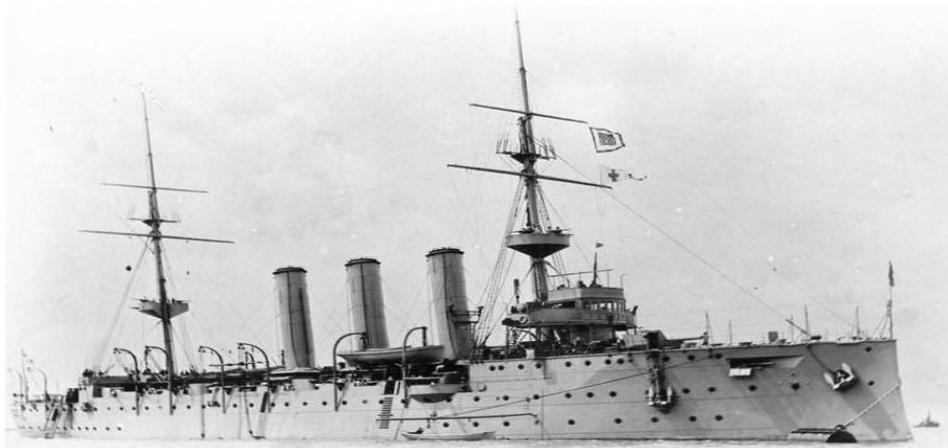


7 GERMAN INTEREST IN AUSTRALASIAN DEFENCE, 1900-1914

'...a soldateska worthy of a South American republic and suited for a comic opera'. *Consul-General Dr. Georg Irmer, 1909.*

'What binds the Dominions to Britain is their military unpreparedness.'
Koloniale Rundschau, Heft 11/12, 1914, 566.

Given the time and effort that the German Navy was investing in operational planning in the Asian-Pacific region in this period, the purpose of the long-term interest in Australian and New Zealand defence capability and effectiveness, and its relationship to Empire defence, is clear. This theme is examined within the framework of German views of Anglo-Australasian differences in which were seen the roots of friction which could affect defence and political cooperation; close observations and assessment of both naval and land based defence measures; and the rôle of the Dominions in Imperial defence. From 1910 the two key questions were: what implications did the Australian Fleet Unit have for Germany in the Pacific and its war planning, and how effective were land forces and infrastructure defences?



HMS *Challenger* 'second class' protected cruiser detached to the Australia Station

The broader picture

Germany's prime concern was to prevent a strengthening of naval forces in British home waters. Related to this was the necessity to know the level of naval and military opposition the Dominions could offer. In an article in the *Deutsche Rundschau* in March 1900, General Colmar von der Goltz stated that Britain was forced to distribute its navy over many seas and 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 unavoidable 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'.¹

Combined with the specific reports of the German Naval Intelligence Service (*Marine-Nachrichtenwesen*) operatives in Australia, and reports of the cruiser captains on the Australian Station, the military, political and economic information passing through the Sydney Consulate-General provided a clear picture of Australia's defence capability and weaknesses. With the dual concerns of British concentration in the North Sea and effective implementation of cruiser warfare plans in the Asian-Pacific region, there were numerous reports forwarded from Sydney to Berlin on the progress towards a separate Australian Fleet and the internal political debate surrounding this.

Interest was maintained at the highest level. In early October 1901, Consul-General Paul von Buri's report on the suggestions by Rear-Admiral Sir Lewis Beaumont for improved naval defence (a squadron of fast cruisers) was forwarded to both Naval Secretary Alfred von Tirpitz and Chief of Admiralty Staff Otto von Diederichs by acting

¹ Quoted in P.A. Silburn, *The Colonies and Imperial Defence* (London:Longmans Green, 1909), 283.

Foreign Minister Oswald von Richthofen.² An assessment of the Commonwealth's defence measures and capability added to further commentary from Sydney on the Report of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) of 1901.³ Some of the implications for German naval planning were considered relevant enough for the Report to receive the Kaiser's attention.⁴ The basis of the Committee's thinking was that the security of the entire British Empire and its trade could be achieved by the maintenance of naval supremacy. The dispersion of cruisers in the densely traversed maritime routes and the protection provided by the extended cable network enabling speedy communication made operations against Australian coastal cities by enemy cruisers improbable, and action would be restricted to the high seas. The German view was just the contrary:

Operations against Australian coastal cities at the current level of coastal defence are certainly so attractive, that fast surprise attacks on them, despite the danger of a general alert of the British cruisers, are not excluded.⁵

The attraction was the number of merchant vessels which would seek refuge in Australian ports. The Germans saw a major weakness in the extraordinary view running like a thread through the whole CID Report that once British cruisers took up the chase, all possible complications would be resolved and every opponent eliminated. It was precisely this overconfident and short-sighted British view which caused consternation in Australia. The concluding paragraph of the German commentary makes it clear why there was such an early interest in the issue - the Admiralty Staff regarded both the British and Australian Reports as 'a valuable proof of the important presuppositions underlying the Memorandum on the suggestion for a cruiser attack on Australian trade' which had been presented to the Kaiser on 6 March that year.⁶

British-Australian differences and implications for Germany

The problems of Imperial defence were not simply solved and were implicit in the geographical position of Britain and its Empire. The demands of home defence had to be balanced with defence of Imperial communications routes through the Mediterranean/Suez to India, East Asia, and the Pacific. A threat in one region posed dangers for the whole, and foreign policy was marked by a seemingly insoluble security dilemma: the situation in Europe always would make meaningful intervention at the periphery a risky undertaking.⁷

² RM 5/v 5792, encl. Richthofen-Tirpitz, Diederichs. Also included were copies of 'The Military Forces of Australasia'; 'Report on the Military Forces of the Colony of New South Wales, 1899'; 'Report of the Council of Defence (Victoria), 1900'; 'Report on the Defence Forces of New Zealand, 1900'; 'Report on the Queensland Military Forces, 1900'; 'Report on the Marine Defence Force, 1899-1900. (Queensland)'

³ RM 5/v 5970, Bl. 177, 'Zum Immediatvortrag', 19 October 1901. Another early detailed study is in RM5/v 5702, Bl. 199, Oberleutnant z.S. Wieting, 'Organisation des Commonwealth of Australia und seine Bedeutung für die politischen und wirtschaftlichen Verhältnisse in der Südsee', April 1902. On the CID see J. P. Mackintosh, 'The Rôle of the Committee of Imperial Defence before 1914', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 77, 1962, 490-503; N.H. Gibbs, *The Origins of Imperial Defence* (Oxford:Clarendon, 1955), 9-10; N. Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901-1914* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1976), 138f.

⁴ The Reports of commanders on the Australian Station were addressed directly to the Kaiser, as these ships were not part of the Cruiser Squadron Command in peacetime. He was diligent in reading them and many have marginalia in his thick blue pencil.

⁵ Wieting, 'Organisation des Commonwealth...'

⁶ Wieting, 'Organisation des Commonwealth...' Admiral William Creswell's views reported in the *Kreuz-Zeitung*, 19 May 1905, clipping RM5/v 5703, Bl. 260. The 'KZ' (officially *Neue Preußische Zeitung*) was a Berlin daily representing the most reactionary elements.

