealth would have to grant permission for the transfer of control to the Admiralty in wartime. This marked a considerable change of attitude on the part of the Admiralty.⁹⁷ The Agreement marked Australia's 'arrival at naval maturity' and ensured the Dominions could make common measure to meet a common threat in Pacific and Asian waters. It wholeheartedly agreed with Joseph Cook's assertion that 'No one can contemplate the position in the Pacific at the present time without a feeling that something ought to be done, and that soon'. Senator E. D. Millen (now Vice-President of the Executive Council) stated that the Agreement

...simplifies the problem of naval defence, ensures a needed element of security in our own waters, and strengthens the naval position of the Empire as a whole...The result must be pleasing to Australian national spirit, leaving, as it does, full control of the local sections to the dominions providing them. This control is absolute, both in peace and war....⁹⁸

With Britain, Australia and Canada contributing, the combination of Dominion fleets was considered a force able to provide minimum protection for Imperial interests in the Asia-Pacific region, was affordable, and most importantly from Australia's point of view, would be stationed permanently in the Pacific regardless of changing defence requirements elsewhere. It cannot be too greatly emphasised how important the 1909 Agreement was to Australia, and how committed the nation was to implementing it fully. There were great hopes for Australia's naval future and as Nicholas Lambert put it, '...the Australian fleet unit was effectively the test bed for the Royal Navy's newest warship types, as well as the latest (albeit controversial) tactical ideas and doctrine'.⁹⁹

The nature of any German threat and Australian independent actions

'A German-Japanese alliance would be our death-knell'. W. R. Cresswell¹⁰⁰ In September 1909 the Defence Department requested the Government to ascertain the British position 'owing to the alterations during the last three years in the balance of naval power, and recent naval developments' on whether any change in the scale of a probable attack on Australia had occurred, and if so what was advised regarding the armament of defended ports.¹⁰¹ The response as the situation was assessed did nothing to reassure the Commonwealth. The 1910 CID Report freely acknowledged that the rise of German naval power demanding an increased concentration of British

⁹³ *Queensland Worker*, 13 February 1909.

⁹⁴ CPD, LII, 1909, 4462-3.

⁹⁵ *Sydney Mail*, 26 May 1909.

⁹⁶ On the political background to the Fleet Unit see Meaney, 182-6.

⁹⁷ *The Age*, 30 August 1909. See also Lambert, 56.

⁹⁸ SMH, 29 August 1909.

⁹⁹ Nicholas Lambert, 'Sir John Fisher, the fleet unit concept, and the creation of the Royal Australian Navy', in *Southern Trident – strategy, history and the rise of Australian Naval Power* (Allen & Unwin, 2001), 224.

¹⁰⁰ Cresswell-Jebb, 31 July 1907, 24 March 1908, Jebb Papers, 813/1/36, 42, in Meaney, 157.

¹⁰¹ AA Melbourne, B197 1888/1/15, Defence Department-Secretary Department of External Affairs, 9 September 1909.

forces in home waters had 'increased the difficulty of making the requisite naval force available...in distant seas'. Although the superiority of the Two-Power Standard was still maintained, its overall strength had diminished. It was now impossible simultaneously to deal with two first-class powers in different parts of the world. The increase of a regional British naval presence thus was not a simple matter. In order to avoid the risk of defeat in a splitting of forces, 'naval action in remote waters might therefore have to be postponed until by the clearing of the situation in Home waters adequate naval force could be brought to bear'. This 'temporary surrender of our local naval superiority' struck Australian defence planners to the core.¹⁰²

This was aggravated by concerns about the reliability of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Creswell's view was that while Germany and the North Sea were important, they were 'not the beginning and end of all things', and 'a German-Japanese alliance would be our death-knell'.¹⁰³ In 1908 he specifically raised the matter in his reply to Colonel H. Foster's study of Australian defence: due to German naval competition Britain was not free to dispatch a large naval force to the East, and Australia faced risks far greater than the raids by 'four unarmed cruisers' as predicted by the CID.¹⁰⁴ In August 1910 the *Sydney Morning Herald* also specifically raised the prospect of a German-Japanese alliance after 1915. Australia could not afford to lose sight of the fact that such an antithesis might one day express itself in the most unmistakable way.

A great deal changes in ten years...The advantages of an understanding between Germany and Japan would obviously be great enough on each side to make it well worth working for. So far as Germany is concerned, it would solve the problems of the British fleet, which would immediately have to be redistributed on a new strategic scheme...this would place Germany in an excellent position...

It was uncertain how far Australia could rely on the United States for support, and the nation was brought face to face with the fact that in such a possible set of circumstances it would be left to its own devices. With the existing defence resources 'we should have a very hard, if not impossible, task in trying to hold our continent'. In the shuffling of alliances everything was possible, and Australia's most urgent need was effective defence.¹⁰⁵

By December 1910 the papers were reacting strongly to a speech in the German parliament by the Colonial Secretary Bernhard Dernburg, particularly the idea that Germany was completely convinced that she must have colonies and that in view of the shortage of cotton and wool, German industry would need to be able to draw on its own colonies and be independent of foreign speculation. Although if the speech was read carefully it was Africa which was being referred to, 'the reason why the sentence was cabled to Australia without further elaboration' was very clear: the Sydney papers took the hint and printed leading articles indicating that Dernburg was referring to the acquisition of new colonies which would cover Germany's cotton and wool requirements. It was left to the readers' imaginations which countries came into consideration. The *Sunday Times* perhaps put it most bluntly:

The long leading article...said Germany was forced to find countries in which the raw materials for its industry could be produced, and it required in the first instance a country that produced wool...As Argentina did not come into consideration because of the Monroe Doctrine, only Australia remained, which...would go to Germany if it should be victorious in the coming war with England.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² PRO, Cab. 5/2, CID Memorandum 24 January 1910, 'Fixed Defences at British defended Ports', Secret, CO 1018/09, 118. A subsequent Report recommended that Sydney, as the base of the Australian Fleet Unit and liable to attack, should increase its armaments by the provision of further 9.2" guns to deter attacks by armoured cruisers. For other defended ports, 6" guns would suffice. Cab. 5/2, CID Memorandum 9 January 1911, 'Australia. Scale of Attack'. Secret, CO 30760/09, 120.