⁷ See Reinhard Meyers, 'Die Dominions und die britische Europapolitik der dreißiger Jahre', in J. Hütter, R. Myers, D. Papenfuß (Eds) *Tradition und Neubeginn. Internationale Forschungen zur*

German observers were always seeking trends which would indicate a divergence of policy from that of Britain, if not an actual political break, and there were several issues of disagreement between London and the Dominions.⁸ In a 1902 study of naval and land defence, Oberleutnant z. See Hollmann noted in his conclusion that since Federation there was a growing trend among Australians to create 'a political landscape of their own that was not so bound to England as one generally assumed'. Australia viewed itself as the coming power in the south and was beginning to stand on its own feet. For the future it would be of significance what measures the Commonwealth would take to lessen the financial control exercised over it, and what the final responsibilities and support between the two would be.⁹ Consideration of causes of friction is relevant because of the German hopes for Dominion neutrality and its implications for operational planning and supply.

In January 1903, the *Kölnische Zeitung* discussed at length Prime Minister Barton's¹⁰ efforts to convince Australians of the worth of the Government's recently concluded naval agreement with London, which involved Australia increasing its contribution from £106,000 to £200,000, for which it would receive 'fewer but better' ships. The parliamentary intention was to reduce spending, and the overriding feeling was that Australia would do much better to put what little money was allocated to defence towards the creation of its own navy, since in wartime British ships would be withdrawn from Australian waters and the country would be open to foreign attack.¹¹ It was this black picture, which dovetailed into their view of colonial ineptitude, which was easiest for German diplomats to accept. Australians regarded the existing naval protection provided by Britain as insufficient, proposing to enlarge the existing squadron at their own cost. It was equally improbable that they would long remain satisfied with London's rejection of this proposal, or that they saw any lasting security in the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.¹²

In June 1906, the CID Report on improvements to Australian defence was being strongly criticised in all Australian circles. Prime Minister Alfred Deakin¹³ stated at a public meeting in Victoria that the Report did not sufficiently consider Australian conditions, and that the creation of an Australian Navy and Army was indeed possible. In his report on the situation Consul-General Paul von Buri emphasised the growing difference of opinion between British and Australian politicians: that on the one side,

deutschen Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert (Köln: Carl Heymanns Verlag, 1975), 177f.

⁸ A comprehensive treatment of later aspects of the topic is in Meaney, Chap.8, 'The Breakdown in Imperial Co-operation, 1911-13', and Chap. 9, 'Anglo-Australian Conflict over Pacific Naval Defence, 1913-14.'

⁹ RM5/v 5702, Bl. 162, 'Australien unter Waffen', 1902.

¹⁰ Edmund Barton, born in Sydney in 1849, was a barrister elected to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly in 1879, later becoming Attorney-General, and the Commonwealth's first Prime Minister.

¹¹ *Kölnische Zeitung*, 8 January 1903, clipping RM5/v 5704. The *Kölnische Zeitung* maintained an extensive foreign news service and its leaders resembled those of *The Times* in length and form. It was considered an authoritative source on foreign affairs, at times the best informed, perhaps because it was favoured by Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow.

¹² *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 19 September 1906, clipping in RM5/v 5704. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance was signed by Lord Lansdowne and Baron Hayashi on 30 January 1902. See Charles Spinks, 'The Background of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance', *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. VIII, 1939, pp. 317-339; Zara Steiner, 'Great Britain and the Creation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance', *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. XXXI, (1959), 27-36; Peter Lowe, *Great Britain and Japan 1911-1915. A Study of British Far Eastern Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 278-287; Ian H. Nish, *Alliance in Decline. A Study in Anglo-Japanese Relations 1908-1923* (London: Athlone Press, 1972). Keith Neilson maintains that it was part of an attempt to maintain the global balance of power: ' "Greatly Exaggerated": The Myth of the Decline of Great Britain before 1914', *International History Review*, Vol. XIII (4), November 1991, 699.

¹³ Alfred Deakin, born in Melbourne in 1856, was a barrister and journalist (a leader writer for *The Age*), elected to the Victorian Legislative Assembly aged 22. Deakin led the liberal nationalist group and during his time in office moved toward the creation of an independent navy.

the British were seeking to reduce any independent Australian position on defence where a foreign enemy was involved, and on the other, that the Australians wanted more and more powers delegated to them - even though the country was not in a position to bear the financial burden of any new responsibilities.¹⁴

In an article in May 1907 entitled 'Australia and the Imperial Fleet', the *Frankfurter Zeitung* discussed the events of the Imperial Conference, and Australian moves to establish an independent naval force. Australia had achieved a measure of success in getting the Admiralty to accept that it was its own decision whether it supported the Royal Navy by direct contribution, or by establishing its own fleet. The article played up the differences existing between Australia and Britain:

Australia would never permit that the English Admiralty make use of these cruisers outside Australian waters. However, the Admiralty wants a completely free hand. The Australians already have their own land defence force, now they want their own squadron...¹⁵

In an assessment of the state of Australian defence in 1908, Leutnant z. See von Freudenreich noted that the Admiralty's insistence that the ships of any Australian fleet must be subordinate to its command in wartime had evoked 'considerable opposition' from the Commonwealth Government. The political feeling was that Australia should build its fleet in addition to the provisions of the Agreement. Indeed, the slow start to any construction pointed to the conclusion 'that probably very little will eventuate from this whole program, and that finally everything will remain as before'.¹⁶ It was because of the distrust of the Colonial Office in particular that Australia and New Zealand had always sought exclusivity in the near Pacific. In 1909 Consul-General Georg Irmer saw the moves for the creation of an Australian fleet as part of the Commonwealth's desire for control of Pacific policy. A major factor in this was a fear of Japan's long-term ambitions.¹⁷

By this time the naval enthusiasm which followed Admiral Sir Reginald Henderson's proposals¹⁸ had died down somewhat, as the nature of the enormous preliminary requirements for the construction of a local fleet of any use were fully realised: 'The future will tell whether the Australian docks can meet the challenge suddenly placed upon them for construction of warships, and deliver suitable quality ships...'¹⁹ This view was reinforced by a report from the Consulate-General in 1911 which concluded that the construction of larger dockyards was necessary before such a program could be effective. In addition, there was a shortfall of skilled labour which was not available

¹⁴ RM5/v 5706, Buri-Bülow, 28 August 1906.

¹⁵ *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 19 May 1907, clipping RM5/v 5703. It represented financial and industrial interests, was liberal in domestic politics and could take a fairly independent stand in foreign affairs although it usually followed the Foreign Office line and was pro-Navy. It was regarded by non-Germans as perhaps the best paper in the country.

¹⁶ RM5/v 5706, Bl.248, 'Stand der australischen Verteidigungsfragen Anfang Mai 1908', encl. Commander *Condor*-Chief of Admiralty Staff, 2 June 1908.

¹⁷ BA-Berlin 10.01/8937, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 5 October 1909.

¹⁸ The Fisher Government sought advice from the British naval expert on the organisation of Australian naval defence. His recommendations for a 22-year naval construction program were accepted by Labour before its electoral defeat in 1913, but were modified by Cook's Liberal Government. See Meaney, 222f. There is initial discussion in the Appropriations Bill Debate, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Vol.LXII, 9 November 1911, 2379f. Some assessments: 'The Henderson Report', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 March 1911; 'The navy that is to be', *ibid.*, 15 March 1911; 'Australia's Defence Bill', *ibid.*, 20 March 1911. A summary of Henderson's Report is in RM5/v 1160, Bl. 91, 'Die Commonwealth Fleet'; also RM5/v 1160, Bl. 169, 'Auszug aus der Denkschrift des Admirals Sir Reginald Henderson über den Ausbau der australischen Flotte'; a fuller version is in RM5/v 5705, Bl. 79, 'Winterarbeit des Oberleutnant z.S. Fabricius. Übersetzung der Denkschrift des Admiral Sir Reginald Henderson, 1911 über den Ausbau der Australischen Marine. Anhang: Was ist bisher zur Verwirklichung des Planes geschehen?', encl. in Senior Officer Australian Station-Chief of Admiralty Staff, 7 March 1912.

¹⁹ RM5/v 5705, 'Winterarbeit...' *ibid.*

in Australia.²⁰ The commander of *SMS Cormoran* was convinced local construction would eventuate because it was seen as a further important step on the path to independence from Britain. 'The acting Australian naval commander in Brisbane explained to me...that now they were on the point of constructing their own fleet, it was not much further to complete independence...in naval matters.'²¹ However, in terms of practical outcomes, this was a crucial misinterpretation of the nature of Australian nationalism.

The Dominions' increasing freedom of decision making was a factor which interested Germany since before Federation, and there was an ongoing apprehension about the security of the German Pacific possessions. In 1912 Acting Consul-General Carl Bünz reported that in New Zealand, Defence Minister Colonel James Allen had told a meeting of the Navy League that while the axis of the Empire was now Britain, in 150 years that might not be the case: '...each single part of the Empire carried the responsibility for its sphere, and for New Zealand that was the Pacific Ocean'.²² This underlined the interest in Australasian military capability, which increased in the immediate prewar years, as by 1913 it was planned to have Royal Navy ships removed from the Australian Station, replaced by periodic visits by ships from the China Station, with the Australians alone patrolling the Pacific. To foster this, a favourably pro-Imperial Dominion press was essential for Britain, and as the Naval Attaché in London from 1907-1912, Wilhelm Widenmann later wrote, the Imperial Press Conference of 1911 (held in conjunction with the regular Imperial Conference of Dominion leaders) 'left no doubt of the importance with which the Empire press was regarded'. Its influence to minimise popular support for the so-called 'baby navies' was essential.²³

In 1913, Consul-General Richard Kiliani noted in a report to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg that in London the very idea of an Australian Navy was seen as a 'comical over-selfestimation'. Apart from the fact that the Royal Navy would demand pay rates equal to the high Australian ones, there was the belief that an Australian fleet could find no useful purpose in the wide and deserted Pacific. Crews could not be properly trained, and there would be an inevitable breakdown in discipline resulting in a life of ease, to which the Australian crews were more inclined than others, and for which the Australian harbour cities offered more temptation.²⁴ However, in the London Embassy the issue of Dominion navies was taken more seriously. In late October 1913, the day after Prime Minister Massey²⁵ announced New Zealand proposed 'an important change in its naval policy' as a result of the British failure to station modern cruisers as agreed in 1909, Richard von Kühlmann, counsellor at the London Embassy (and later to become Foreign Secretary), reported that New Zealand's goal was the same dominance at sea locally as Britain exercised on the other side of the world.²⁶

Winston Churchill's momentous statement on 17 March 1914 while speaking on the Naval Budget that Britain in effect would not abide by the 1909 agreement with Australia, caused enormous upset there. The sharp reaction by 'leading politicians and

²⁰ RM5/v 1160, Münzenthaler-Bethmann Hollweg, 12 April 1911. Such statements caused the Governor-General to counter that 'Australian Fleet' was a misnomer-the ships were 'an Australian unit of the British fleet'.

²¹ RM5/v 6007, Ebert-Kaiser, 12 June 1911; also RM 5/v 5707, Bl. 300, Konter-Admiral Rieve-Kaiser, 15 August 1911.

²² RM5/v 5717, Bünz-Bethmann Hollweg, 26 September 1912.

²³ W. Widenmann, *Marine-Attaché an der kaiserlich Deutschen Botschaft in London, 1907-1912* (Göttingen;Musterschmidt, 1952), 38. The Reports of the Attachés carried considerable influence. The Ambassador could add his own observations and recommend changes to them, but not stop their dispatch to Berlin. Even if the Chancellor believed the report dealt with political matters, he could not withhold it from the Kaiser if Tirpitz insisted it be presented.

²⁴ Politisches Archiv im Auswärtigen Amte (PA-AA), German Foreign Office Archive, Berlin, R19,272, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 22 December 1913.

²⁵ W. F. Massey, 1856-1925, Prime Minister 1912-25.

²⁶ RM5/v 1160, Kühlmann-Bethmann Hollweg, 29 October 1913.

the press of all persuasions' was commented on with growing interest by Kiliani. The statement-in-reply by Defence Minister Millen²⁷ was regarded as one of the most significant expressions of Commonwealth policy. Four things aggravated the Australians: the British repudiation effectively wrecked the foundations of the Australian Fleet for which several millions already had been expended. The statement that cruisers in the Pacific were superfluous was in contradiction to the requirements which the Admiralty itself had laid down for the establishment of the Fleet. And crucially, the British plan to guarantee Australian defence by means of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance would under no circumstances be acceptable.²⁸

In New Zealand, Churchill's action was resulting in a slow change towards Australia's policy, and Massey was considering the construction of a *Bristol*-class cruiser for New Zealand defence- '...a protection of the region and trade of Australasia by the...Mikado' was equally unacceptable. The press was expressing the hope that Canada also might now adopt the policy of local self-defence. The main exception to this anti-British feeling was the stand of the *Melbourne Age* - 'always strongly anti-German' - which approved of Australian-Japanese cooperation in the Pacific 'in order to hold the enemy in the North Sea in check'. But overall, London's view that the Australians were overreacting was answered with the charge that it had no understanding of their desire for independence of action based on regional concerns. Kiliani reflected the local view that for the Dominions, Britain's now modest presence (five cruisers), considering the volume of its trade with China and the region, was difficult to swallow. The time might well come when Britain would have to choose between the benefit the Alliance gave for European security, and the security needs of the Dominions. What appeared to be widespread divergences of opinion and policy were assiduously reported to Berlin. To Germany's advantage, the 'baby navies' were seen to increase Britain's difficulties with Imperial naval coordination and effectiveness, even if the calling back of many ships to home waters could well be to Germany's disadvantage.²⁹



Close observations and assessments: land defences

Hollmann's 1902 report (see above) depicted the Pacific as the place where naval battles would occur as in the Mediterranean of the past, 'particularly if political combinations enable an advance against England's sea power', and in this respect Australia's Federation had provided significant changes to defence structure in the region. While the report gave a comprehensive overview of the measures implemented and those planned, the general verdict was that Australian defence planners, convinced of the inborn military talent of the population, believed that defence could rest safely on the character and patriotism of the population when need arose, without the need for a standing army.³⁰ In the following years detailed information was gathered

²⁷ E. D. Millen, 1862-1923, NSW parliamentarian 1894-1901, Senator 1901-1923, Minister for Defence 1913-14.