¹⁰³ Creswell-Jebb, 31 July 1907 op.cit.

¹⁰⁴ Parliamentary Papers, 1908 Session, Vol.II, No.35, 'The Defence of Australia. By Colonel H. Foster (Director of Military Studies, Sydney University), together with remarks thereon by Captain W.R. Creswell, Naval Director'.

¹⁰⁵ SMH, 11 August 1910.

¹⁰⁶ PA-AA, (German Foreign Office Archive, Berlin), R 19270, Münzenthaler-Bethmann Hollweg, 24 December 1910.

Such a possibility was not seriously entertained in London as it was in Australia. Lord Kitchener's 1910 report on Australian defence maintained in part that as long as British naval superiority was assured, then it was an accepted principle that no Dominion could be successfully and permanently conquered by an organised invasion. However, in Australia's case considerations of time and space could not be disregarded - it was quite conceivable that national considerations might require the concentration of British naval forces elsewhere. They could then find themselves temporarily inferior to an actual or potential enemy.¹⁰⁷ This had always been an Australian fear and the main rationale for the establishment of a local fleet unit. Deakin wished to gain Kitchener's support for Australia's Pacific-centred strategic analysis as he had already committed to a policy which ignored the advice of the CID.¹⁰⁸

The 1911 CID Report on possible attacks on Australia stated that the establishment of the Fleet Unit based at Sydney would certainly alter the existing situation. 'As a naval base the value of Sydney as a strategic objective...will be considerably increased', therefore in determining the standard of fixed defences, 'the contingency of attack by armoured cruisers should be taken into consideration'. The landing of troops was still not yet ruled out. Having regard to the comparative weakness of German naval and military forces in the Pacific, and the distance of bases from Australian territory, it was considered improbable that any military landing force more formidable than the existing defences were calculated to meet - 'a maximum...of 1,000 men'- would eventuate.¹⁰⁹ The Report recommended that Sydney, as the base of the Australian Fleet Unit and liable to attack, should increase its armaments by the provision of further 9.2" guns to deter attacks by armoured cruisers. For other defended ports, 6" guns would suffice.¹¹⁰

In August 1911 Vice-Admiral King-Hall (now Commander-in-Chief Australia) received a request from his counterpart on the East Indies Station asking him to arrange for a weekly list of all German merchant vessels calling at Sydney to be sent to the Naval Intelligence Officer at Colombo. King-Hall was of the view that much stronger measures needed to be taken, and emphasised the vital nature of this task

on account of the probable conversion of many German ships into Armed Cruisers on the high seas, it is very necessary that all possible information as to their movements should be in the possession of the Naval authorities to enable adequate measures to be taken for their prompt suppression or capture...¹¹¹

The suggestion was implemented within ten days.

The Naval Agreement concluded in 1911 was generous in comparison to the earlier position: Dominion Governments were to have complete control of movement of their vessels inside and outside their own Stations, except in wartime.¹¹² Prior to his departure for London for the Imperial Conference, the New Zealand Defence Minister Col. James Allen had expressed his views on New Zealand's position regarding Imperial naval defence. Australia had begun along the correct path, and to him this way appeared the ideal one, perhaps eventuating in the creation of a fleet for the southern Pacific maintained by those two countries, Canada, South Africa and perhaps India. In addition he advocated the creation of an 8-10,000 man expeditionary corps.¹¹³ A contemporary writer pointed out that Canada's merchant marine also had the Royal Navy as its sole protection. All the Dominions 'would be entirely at the mercy of England's hypothetical combatants' as the Royal Navy would be required to patrol the accessible and relatively undefended coast of the British Isles.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ AA-Melbourne, CRS B197 1851/2/17 Minute Paper 'Defence of Australia', 17 June 1912.

¹⁰⁸ See Meaney, 187, Footnote 118.

¹⁰⁹ PRO, Cab. 5/2, CID Memorandum 9 January 1911, 'Australia. Scale of Attack'. Secret, CO 30760/09', 119.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 120.

¹¹¹ AA Melbourne, B197/1877/4/9, King-Hall - Governor-General, 24 August 1911. The North German Lloyd's Chairman of Directors denied that convertible merchant vessels were in Australian waters, describing the claims as 'ridiculous' and for which there was 'neither excuse nor justification'. Quoted in the *Morning Post*, 21 October 1911. The disclaimer, as proven by German archival documents, was untrue.

¹¹² PRO, Cab 5/2/1, Minutes of 112th Meeting of the CID, 29 May 1911.

¹¹³ RM5/v 5708, Bl. 18, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 14 December 1912.

¹¹⁴ T.H. Boggs, 'The Canadian Navy and Imperial Unity', *The American Political Science Review*, V, No.3 (August 1911), 346.