²⁸ PA-AA R 6125, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 25 March 1914; R 19272, 25 March, 18 April 1914.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ RM5v 5702, Bl. 162, 'Australien unter Waffen'.

about all aspects of naval and land defence planning, communications, and fortification details. Korvettenkapitän Seiferling (*Möwe*) noted local defences in 1902 and made a more detailed examination of Townsville's importance in the mineral and foodstuff export trade which went almost exclusively to Britain. This provided a description of harbour fortifications complete with photographs.³¹

In October 1905, Buri reported that for some time since the end of the Russo-Japanese War, there had been a considerable feeling of insecurity in relation to Australia's political future. There was some satisfaction in plans to establish Singapore as a fortified naval station, but in reality, the whole defence system of the Commonwealth left much to be desired. In the event of conflict, of the 61,518 troops which could be raised –this included members of rifle clubs and cadets- only 18,542 belonged to the permanent forces, the Militia, and the Volunteers. And of these 'certainly a large number exist only on paper'. The Vice-President of the Executive Council, Thomas Ewing, pointed to the lamentable state of Australian coastal defences, and had stated that in wartime the Commonwealth would be able to provide only one rifle for every thirty troops. This was part of a general deterioration seen in the defence system. Referring to Maj.-General Edward Hutton (Commander-in-chief 1902-4),³² Buri noted that 'the very competent and energetic' officer had been let go, and the leadership of the national defence system was now primarily in the hands of two unwieldy bodies, the Council of Defence and the Military Board, the composition of which was partly determined by politically-partial civilians. The general verdict on the Government's sudden zeal for defence was rather disparaging. The current Government constituted of 'protectionists and workers' had been in power long enough to have done something, but never previously had thought seriously about defence questions. The plan to require military training of every male inhabitant in peacetime was seen to be an extreme reaction to this inactivity and there was an underlying lack of advanced infrastructure:

All such plans, which involve some inconvenience or a diminution of income for those affected, would be so unpopular despite the great show of patriotism that no Australian government, dependent as it is on voter support, would make the attempt to introduce such measures...The security of Australia depends solely on the British Squadron in the Pacific, to whose costs Australia contributes £200,000 yearly, and should this not be in the position to fulfil its obligations, then nobody has a doubt that the country would fall to any enemy.³³

Probably, everything would remain as it had been, meaning a reliance on Britain.

Enough interest was aroused by two reports from Buri in June 1906 concerning improvements to Australian defence for Foreign Secretary Heinrich von Tschirschky to send copies to the Admiralty and the Army General Staff. Central was the activity of Lt.-Col. Fitzpatrick of the Intelligence Section of the British General Staff, inspecting fortifications and other military establishments, apparently at the express wish of the Commonwealth Government. The reason for this activity was 'the poor standard of the Australian defence system, generally acknowledged here on all sides'. This situation ...forms here the substance of private and public expression, although the government has undertaken no energetic action since the time the report

³¹ RM5/v 5972, Bl.31, Commander *Möwe*-Chief of Admiralty Staff, 2 April 1902; Bl. 39, 4 April 1902.

³² Sir Edward Thomas Henry Hutton (1848-1923), British regular soldier and first organiser of the Australian Army, Commander-in-chief 1902-4 and partly responsible for administrative changes under the 1904 Defence Act. See Meaney 57-73. However, he was attacked bitterly for alleged attempts to 'imperialise' troops in order to fit them for overseas service. See Warren Perry, 'Military Reforms of General Sir Edward Hutton in the Commonwealth of Australia, 1902-4', *Victoria Historical Magazine*, Vol. XIX, (No. 1), February 1959.

³³ RM5/v 5706, Bl. 180, Buri-Bülow, 24 October 1905.

was composed...How poorly even the more important newspapers regard their own military is exemplified by the caricature of field artillery in the "Daily Telegraph", one of the leading free trade publications. Also in private conversations even when foreigners are present, one hears from otherwise leading people the most denigrating criticism of their own military.

That this was now occurring was due to the preoccupation of the press with a danger from Germany and Japan, even to the extent of invasion. The problem resulted in an apparent state of paralysis: all in all one obtained the feeling that 'the Australian defence system is in a very sorry state, that one does not recognise the seriousness of the situation, and is not prepared to make the necessary sacrifice'. In a following report he commented on a scare article in the *Sunday Times* that '...two things are interesting: the amazing openness with which defence matters are criticised, and the probability that everything similar to what the author has predicted will eventuate if ever a disciplined foreign army should land here'.³⁴

Buri went on to discuss the function of the Cadet system, and organisational problems involving the individual states. He also appears to have been providing specific information on port defences. In a commentary on discussions between Col. Bridges (Defence Department) and the CID concerning harbour fortifications, he noted that while Sydney's natural configuration made attack difficult, 'the guns of the southern and middle main forts are largely obsolete, also those at Queenscliff'.³⁵ This kind of information was relevant given the proposals for the Cruiser Squadron to bombard port facilities outlined in the annual reviews.

In late 1907 his successor Dr Georg Irmer reported on the Government's introduction to Parliament of the long-withheld plans for the future shape of Australian defence, describing it as 'a minimum of militarism and a maximum of navalism'. Despite the Admiralty's rejection of Deakin's earlier proposals, he now hoped to be more successful, but 'on what this optimism is founded is certainly not clear'. However, for Irmer the telling point was not the statement that both land and naval forces were 'absurdly inadequate' - which contained nothing new - but that it came 'from the mouth of the responsible leader of Australian policy is noteworthy'.³⁶

Leutnant z. See von Freudenreich's report on defence matters in 1908 included details of the Cadet system for every schoolboy aged 12-16, and the National Guard to which it was proposed every Australian had to belong for three years. This was, as he pointed out, nothing less than the introduction of universal military service. However, major problems were seen in the lack of officers, and the training periods in the reserve.³⁷ There was a lively popular interest in the Army, particularly the feeder organisations of Cadets and Scouts, but the *Sydney Mail* (7 April 1909) called it a 'most picturesque development of boy soldiering'. Still, in a few years the boys would be the first line of Australia's land defences. Graf Deym von Stritetz, Vice Consul-General in Sydney, requested information on the cadet system which was supplied by Atlee Hunt in the Dept. of External Affairs.³⁸

German assessments differed. The commander of *Planet* reported that 'These institutions can not be denied a certain value for defence'.³⁹ His colleague on *Condor*

³⁴ The *Sunday Times* had reported that a German bomb could be lobbed easily into Sydney from offshore. RM5/v 5706, Bl. 192 ff., Foreign Office-Admiralty Staff, Army General Staff, 3 June 1906, enclosed Buri-Bülow, 24 April 1906.

³⁵ RM5/v 5706, *ibid.*, 10 April 1906.

³⁶ RM5/v 5706, Bl. 245, Irmer-Bülow, 16 December 1907.