In June 1912 Reginald McKenna, former First Sea Lord, commented that German cruisers could quickly capture merchant ships coming to Britain from Australia and the Far East. The supremacy of the Royal Navy in the North Sea would not solve this problem.¹¹⁵ In the same year there were serious concerns being expressed in the Australian parliament. Dr Maloney (Melbourne) drew the House's attention to Archibald Hurd's *The Command of the Sea* which had caused something of a stir on publication. On two occasions the German naval estimates had been exceeded by a large margin, and the whole thrust of Germany's naval and foreign policy was cause for concern. If the shipping routes of Australian commerce were destroyed, it would mean that within six weeks Britain would be in dire straits, 'our trade gone'. Wheat, wool, and exports generally would all be affected.¹¹⁶

By the end of 1912 the *Sydney Morning Herald* was bemoaning the lack of a definite coordinated policy so the disparate naval forces of the Empire could be best utilised. It was clear that the point had been reached when the Dominions would be asked in certain contingencies to surrender local naval control to the Admiralty in return for representation on a permanent Imperial Council of Defence. However a merely consultative body would not meet Australia's needs and it had the right to ask on what basis of foreign policy its naval force was to be employed.¹¹⁷ Nothing seemed to be occurring to abate Australian longterm concerns.

In the dark: the reversal of Admiralty policy

Dominion feeling was aggravated by the attitude of Winston Churchill¹¹⁸ as expressed in his speech on the 1914 naval estimates, which, as the Memorandum by Defence Minister Pearce put it, reassessed the whole Imperial naval position as far as the Pacific was concerned. Australian concern centred on several key points:

- that a battle cruiser was not a necessary part of a Fleet Unit;
- that the presence of such warships in the Pacific was not necessary to British interests;
- the substitution of the scheme of a powerful joint Imperial fleet in the Pacific by 'ineffective isolated units';
- an interpretation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance unacceptable to Australia;
- and the replacement of a definite inter-Imperial cooperative policy for Pacific defence by an 'unco-ordinated, ephemeral scheme possessing neither permanence, nor clear aim and function'.

This indicated 'so startling a change from the opinion and policy in conformity with which Australia has addressed herself to naval defence', particularly on the basis of the 1909 Agreement when the battle cruiser -in fact three- was regarded as an essential component for the protection of British interests in the whole Pacific. This was supported by the Report by Admiral Sir Reginald Henderson in 1911.¹¹⁹ How was it that action taken on Admiralty advice in 1909 was now stated by the Admiralty to be based on entirely wrong premises? Australia was entitled to an explanation reconciling the 1909 position with Churchill's statements. There was no guarantee of security in the Anglo-Japanese Alliance: 'The pages of history are strewn with the wreckage of fruitless alliances'.¹²⁰

If Australia were to wait until an emergency actually arose the opportunity would have passed. It was a matter of great concern that first the *New Zealand* was transferred to Europe, and that a third similar vessel was not provided for Pacific service. The point was made that it was precisely the Imperial aspect of the naval scheme that commended it to a considerable section of the Australian population. Churchill now had rendered the RAN 'an isolated force, the very circumstance which [he] himself condemns'. Australia's first duty was to place its Fleet and associated organisation on

¹¹⁵ Memorandum by Reginald McKenna on the naval situation, 24 June 1912, Cab/37/111/79, in C.J. Lowe & M.L. Dockrill, *The Mirage of Power. British Foreign Policy 1902-1922*, Vol. 3, *The Documents* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 456.

¹¹⁶ CPD, LXV, 28 August 1912, 2688.

¹¹⁷ SMH, 6 December 1912.

¹¹⁸ Churchill succeeded Reginald McKenna as First Lord of the Admiralty in October 1911.

¹¹⁹ Henderson's recommendations were accepted in their entirety by the ALP before its defeat in 1913, but were slightly modified by the new Liberal Government under Joseph Cook. A contemporary assessment is in SMH, 'The Henderson Plan', 14 March 1911.

¹²⁰ 'Australian Affairs', *National Review*, January 1914, 880.

a thoroughly sound foundation. It was doubtful if the number of vessels was indeed sufficient to provide that foundation without which in time of war it would be 'worse than useless'.¹²¹ The *National Review* wondered why Australian proposals for an Imperial Defence Conference to consider the problems of Pacific defence were received in London 'with apparently so little realisation of the earnestness of the Government in the matter, and so inadequate an appreciation of the issues at stake'. The writer tartly noted that it was time the Colonial Office's methods in dealing with vital Imperial issues received a thorough reorganisation. The non-fulfilment of the 1909 Agreement 'removes the whole foundation on which the Commonwealth agreed to establish a local Australian Navy - namely co-operation with other Imperial forces in the Pacific'. Despite Henderson's plan, Australia had received no indication of the needs which were to be met in the Pacific and what part London was going to play in meeting them.¹²²

The Age pointedly stated that Churchill's policy left the Australian Navy completely isolated. An agreement solemnly entered into, on the basis of which Australia already had expended several million pounds, had been deliberately renounced. Not only this, there also appeared to be a determination to break down the system of separate Dominion units as part of an Imperial naval scheme. The Naval Lords clearly were opposed to the creation of fleets which were not under Admiralty control except in wartime. That Churchill placed Australian security on the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was unacceptable, and he 'should be informed in the plainest terms' that the Australian fleet would not be transferred to Admiralty control merely to avoid burdens on the British taxpayer.¹²³ Churchill's proposed Imperial Squadron which was to perambulate the Empire was not regarded seriously in Australia, since it met neither the needs of Pacific nor European defence. Australians wanted to know in what respects the Imperial situation had so changed since 1909 to bring about the repudiation of the policy then agreed to. Australia would proceed with the organisation of its naval forces undeterred by Churchill's statements.¹²⁴ The journal of the Royal Colonial Institute later commented that while the idea of concentrating all the Empire's battleships in European waters might be logical strategy to Englishmen, it ran counter to the instincts and wishes of the Pacific Dominions. If there were an alliance with Germany and none with Japan, would Englishmen be content to have all the battleships concentrated in the Pacific?¹²⁵