³⁷ This involved fourteen days training in the first two years, twelve in the third. After these three years, the men would go into a reserve force for six years. This was anticipated to train 80,000 men initially, increasing by 30,000 each year to a final force of 200,000. The Defence Bill is discussed in the *Naval & Military Record*, 11 November 1909.

³⁸ AA-Vic., MP 84/1/0-1977/320.

³⁹ RM5/v 5704 & 6005, Commander *Planet*-Kaiser, 8 June 1909. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* reported on the undertaking from the introduction of legislation, 25 September 1908. There is a detailed

reported that regarding the Cadets, 'the Government appears to promise too much from the actual usefulness of Cadet training', and the training process for the National Guard was considered 'completely inadequate from the military side'. As for the proposals becoming reality,

The general view is that these new proposals will never pass; much less than the naval program. The thought of universal military service is currently too uncomfortable for the Australians...The whole defence program has the appearance that the Government wants to undertake something for self-defence, but is not clear on how to implement it.⁴⁰

The question of the provision of officers, both military and naval, was a continually recurring and difficult one.⁴¹ This ongoing problem affected the rank- and- file. In 1911 Kiliani reported that the unruliness expected from the latest intake of young recruits had exceeded all predictions. From all States came reports of officers being verbally insulted with the singing of bawdy pub songs, and even physically jostled. In several instances during army exercises the enthusiasm of the watching public was such that they attempted to join in!⁴² The general verdict on the Australian militia personnel was poor. Officers of any note were usually British and in the Navy's case had been seconded primarily from the merchant marine. 'The officers of the militia, with whom the officers of Your Majesty's ship "Planet" often came together either on board or in their club...in general made no first-class impression, neither militarily nor socially'.⁴³

Kiliani was more generous in his assessment. After visiting Duntroon Military College and seeing the officer-aspirants, 'who in themselves present not at all bad material', he reported the view of British instructors that due to the minimal training conditions and opportunities 'it was out of the question that they command and lead large units'. This would certainly inhibit their use in wider Imperial defence, and it was recommended they be sent for further training to India and Britain. However, the Australian dislike of service with non-white contingents made this problematic. There were also cultural factors which would weaken the new defence force. Apart from the inherent mutual dislike between Australian and British soldiers, there was the attitude of the 'ranker' who had risen to officer level:

Nobody is harder and more unjust towards the soldiers, who for their part particularly hate him and show their contempt at every possible opportunity...The impression one receives of the antagonism between British officers on one side and Australian on the other cannot be depicted strongly enough...The Australians maintain that British officers can not grasp the democratic nature of the Australian psyche, and know nothing of Australian conditions. The British officer, who frequently has served in India, Egypt, Sudan or elsewhere overseas, does not accept that Australian conditions –apart from the malaise of an inflated self-importance of a radical democracy- militarily offer any new career prospects. Particularly unloved are the British instruction officers at the Military College, whose current commander is Australian-born General Bridges, who last year visited the Cadet Academy in Lichterfelde. Because of his preference for American military ways, he is held in little regard and great dislike by his British officers...The Chief of the General Staff, General Gordon, thirty

report on the New Zealand Cadet system dated 1907, and its rôle in defence. See RM5/v 5716, Bl. 240, Oberleutnant z. See Frhr. von Buttlar, 'Anlage zum militär-politisches Bericht "Condor" vom 24.9.07'.

⁴⁰ RM5/v 5706, Bl. 248, 'Stand der australischen Verteidigungsfrage...', encl. Commander *Condor*-Chief of Admiralty Staff, 2 June 1908.

⁴¹ On the scarcity of trained crews and supplements from the Royal Fleet Reserve: RM 5/v 1160, Bl. 131, Kühlmann-Bethmann Hollweg, 12 January 1912; 'Signing On', *SMH*, 9 March 1911.

⁴² RM5/v 1160, Bl.96, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 23 August 1911.

⁴³ RM5/v 6006, Commander *Planet*-Kaiser, 15 April 1910.

years in Australian service, is apparently mostly drunk and makes no reliable impression...Of the so-called State Commandants, who similarly mostly transferred from the English Territorial Army in their early years, one has the thorough impression that they are not taken seriously by British career officers.

Many of the young officers appeared primarily concerned with public attention and openly criticised conditions. Given that the Commonwealth was paying 'the horrendous sum' of up to £500 annually to each officer aspirant, it was clear that 'the modern democracies are economically more wasteful than the old military states'. Kiliani justified reporting in such detail because of the internal frictions and contradictions, which were receiving considerable attention in the Australian press. He considered it remarkable that there were such openly public criticisms.⁴⁴

By 1913 the topic was 'on the daily program of the Imperialist press here'. Kiliani saw the urgent necessity for filling the officer ranks as 'one of the most difficult tasks Australia had' and the press 'constantly uses it to hold before the eyes of the public the dependence of the Dominion upon the mother country'. It repeatedly portrayed the poor quality of the local material and lack of discipline in the ranks to support the obtaining of British officers, particularly for the higher and General Staff ranks. Nevertheless, the Labor Party Government, so it was reported confidentially, despite its disinclination would find it necessary to enlarge the administrative and instructional personnel by the appointment of officers from the British and Indian Armies. Similarly, the new naval command had been organised by the Admiralty. The response to such an influx led to the comment that 'the thinking organ for the commanders of the Dominion naval units is in London',⁴⁵ -which is exactly the way the Admiralty would have liked it to remain.

1909 and implications of the 'Dreadnought Agitation'



Consul-General Georg Irmer commented on the parliamentary debate of the 1908 defence proposals that it was conducted with a 'maximum of oratory and a minimum of knowledge'. The German Navy was seen as 'primarily serving aggressive purposes', and Australia should look with more concern toward Germany than Japan.⁴⁶ In a subsequent report, Irmer enclosed a copy of the pamphlet *Claw and Eagle* which, with its lurid cartoon of serpent (Japan) and crowned eagle (Germany) encircling Australia, showed the 'completely low level of political thinking here.'⁴⁷ There was indeed considerable concern that these two powers could well join up after the expiry of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

At the end of March 1909, Irmer noted that the tone of the local press toward Germany had suffered a sudden and nasty interruption by way of the naval agitation which had been 'called out by London'. While there was a strong feeling for the presentation of battleships to the Motherland, the government was by no means united

⁴⁴ PA-AA, R19,272, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 22 December 1913.

⁴⁵ RM5/v 5707 Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 3 February 1913.

⁴⁶ RM5/v 5706, Bl. 256, Irmer-Bülow, 22 October 1908.