Australian precautions

Australians soon realised that any defensive measures would have to be initiated by themselves. The lack of encouragement emanating from London seemed to imply that the Colonial Office had 'no real appreciation of Australia's position as the dominating power in the southern seas'. Germany controlled six island groups in the Pacific, New Guinea and Samoa provided considerable strategic advantages, and it had designs on the Dutch Indies.¹²⁶ Under these circumstances any temptation by London to pursue a policy of *laissez faire* as far as Australian interests were concerned was unacceptable.¹²⁷

The *Sydney Morning Herald* pointed out in 1913 four aspects of the Australian naval defence problem: the immediate defence of Australian shores; the necessity for cooperation between Australia and New Zealand for the protection of mutual interests; the desirability of joint action between Australia, New Zealand and Canada with regard to the Pacific; and the relation of the Australian Fleet Unit to the Imperial Navy. While the new force had to be considered 'always as part of a mighty system' - for only in this way could Australia's limited resources best be utilised to protect the isolated continent

¹²¹ Papers presented to Parliament, Vol. II, 5th Parlt. 2nd Session 1914, 'Naval Defence:Memorandum by the Minister for Defence dated 13 April 1914; together with Speech of the First Lord of the Admiralty'.

¹²² 'Australian Affairs', *National Review*, op.cit.

¹²³ *The Age*, 14 April 1914.

¹²⁴ *National Review*, June 1914, 707.

¹²⁵ *United Empire. Journal of the Royal Colonial Institute*, Vol. 4, 1913, 377.

¹²⁶ See P. Overlack, 'Australian Reactions to German Interests in the Netherlands Indies and Timor prior to 1914: A Strategic Imperative', in J. Moses & C. Pugsley (Eds.) *The German Empire and Britain's Pacific Dominions 1871-1919. Essays on the Role of Australia and New Zealand in World Politics in the Age of Imperialism* (Claremont CA: Regina, 2001).

¹²⁷ 'The Future of the South Seas', SMH, 28 January 1911.

in the face of stronger powers- there was also emphasised the necessity for frequent inter-Imperial consultation.¹²⁸



In a paper to the Royal Colonial Institute in 1903, Senator Alexander Matheson stated that while the principal harbours were fortified, this was for the most part inefficient. For some 1,300 miles from New Guinea along the Queensland coast lay a sheltered highway between coast and reef from which all maritime traffic converged at Prince of Wales Channel to the north of Thursday Island 'as if it were at the neck of a bottle'. This position was of the utmost importance to British commerce, 'as a single armed merchant-vessel...might intercept at this spot the whole traffic between Asia and Eastern Australia'. At the southwest of Western Australia was the port of Albany which commanded the routes from Australia to Europe via the Suez Canal and South Africa. It was impossible to over-estimate its value as a coaling station to vessels: 'while in the hands of an enemy it would form a convenient base from which the whole trade between Europe, Africa and Australia might be intercepted'. Fremantle, the landing point for the cable from the Cape, and which was rapidly gaining importance as a coaling station, was without defences of any kind. In the far north, the cable stations at Roebuck Bay and Darwin also were open invitations to attack. While the Heads at Sydney were fortified, it was still possible for an enemy to lie off Botany out of range and shell the city, dockyards and shipping in the harbour. Jervis Bay and Twofold Bay were undefended 'and would form convenient bases and temporary places of resort for an enemy's ships'. Although this situation was serious, the Colonial Defence Committee in 1901 pointed out that the action of fast cruisers or armed merchant auxiliaries against Australian trade on the high seas constituted a far greater danger than attacks on ports. The Royal Navy might not always be in a position to prevent raids by hostile cruisers intent on destroying shipping, naval and mercantile marine resources, seizing coal, levying ransom, or merely creating panic. In a biting criticism of opposition to local naval defence, Matheson continued:

Here we have a candid admission of the special risk against which Australia desires to ensure - namely, the danger to British commerce at points where the ocean routes converge - and an equally candid admission of the impotency of land defences to meet that risk; yet our Imperial critics would deny our right to supplement...with an effective naval force, because, "the sea is one, and the British navy therefore must be one"...they would debar Australia from doing for herself what expert after expert has admitted the British navy cannot undertake to do for her.

In Creswell's words, the spectacle of some five million Australians unable to prevent the burning of a cargo of wool in sight of Sydney heads would be the consequence of a policy of naval impotence.¹²⁹

Creswell, who composed the Memorandum 'Defence of Australia' in 1912, commented that in the Henderson Report were specified the foundations for naval defence. Recent developments in the peace strategy of the major naval powers indicated that British command of the Pacific might be suspended to a greater degree and for a longer period than could have been anticipated when Kitchener's report was written. Under these circumstances, Australia had been put on the defensive, necessitating plans that

¹²⁸ 'Australian Defence', SMH, 14 January 1913.

¹²⁹ Senator Matheson, 'Australia and Naval Defence', *Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute*, XXXIV, 1902-3, 199-200, 204, 218.

required an early choice of defence positions. In this document Creswell concentrated only on Sydney, particularly vulnerable with commerce and Navy centred in the one port. The effective counter to an enemy concentration here was seen to be the selection of Port Stephens in the north and Jervis Bay in the south, making them strong as flanking ports. This having been done, for an enemy attempting to watch all three ports - unless greatly superior - the consequent dispersal would offer opportunities to the weaker defending fleet.

Quite apart from their naval importance, these two flanking ports must be strongly held - Jervis Bay as the port of the Federal Capital and Port Stephens as the door to the coaling centres and the Hunter Valley, a district so rich in supplies as to be capable of sustaining an enemy's force of considerable numbers and consequently a part of Australia to be specially guarded.

He urged that no time was to be lost acquiring as much land as possible for naval, military and fortification purposes in these areas.¹³⁰

Perhaps motivated by the considerations on the question of arming merchant vessels made in the Canadian Defence Department's *Monthly Intelligence Diary* for February 1912, Defence Minister Pearce aimed to bring before Cabinet that such a move be considered in connection with the Commonwealth Navigation Bill.¹³¹ Although not legally obliged to allow 'days of grace',¹³² the view was that by signing the Convention, Britain had incurred a moral obligation to do so 'provided her military operations are not thereby seriously affected'. An enemy to whom the grant of 'days of grace' was contemplated might decide to refuse them, in accordance with a predetermined plan of cruiser warfare. To meet such a contingency the grant was not to be made otherwise than conditionally on the application of reciprocal treatment to British vessels, and in no case were enemy ships in British waters to be permitted to sail unless this had been definitely assured.¹³³

Military interests obviously required that certain exceptions be made. Article 5 of the Hague Convention stated that it did not refer to merchant vessels which showed by their build that they were intended for conversion into warships. These vessels could be seized, confiscated and converted to the belligerent's own use without incurring any liability for compensation. However, the Committee of Imperial Defence envisaged a wider application to those vessels which although not intended were still suitable for conversion. In order to ensure that no enemy merchant vessels or neutrals with contraband left port, it was emphasised that a delay of even a few hours might result in the escape of some vessels which it was highly desirable to detain. The local machinery necessary to ensure prompt action would have to be devised in peacetime and kept ready for immediate application on the outbreak of war. The Overseas Defence Committee recommended that the Governments of all the Dominions and Colonies should have the appropriate draft Order in Council which could be promptly implemented as needed.¹³⁴ At the end of 1912, the Naval Secretary (H. W. Manisty) suggested to the Defence Department that in connection with the revised 'General Instructions for the Control of Mercantile Traffic at Defended Ports in Time of War or Emergency, 1912', that a committee be appointed to compose general traffic regulations for Australian ports.¹³⁵ That this move was foresighted is shown by the boarding of NDL steamers in Australian ports in the night of 3 August 1914.

¹³⁰ Ibid. In addition, in October 1913, two patrol boats for Garden Island with its dock facilities and for Spectacle Island were approved by the Naval Board. AA-Vic., CRS B197, 1856/4/269, Dept. of Defence/Navy Office Secretary, Dept. of Defence, 4 October 1913.

¹³¹ AA-Melbourne, MP 1049/1914/0289, Minute Paper 12/3626, 12 August 1912.

¹³² The international law affecting the policy regarding 'days of grace' was formulated in Articles 1 and 2 of the Second 1907 Hague Convention relative to the Status of Enemy merchant Ships at the Outbreak of Hostilities'. Article 1 stated that when a merchant vessel belonging to a belligerent Power was at the commencement of hostilities in an enemy port, 'it is desirable that she should be allowed to depart freely, either immediately or after a reasonable number of 'days of grace' to proceed direct to the port of destination or any other port indicated. AA-Melbourne, CRS B197 1928/2/31, Secret 446M, 10 April 1912, 'The Treatment of Neutral and Enemy Merchant Ships in Time of War', 1-2.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 3-7.

¹³⁵ AA-Melbourne, MP1049/1913/0169, Manisty-Pethebridge, 29 November 1912. A sub-committee consisting of the District Naval Officer, a representative of the Military Commandant, and the Collector of Customs would complete

In February 1912 the Navy Board in Melbourne requested the Naval Attaché at the High Commission (Captain Hawarth-Booth) to sound out the British Government concerning stores, guns, and explosives held in reserve in Australia which might be of value to an available to be taken over by the Commonwealth. His lengthy reply shows that the danger posed by German armed merchant vessels was well recognised. The whole question of the use of British stores in Australia was under review by the Admiralty. It was accepted that the menace posed by German armed merchant vessels could not be eliminated even if a practically unlimited number of cruisers were maintained on distant Stations. It was estimated that there were about forty such German vessels, of which four were regularly trading between Europe and Australia. While it was generally accepted that Britain would not take the initiative to arm at a time of strained relations, it was considered probable that 'other big powers weaker at sea' (meaning Germany) would not hesitate to do so. The initiative would probably be taken at the same time in different parts of the world, and special efforts would be directed towards the destruction of British shipping on the main trade routes, the coordination of which would be assisted by radio-telegraphy. It was also possible that under existing conditions, some British vessels intended to act as armed merchantmen might be sunk or captured long before they reached the base where their armament was stored. Thus from 1912 the Admiralty made special efforts to persuade the major shipping companies to carry one to four 4.7" guns, ammunition and radio on their larger vessels.

It is obvious that the adoption of such a system would be a real and definite safeguard against the menace of German policy...It is of paramount importance to the Empire that trade in supplies of food stuffs and raw materials shall continue in war time...arming a few merchantmen after the outbreak of hostilities won't secure it.