⁴⁷ PA-AA, R 19287, Irmer-Bülow, 11 May 1909. Perhaps this imagery had something to do with Zarathustra's beasts in vulgarised Nietzschean ideas.

as to what action should be taken.⁴⁸ Ambassador Paul Graf von Wolff Metternich in London reported to Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow about the moves by New South Wales and Victoria to offer a *Dreadnought* to Britain.⁴⁹ The matter was obviously important for the Germans because of the implications Australian action would have for both German war planning in the Pacific and a possible realignment of British Imperial policy.⁵⁰ In April, Irmer wrote to Bülow that more opportunity needed to be made to sway the views of the all too rare Australian personalities visiting Germany: '...as they are an important means of negating the all too frequent prejudices current here about developments in Germany'.⁵¹ Also in April a thirteen-page report was sent from the London embassy to Berlin about British naval proposals and their effect on Australian opinion against Germany.⁵²

Nevertheless, the Commonwealth Government was cool on the idea of sending ships now, and it regarded the current agitation as unjustified by any urgent grounds. For this First Sea Lord 'Jacky' Fisher was dubbed 'the most popular Australian in Germany'. The Commonwealth had stood fast in its rejection of sending battleships to the Motherland at Australia's cost. It was the implications of this that were of interest to the Germans, since it was the creation of an Australian Fleet which would make possible the recall of the Australian Squadron thus strengthening British naval power in Europe.⁵³ With the Germans' best interests linked to Fisher's continuation in office, Irmer noted that a Deakin Ministry 'would be the most damaging to our interests'.⁵⁴ Irmer provided an incisive description of Deakin following some time spent with him in August 1909. He saw him as a deep thinker, something unusual in the 'superficial politics' of Australia. In his total devotion to duty and lack of concern for ordinary human interests, he likened Deakin to that grey eminence, 'the secret diplomat of the Foreign Office', Friedrich von Holstein. All of Deakin's thoughts were directed towards making Australia great, and he saw the way to achieve this in maintaining the closest possible defence links with Britain.⁵⁵

In following years, copies of defence arrangements continued to be forwarded to various ministries in Berlin.⁵⁶ A 1909 German study of Australian defence emphasised the concern at the European colonial presence in the Pacific as one reason for the Australian insistence on its own fleet. Some 'anxious spirits' believed that Germany was waiting for the right moment to fall upon Australia, and for this purpose 'that we want to construct strong naval bases on our Pacific islands'.⁵⁷ There was a multiplicity of views in leading Australian circles in relation to what was required for national defence, and copious annotated newspaper clippings accompanied Consular reports to Berlin. While the majority was for the creation of an Australian fleet to counter the perceived threat for the foreseeable future, this would falter on the lack of personnel,

⁴⁸ *SMH*, 18 March 1909, under a banner 'Naval Supremacy in gave peril': British Opposition leader Balfour quoted Tirpitz' statement that 'We can build as fast as the English.' PA-AA, R 19,287, Irmer-Bülow, 29 March 1909.

⁴⁹ R19,287, Metternich-Bülow, 2 April 1909.

⁵⁰ On the 'Dreadnought-scare' see A. J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow. The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904-1919* (London:Oxford University Press, 1961), Vol. I, 151f.; Meaney, 175-181.

⁵¹ PA-AA, R19,287, Irmer-Bülow, 16 April 1909.

⁵² PA-AA, R19,287, 'Die englische Flottenvorlage und ihre Wirkung auf die australische Stimmung gegen Deutschland', 29 April 1909.

⁵³ Irmer-Bülow, 26 March 1909.

⁵⁴ PA-AA, R 19,287, Irmer-Bülow, 11 May 1909. PA-AA, R 19,928, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 18 August 1909; also PA-AA, R 19,287, Irmer-Bülow, 13 April 1909.

⁵⁵ PA-AA, R 19,928, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 18 August 1909; also PA-AA, R 19,287, Irmer-Bülow, 13 April 1909.

⁵⁶ PA-AA, R19,928, 13 November 1909.

⁵⁷ RM5/v 5707, Bl. 216, Admiralstabsaufgabe Nr. 10, 'Die geplante Landesverteidigung des australischen Commonwealth und ihre Beteiligung an der nationalen Verteidigung Großbritanniens', 1909.

for in Australia, even less than in Britain, was there any enthusiasm for the introduction of universal military service. The population 'has shown no great enthusiasm for service in the future Australian Army.' The introduction of military service was described almost as a standing joke.⁵⁸ The commander of *Planet* reported that similar problems were seen in the Navy:

The very thing that the Motherland needs more urgently than Dreadnoughts, men for the manning of ships, will not be found here. English officers only shrug their shoulders at the mention of an Australian Navy.

Kitchener and uncomfortable news



In 1909-10, Field-Marshal Lord Kitchener who was to retire from the position of Commander in Chief of British forces in India, made an extensive tour of China, Japan, Australia and Canada before taking charge of the Mediterranean forces.⁵⁹ The invitation was carefully specific, requesting him to 'inspect our forces and fixed defences in order to advise...upon the best means of developing...the land defences of the country.' Deakin wished to gain Kitchener's support for local Australian-Pacific defence, and in him saw a possible powerful ally against the Committee of Imperial Defence and the Colonial Defence Committee.⁶⁰ On 2 December 1909 he arrived in Singapore, inspected the defences, and departed for five days in the Dutch Indies, where he visited Java and the Moluccas before continuing on to Australia. In Singapore, Consul-General Kiliani (before his move to Sydney) pointed out the significance of his visiting Darwin, given current talk about the possibility of this port being upgraded as a base for the Australian Fleet.⁶¹

In Sydney, Irmer commented that in the local press and receptions Kitchener was praised as 'the first and greatest English soldier. One loves superlatives in Australia'. His time in Australia was followed with interest by the Germans, not least because it provided an opportunity to observe Australian land defences in action. They probably already knew what his verdict would be: 'He certainly will have obtained no particular joy from the military theatre which has been presented with so much hoo-ha'. At a gala dinner in the Sydney Town Hall, Sir George Reid praised him for that meaningful silence which had been a signal characteristic of all great military men since Moltke.⁶² Irmer commented:

The parliamentary humorist continued that all regretted that the Field-Marshal did not say what one in Australia generally wished to hear. Now,

⁵⁸ RM5/v 5707, Bl. 270, 'Schwierigkeiten bei der Einführung der allgemeinen Wehrpflicht in Australien', Münzenthaler-Bethmann Hollweg, 21 March 1911. The topic already had been considered in the *Kreuz-Zeitung* on 14 December 1907, clipping RM5/v 5703.

⁵⁹ Kitchener was Commander in Chief India 1902-9, British Representative in Egypt 1911 to 1914 when he was created an Earl, and Secretary of State for War 1914-16.

⁶⁰ Cablegram 9 July 1909, in G. Greenwood & C. Grimshaw (Eds), *Documents on Australian International Affairs 1901-1918* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1977), p. 246. Meaney (p. 187) points out that Deakin had already committed himself to a defence policy which ignored the CID's advice.

⁶¹ RM5/v 5707, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 7 December 1909.

⁶² A reference to Helmuth Graf von Moltke, famous in the Franco-Prussian War, and Chief of the General Staff until 1888. Reid, born in Scotland in 1845, had been a public servant and barrister, Premier of New South Wales 1894-9, and was High Commissioner in London 1910-15.

he certainly has had little cause for praise of the Australian militia. What he has said about Australian soldiers can be summarised that they are energetic triers. That is not much.