As this change of policy was only in its initial stages, it was considered highly desirable that the Commonwealth take over the Royal Navy stores in Sydney and in addition also adopt the arming policy outlined. It was considered that eight vessels so armed would be secure from anything other than a warship and 'contribute greatly to the maintenance of trade in wartime'.¹³⁶

By 1913 the press was highlighting the German and Japanese naval threat. In particular there was not the slightest evidence that Germany had any intention to modify its determination to secure command of the oceans, and

The Pacific is now practically undefended by the Imperial Navy and there is no present prospect of the policy of naval concentration in European waters being abandoned. With Germany building ship after ship and Japan accumulating armament in the Pacific there is more than hopeful words needed from those who direct the policies and thus control the destinies of British states.¹³⁷

The uncertainty of the naval situation in the Pacific was an ongoing concern. In April 1913 Creswell's assistant, Commander Walter Thring, the Naval Board's Second Naval Member Captain Constantine Hughes-Onslow, and the Chief of the General Staff Brigadier-General J. M. Gordon toured the far north. While the prime task was to assess Thursday Island as a fortified base and find a suitable site for a highpower wireless station, there evolved a sweeping reassessment of defence policy. Thring's analysis was based on four premises: that the cooperative Dominion Pacific Fleet would not eventuate; that Australia faced attack from the north, most likely from Japan; that existing defence policy was not the best to meet the threat; and that Australia had to act immediately to prepare for a northern threat which would become acute by 1920.¹³⁸

the regulations according to local requirements. This particularly dealt with the procedure for stopping and searching merchant vessels. That such early detailed planning was implemented resulted in the prompt detaining of all German vessels in Australian ports on the outbreak of the War. Secret instructions found on board some vessels ordered them to try to reach the Dutch Indies not through Torres Strait but passing south of Tasmania if possible. AA-Vic., MP1049 1914/0351, Naval Board-Captain in Charge Sydney and DNO Fremantle, 13 August 1914.

¹³⁶ AA-Melbourne, MP 1049/1914/0289, Hawarth-Booth-Secretary Naval Board, 21 March 1912. The British plan was implemented in mid-1913. Yet despite this more precautionary policy, ammunition would not yet be carried on board. AA-Vic., MP 1049/1918/0258, M0823/13 Confidential, Admiralty, 10 June 1913.

¹³⁷ *New Zealand Herald*, 29 November 1913.

¹³⁸ AA Melbourne, MP1049/S1/15/054, in Webster, 229.



Australia 'guilty' of going its own way, 1913.

In December 1913 Andrew Fisher suggested a subsidiary conference on naval defence be held in one of the Dominions, in view of the 'need for further and fuller cooperation for the...defence of the North and South Pacific Oceans'. Australia was deeply concerned by Britain's failure to live up to the 1909 arrangements and 'the present system cannot continue'.¹³⁹ When the proposal was rejected in London, Pearce for the first time publicly criticised the British Government for failing to implement its share of the 1909 Agreement.¹⁴⁰

The hostile Australian press had long caused annoyance in Germany. Early in 1914 there was at least some good news for Ambassador Lichnowsky in London, that the longtime manager of *The Times*' foreign affairs department (Dudley Braham), was leaving as the result of a disagreement with Lord Northcliffe, to assume the chief editorship of the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*. This suited the Germans, as Braham was familiar with the intricacies of European politics, and while he could not be described as overly friendly towards Germany he was at least 'concerned to see German views correctly presented'. Lichnowsky expressed the hope that his influence would contribute to moderating the 'prominent unfriendly tone of the press in Australia'.¹⁴¹

The situation in 1914

Given Australian concerns to have the Orient Mail Line steamers armed defensively, Hawarth-Booth was alarmed to discover from the Chief of War Staff, Admiral Sir Henry Jackson, that the whole question of arming merchant vessels for defence 'had unfortunately been hung up by the Admiralty Board', delay at reaching a decision being due to the fact that it had been proposed to continue the old system of utilising a limited number of fully armed merchant vessels on the trade routes, as well as the new scheme of arming certain merchantmen for defence. The former proposal was complicating matters, but the armament would be upgraded to 6" guns.¹⁴²

In June 1914 Colonial Secretary Lewis Harcourt advised the proposal that during 'precautionary' and 'war' periods, Naval Intelligence officers should inform the commanders of defended ports of the movements of enemy warships in the vicinity.¹⁴³ In August he informed Australia of the Admiralty decision to supply ammunition to the British merchantmen armed for self-defence, which would be placed on board as soon as possible. The names of the ships, destinations and ports of call would be provided. It was emphasised that every (Dominion) Government assistance would be proffered the captains concerned to avoid delay or inconvenience.¹⁴⁴

The secret Report on coastal defences early in 1914 by the Inspector-General (General Ian Hamilton) briefly outlined what was available to be utilised in defence, and

¹³⁹ SMH, 14 January 1913.

¹⁴⁰ SMH, 22 January 1913.

¹⁴¹ PA-AA, R 19271, Lichnowsky-Bethmann Hollweg, 18 March 1914.

¹⁴² AA Melbourne, MP 1049/1914/0289, Hawarth-Booth - Naval Secretary, 18 February 1914.

¹⁴³ AA Melbourne, CRS B197,1889/2/256, Harcourt - Munro-Ferguson, 10 June 1914.