Cook 'spoke of military matters with comical gravity and like a blind man contemplating colour. The whole gathering gave the impression of naïveté, of a group of children beholding a Hercules at a fair.'⁶³

Kitchener's visit was the occasion for the first massed displays of large sections of Australia's land forces. The previous June, Korvettenkapitän Adolf von Trotha (*Planet*) had reported on the difficulties experienced with a citizen army. The exercise for the land defence of Sydney had suffered considerably because of the availability of the men only on weekends, and even then participation 'very much depended on the goodwill of the individual'.⁶⁴ A year later the situation had not improved, and the troops' unprofessional turnout and the statements of supposed experts evoked sarcastic German assessment. While the press reported in glowing terms on the turnout, Irmer wrote that at Liverpool, where the troops were to assemble, there was considerable absenteeism: nearly 40% of the 5th Light Horse remained on their farms, as good rain had just fallen. The 4th Infantry Regiment, composed mostly of Newcastle miners, when ordered to carry out earthworks, promptly downed tools until their pay of 8/- per day was assured. In Melbourne things did not fare much better: of the 6,476 men expected to appear, fewer than half did, and then most declared they had no intention of staying the full eight days.⁶⁵ Given such impressions, superficial was they perhaps were, it is no wonder the Germans had a contemptuous view of Australia's defence capability. In conversation with Trotha, the commandant of naval forces in Queensland, Captain Richardson, commented that in so young a nation the people possessed no real understanding of what was necessary for national defence, and believed they would come out alright with half-measures and a little money.⁶⁶ Irmer observed that Kitchener's plan for reorganisation of the land forces could have been composed by a lesser being, and commenting on a *Sydney Morning Herald* item, he continued:

There follows a real Australian tirade of praise about the extraordinary initiative, skill and self-reliance of Australian youth, which the British recruit does not possess. One can see it is the injured pride of the "Colonial", directed toward Kitchener because he made no secret of his disdain for this childish playing at soldiers...⁶⁷

The social composition of the Australian Defence Force, particularly its officers, was of interest to the Germans with their derogatory views of the abilities of a soldiery born of a citizen democracy. A *Sydney Morning Herald* statement that the officer must in the first instance be a citizen and secondly an officer, and that 'above all one has to prevent the growth of a military caste', in Berlin evoked the marginal note of 'Naturally!!!'.⁶⁸ This goes a long way in explaining the generally dismissive German opinion of the standards and effectiveness that could be achieved in a citizen army and navy.

The Defence Act 1910 sought to implement the most important of Kitchener's proposals for the reorganisation of Australia's land forces. A full explanation of these was provided in a report to the Chancellor in January 1911.⁶⁹ Extensive comments on

⁶³ RM5/v 5703, Bl. 69, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 10 January 1910.

⁶⁴ RM5/v 5704, Trotha-Kaiser, 8 June 1909.

⁶⁵ See *SMH* 7 January 1910 for a report on this: 'The official estimate of the attendance...is discouraging.' The problem continued: see cartoon in *The Bulletin* 28 August 1912 regarding absenteeism.

⁶⁶ RM5/v 6006, Commander *Planet*-Kaiser, 15 April 1910.

⁶⁷ RM5/v 5707, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 20 February 1910.

⁶⁸ *SMH* [-] February 1910, in RM5/v 5707, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 20 February 1910.

⁶⁹ RM 5/v 5707, Münzenthaler-Bethman Hollweg, 5 January 1911. See also *Koloniale Rundschau*, 1910, 'Australische Probleme', 491-3.

defence details and Kitchener's report were also in the report of the Senior Officer, Australian Station (Kranzbühler) the previous year.⁷⁰ There was definite interest in what was now going to happen in Australia: a marginal comment notes that the report contained detail not yet known, and it was to be forwarded to the General Staff.

Weaknesses identified

Starting with the period of strained Anglo-German relations from 1909 visiting German officers took opportunity to note in considerable detail the nature and strength of harbour defences during their stays in Australian and New Zealand ports.⁷¹ This intensified with observations following Kitchener's visit, as in addition to his memorandum 'The Organisation of the Australian Land Defence Forces', a second Report dealt with the fortified positions in the Commonwealth. Irmer had obtained information that new fortifications were not anticipated.⁷² Significant at this time are two studies. The first, a subsequent report by Freudenreich entitled 'The Position of Australian Defence Planning at the end of March 1909', began with an overall view of developments to that time. The least progress had been made in land defences, 'because the Australians resist everything which has the remotest similarity to compulsory military service'. The Government planned, but had not yet passed through Parliament, the proposal for compulsory training. It fully recognised that it could not produce European-type soldiers with this type of training ('social position plays no determining rôle'), but hoped nevertheless that basic understanding of field service and military organisation with some shooting would suffice.⁷³



The fact that Kapitänleutnant Paul Wülfing's 'The Planned Defence of the Australian Commonwealth and its Participation in the National Defence of Great Britain' is designated as an 'Admiralty Staff task' shows that there was real and practical interest in any military and naval opposition on the part of Australia which might interfere with a planned attack on Australasian shipping.⁷⁴ The most important section is entitled 'Australia's Reasons for the Creation of its own Navy'. While Britain's continuing withdrawal of ships overseas and their concentration in European waters caused unease in Australia, nobody was in any doubt that the best defence was the superiority of the Royal Navy. The Admiralty 'quite rightly' said that Australia's fate would be decided in the North Sea or the Atlantic. While this strategy of concentration was considered the correct one for the defence of the Empire as a whole from a military point of view, Australians considered that until the decision had been reached at home, here enemy cruisers would attack coasts and trade. The Commonwealth was powerless to prevent the denuding of the Station by the Admiralty. The study also

⁷⁰ RM5/v 5707, Bl. 175, 3 July 1910.

⁷¹ Reports on harbour defences, particularly gun emplacements, are in RM5/v 5718, Bl. 1, Commander *Condor*-Chief of Admiralty Staff, August 1909; Bl. 3, Commander *Cormoran*-Chief of Admiralty Staff, 25 February 1913.

⁷² RM5/v 5707, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 20 February 1910.

⁷³ RM5/v 5707, 'Stand der australischen Verteidigungspläne Ende März 1909', encl. Commander *Condor*-Chief of Admiralty Staff, 3 April 1909.

⁷⁴ RM5/v 5707 'Die geplante Landesverteidigung der australischen Commonwealth und ihre Beteiligung an der nationalen Verteidigung Grossbritanniens. Admiralstabsaufgabe Nr. 10, 1909. While it also discussed land forces, the bulk of the study dealt with naval defence.

considered the purely technical side of implementation - numbers and types of vessels, costing, and personnel. With regard to the latter, the existing Naval Militia had 'very little military value' and could not be seen as the base from which to draw for a new active fleet. British officers frequently had expressed the opinion that they were less than thrilled at the prospect of training and commanding Australian crews. As to the prospects for the implementation of the Naval Plan for Australia, while the Commonwealth Government was clearly intent on this, it remained to be seen how far the strength and financial means of the country made implementation more easy or difficult.

The final consideration was how Australia was to pay for its new Navy. The debate coincided with a time when the economy was in recession and one could not reckon with a considerable and consistent improvement. The appropriations and the sacrificial willingness of the Australian Parliament would come up against many hard tests in the future, particularly since

...the mood of the Australian population, which happily bites off more than it can chew, will become somewhat more subdued about the demands which will be made on its purse. The further development of the Australian Navy is inseparably tied to the growth in population and standard of living...Prophecies are an uncertain thing...but I would say that a further expansion of the Australian fleet is not to be expected in the next ten years.⁷⁵

He deemed the proposed Defence Bill 'a really mediocre and superficial attempt on the part of Australian lawmakers' and in no way could it be designated a defence measure.