¹⁴⁴ AA Melbourne, MP 1049, 1918/0258, Harcourt - Munro-Ferguson, 7 August 1914, encl. Admiralty-Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 5 August 1914.

what was additionally required. He made detailed assessments of the defences of Thursday Island, Newcastle, Sydney, Port Phillip, Adelaide, Albany, and Hobart. The view was that given a sufficient land force, coastal defence existed for only three purposes: to protect naval works and shipping against direct attack, to prevent distant bombardment, and to deny enemy ships the use of roadsteads at points of strategic importance.¹⁴⁵ It was considered that Australian ports, most with narrow entrances, winding channels, rapid currents and commanding gun positions, were more easily defended than others in the world. The blinding effect of searchlights alone was thought sufficient to deter night entry. Hamilton did not believe that a cruiser would be prepared to expend valuable ammunition merely for the purpose of hitting a few merchant ships, particularly in view of the international complications which could arise. While it was a 'sheer impossibility to deny use of every inlet or roadstead' to an enemy, he urged serious consideration that only those places would be defended, which in the Navy's opinion were of justifiable value. Anything else would be a dangerous extravagance. His general verdict was that coastal defences were maintained in an efficient condition, and sufficient equipment and ammunition was available or on order. However, while complete arrangements existed for the treatment of neutral and enemy merchant vessels in wartime, attention was required on the necessary command communications which in all cases were not complete and up to date.¹⁴⁶

On the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 the naval position in the Pacific was weaker than Churchill had argued it would be. The main British vessels were pre-*Dreadnought* battle cruisers with a range and armament insufficient for the region and certainly inferior to the projected strength planned at the 1909 Defence Conference. Of those planned forces, only the Australian Fleet Unit was in existence and ready for combat.¹⁴⁷ As D. C. Gordon points out, it could be argued that the Admiralty took account of *Australia's* presence in its disposition of vessels, and if it had not been there, would have provided. However in view of the general fear in British naval circles that the margin of superiority in the North Sea and Mediterranean was so thin, and given Churchill's statements that the more powerful vessels like *New Zealand* would be held where they could counter newer German ships, it was unlikely that anything comparable to *Australia* would have been dispatched.¹⁴⁸ The main reason for the tardiness of war preparations was the uncertainty of Imperial naval policy in the Pacific. As far as Australia was concerned, the framework rested on cooperation between Dominions and Britain in the creation of a Pacific Fleet- a firm agreement about which had been reached in 1909, and on which plans were accordingly made.¹⁴⁹ In contrast, the Admiralty's understanding was in terms of a general, flexible policy for the Pacific, subject to alteration.¹⁵⁰

In the Commonwealth the situation was regarded as uncertain despite initial successes in the occupation of German colonial territory in the Pacific. In October Defence Minister Millen stated in a review of the trend and purpose of German policy over the previous decades that it clearly was the intention to extend overseas dependencies. Africa was generally unsuitable for settlement colonies, Central and South America was excluded through the Monroe Doctrine, so

No other portion of the globe's surface today offers those two things [many acres and few people] with the exception of Australia...the sooner we recognise the fact the better it will be. If the German Emperor should be the victor in this struggle...Australia, or a portion of it, will be the prize claimed for the victory...it must bring home as clearly as possible that we are today not merely aiding the Empire from feelings of loyalty and devotion to Great Britain, but are actually engaged in a struggle to defend our right to continue

¹⁴⁵ AA Melbourne, B197, 1855/1/17, 'Report by the Inspector-General of the Overseas Forces on the Coast defences of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1914'; also B 197 1856/4/291, 'Report by Commandant 6th Military District on Test of Precautionary Stage of Hobart Defence Scheme'.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ See Corbett, Vol. I, 145.

¹⁴⁸ Gordon, 294.

¹⁴⁹ Australian National Library Canberra, Denman Papers, MS 769, Pearce-Denman, 4 May 1914; Millen-Denman 5 June 1914. Admiral Sir John Fisher claimed to have coined the phrase 'Pacific Fleet' where Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa would run 'a complete Navy'. Fisher-Esher, 13 September 1909, Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought*, Vol. II, 266.

¹⁵⁰ PRO, Admiralty 1/8375/108, in S. D. Webster, *Creswell, the Australian Navalist: A Career Biography of Vice-Admiral Sir William Rooke Creswell*, Ph.D. Thesis, Monash University, 1976, 223.

to live in our own way in this country...If the tide of war were to turn...we should have no cause of complaint if [Germany] acted towards Australia exactly as we have acted toward her Pacific possessions.

The nation was unprepared for the realities of war. All preparation had been made for the repulsion of 'some raiding party', and none for service abroad, with the result that there had been a great deal of extemporisation: 'There was not a single man, officer, uniform, cartridge, or gun earmarked for anything but service within Australia'.¹⁵¹

The document 'Protection of Australia', composed of questions and answers in December 1914, considered Australia's wartime position. It asked what steps could be taken to protect Sydney and Brisbane shipping during the absence of the warships *Australia*, *Sydney* and *Melbourne* on convoy duty, and would the German cruisers remain at large? In answer, it was pointed out that the disposition of Australian ships now rested with the Admiralty, and the Commander of the China Station had arranged for the *Minotaur* and the Japanese cruisers *Ibuki* and *Chikuma* to be sent to Rabaul. *Encounter*, *Pioneer*, three destroyers and two submarines remained in Australian waters.¹⁵²

The naval writer Sir Julian Corbett put the reasons for Anglo-Australian success succinctly: the vast extent of the world's oceans were controlled by guarding the main focal areas where trade routes converged and where German cruisers intent on destroying commerce were most likely to be attracted and had the only chance of inflicting serious damage on the volume of trade. While there was some weakness caused by the watching of ports frequented by German ships capable of being converted into auxiliary cruisers, 'the fact remains that...the success of the defence over the attack went beyond everything the most sanguine and foresighted among us had dared to hope'.¹⁵³ From the beginning Creswell saw one overriding strategic aim in the Pacific: the destruction of the Cruiser Squadron. The Australian Fleet Unit had to be free to concentrate on bringing it to battle. Conversely Spee's main concern was to avoid the Japanese battleships and HMAS *Australia*. In the light of German commerce warfare aims (admittedly limited by circumstance primarily to the *Emden*), Creswell was correct for so long to have urged the protection of local trade routes. Thus when he learned in mid-August that the main ships of the Fleet Unit were to escort the New Zealand expeditionary force to Samoa, and later that Patey's force was to accompany the Australian occupation of New Guinea, it came as rather a shock. He urged the use of armed merchant vessels instead.¹⁵⁴

Postscript

While at times fears of German expansion were emotional, even irrational in the way in which they were expressed, they were not entirely exaggerated. The German naval operational planning files showed Australasian raw materials and produce to be a prime target in the event of war with Britain, with the aim of destabilising its economy and causing social unrest. Unable to prosecute a war effectively, Britain would be forced to negotiate on terms amenable to Germany. What the fate of the various parts of the Empire then would be is not entirely a matter for conjecture in view of the often expressed aims of German *Weltpolitik*, and were clearly recognised by Defence Minister Edward Millen (see above).



Already in March 1900, General (from 1911 Field Marshal) Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz stated that Britain was forced to distribute its navy over many seas and

¹⁵¹ CPD, LXXV, 14 October 1914, 98-99.

¹⁵² AA Melbourne, CRS B197 1855/1/58, 'Protection of Australia', initialled by Pearce on 23 December 1914.

¹⁵³ Corbett, 15.

¹⁵⁴ AA Melbourne, MP1049/S1/14/0307, Memorandum of 8 August 1914. In 1915 Creswell observed that 'True strategy calls for centres of creative or producing Naval power at distant points in the Empire rather than perpetuating the grave disadvantages of depending on one central point situated possibly half the world's circumference from where it might be needed. AA Melbourne, MP1049/S1/17/0115A.

the home squadrons were 'surprisingly weak in comparison with the fleets in the Mediterranean, India, the Far East, Australia...and the Pacific'. It was in that necessary distribution of strength that Britain's weakness lay. A victory in Europe would secure all for Germany: 'If India, Australia or Canada should be lost in a war, they would remain lost forever'.¹⁵⁵ In September 1912, under the headline 'Germany's need for expansion', *The Argus* discussed in detail Hans Delbrück's latest contribution in the influential *Preußische Jahrbücher* concerning Germany's position in the world. Not only might it win a naval war against Britain, but the German Empire had, in the development of its power, reached a stage at which it could expect to engage in colonial politics on a large scale. Delbrück had stated that

wherever in the world the nature of things brings about a rearrangement of territories, Germany must announce that she feels justified and compelled to put forward claims...the German people...must declare frankly that Germany has armed herself and will maintain her armaments for the sake of the future of her colonial politics...¹⁵⁶

The implications for Australia were obvious and attracted repeated press comment. For the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the Royal Navy was the world's principal guarantee against a huge international conflict, by bringing pressure to bear on any aggressor by threatening trade, overseas territories, and merchant shipping. The effects this would have on the British and Australian reader can be imagined. As the *Herald* continued, it was precisely Britain's general naval supremacy 'which is the primary safeguard of the security...of the great dominions...' This power would be diminished with the continued growth of the Germany Navy.¹⁵⁷

All this needs to be seen within broader German aspirations. Karl Helfferich, the great exponent of extending the Baghdad Railway to the Red Sea which would give Germany land access to the Indian Ocean, spoke repeatedly of the connection between 'our colonial and world-political tasks'.¹⁵⁸ Mahan had warned that a nation with naval potential based on the Gulf could 'flank all the routes to the farther East, to India and to Australia'.¹⁵⁹ German Admiralty Staff war aims included clear intentions to expand foreign bases in the Indian Ocean and Indies regions with the view to consolidating Germany's postwar world-power position. It was expressly stated that in any peace negotiations, the return of New Guinea was to be demanded because of its nickel deposits and strategic position accessing the Indies' trade routes, as well as the cession of New Caledonia.¹⁶⁰ When War broke out in 1914, in the Australasian mind this seemed to be but the logical conclusion to the trend of events in the Pacific in the preceding decades, during which Germany had intensified its strategic and naval presence.

¹⁵⁵ *Deutsche Rundschau*, March 1900. Von der Goltz (Goltz Pasha) featured in the reorganisation of the Ottoman Army and was a strong proponent of ties with that Empire. Turkey was also the focus of German expansion: see Malte Fuhrmann, 'Anatolia as a site of German colonial desire and national re-awakenings.' *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 2009 vol. 41, 117-150.

¹⁵⁶ *Argus*, 7 September 1912.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ BA- Koblenz, N1123/8, 'Das Kolonialprogramm des Reichkanzlers', *National-Zeitung*, 11 December 1904.

¹⁵⁹ Cited in A. D. Maclaren, *Peaceful Penetration* (London, 1916), 164.

¹⁶⁰ BA-Koblenz, Nachlaß Solf, N1053/58, 'Koloniale Kriegsziele', 1914. Creswell repeatedly emphasised the importance of exploration and development of oil resources in New Guinea, and also indicated the potential of Timor. AA Melbourne, MP1049/S1/13/0226 and MP472/1/13/11796.