What is proposed here is little more than a series of decisions about principles in the selection, training, discipline, mobilisation and payment of Australian service personnel. It cannot appear doubtful to anybody that a defence law which must serve the iron necessity of war, and where it deals with the very existence of a young nation, cannot be concerned with humane feelings and moral points of view, and even less with concessions to the voting masses...

Irmer could discover no new positions in defence matters. 'In the final analysis nobody will succeed in doing that', as new ideas in the area of defence were even less frequent than in Europe.⁷⁶

In November 1909 Irmer reported that the Defence Bill had passed through Parliament without noteworthy alterations, although there had been much heated debate, from which he gained the conviction that 'the Federal Parliament does not have the most basic grasp of military matters'. The content of the speeches and the Government's original proposal had led to the view expressed in some press quarters that one was dealing with 'an army of children and a soldateska worthy of a South American republic and suited for a comic opera'.⁷⁷ In July, Senator Colonel Neild in an exchange with Sir Josiah Symon also had expressed concern about the readiness and discipline of the land forces. Such concerns would have vindicated Irmer's assessment. The whole naval debate had been characterised by an attempt to make a connection between Germany and the British-Australian naval plans, so much so that it 'appeared like a parliamentary arrangement...which has proceeded on London's directions'. Given the expected opposition, perhaps it was not surprising that London wanted to keep a guiding hand on proceedings.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ BA-Berlin 10.01/8937, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 5 October 1909.

⁷⁷ RM5/v 5707, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 1 November 1909.

⁷⁸ *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XLIX, 2 July 1909, 766; RM5/v 5707, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 1 November 1909.

In June 1911, the captain of *Cormoran* (Ebert) reported on a meeting with the Commander-in-chief of the Australia Station, Vice-Admiral Sir George King-Hall, described as a 'convinced friend of Germany' who had visited the country on several occasions, and had a friendly relationship with the Chief of the Naval Cabinet, Admiral Georg von Müller. The significance of this meeting was that in the course of conversation, King-Hall intimated that steps for an Australian Fleet had progressed to the stage where it was probable the Commonwealth would assume responsibility for its own maritime defence within two years. However,

Apparently the Admiral views the coming drastic changes with very mixed feelings, and even if he did not specifically say so, I nevertheless had the distinct impression that he places only limited trust in the new system. The Australian people desperately needed some good "discipline", and he hoped for an improvement with the introduction of universal military service. The badly suppressed sigh he emitted with these words clearly indicated how small his hopes in this direction are.

The main cause for this pervading malaise was the lack of respect for any authority in the character of the average Australian, which showed itself early in the conduct of children towards their parents and teachers. Ebert also indicated insufficiencies in artillery and infantry. Rear-Admiral Johannes Rieve, Sectional Head in the Admiralty, prepared a summary of this report with comment, which was forwarded to the Kaiser.⁷⁹ A subsequent report returned to more essential matters, enclosing information on Brisbane for addition to the Cruiser Handbook, clippings about the extension of the New South Wales railway system, and two railway maps of Queensland.⁸⁰

German military planners were the first to recognise the importance of, and utilise, railway systems in wartime. Hence from Federation there was considerable interest in what Australia planned in this respect. In 1902 the transcontinental certainly was seen in trade-political terms – and here it must be remembered that the promotion of German economic interests was a prime goal of *Weltpolitik*:

...it lies in the interest of the whole British Empire to regard this railway as a part of the trans-Indian railway over Singapore, Calcutta, Baghdad, Smyrna, Paris and London, and as rival to the almost completed Russian trans-Siberian...Due to the rapidly developing trade relations between Australia and Asia the transcontinental will create great interest among English politicians...⁸¹

The construction of the transcontinental railway was seen by Australians as a deterrence to any invasion or landing, and its strategic as well as economic significance was reported regularly. However, the view in Berlin at first was that it was doubtful it would be constructed 'in the near future' because of financial constraints.⁸² Nevertheless, the potential as a strategic underpinning for an effective Australian Navy remained, as Henderson had stated. Oberleutnant z. See Fabricius noted that he '...indicates the urgent necessity of the construction of a rail link between Port Darwin and Freemantle, and the population centres with their industry and resources, which he considers essential for the maintenance of the Fleet'.⁸³

Problems within the Australian naval construction program reduced any German anxiety about the level of an immediate threat to their position in the Pacific. In

⁷⁹ RM5/v 5707, Bl. 300, Rieve-Kaiser, 15 August 1911; RM5/v 6007, Commander *Cormoran*-Kaiser, 12 June 1911.

⁸⁰ RM5/v 5713, Bl. 19, Commander *Cormoran*-Chief of Admiralty Staff, 18 June 1911. Marginal comment on clippings in RM5/v 5713, Bl. 1, September 1903.

⁸¹ RM5/v 5713, *Export. Organ des Centralvereins für Handelsgeographie*, 29 May 1902.

⁸² Marginal comment on clippings in RM5/v 5713, Bl. 1, September 1903. This folio, 'Verkehrswege', contains a collection of interesting reports on transport. See the leader 'Railways in War', *SMH*, 16 March 1911.

⁸³ RM5/v 5705, 'Winterarbeit...' op.cit., Bl.94.

forwarding copies of the Naval Defence Act of 1911, Kiliani commented on the problems being encountered in Australian shipyards as a result of the Commonwealth policy to construct as much as possible locally. Because of the dubious overall state of facilities, it appeared doubtful whether the construction of cruisers and the remaining three destroyers would be achieved within the scheduled time.⁸⁴ The German view was that the construction program would never meet its target date: '...the proposed program is more of a wish, whose realisation remains far behind the boundaries of the achievable.' The prospects for a speedy completion of the small cruiser *Brisbane*, for which the components were being manufactured in Britain, appeared dim. Construction was supposed to follow in Sydney, but the workshops there were in such a state of unpreparedness that Defence Minister Millen had to order the closure of several operations. The outfitting of the workshops with useable machines would take considerable time and money.⁸⁵

In February 1913, the Senior Officer on the Australian Station (Ebert) submitted a detailed observation of New Zealand's defence capability. It is significant that, in a similar vein to observations about Australia, he began by pointing out the general public dissatisfaction with the newly introduced defence system. The press was chiefly concerned with awakening interest in military matters and making military service popular. To this end, the German bogey was often raised to counter voices which declared the system to be superfluous for New Zealand. On the whole, his opinion was that approval of the new system was to be found mainly among older people, less on military grounds than in recognition of military service as a good means of disciplining the young. Weaknesses in the national character were seen as a factor deleterious to military discipline and the effectiveness of the armed forces. During *Cormoran's* stay in Wellington, an attack was made on a Rifle Club and graffiti written against Major-General Godley, who had overseen reforms. There was a complete lack of respect for any kind of authority,

which with the passage of time has almost become an innate part of the character of the free Australian or New Zealander...and which shows itself not only in the demeanour of the employee to his employer...but above all in the disrespectful behaviour of half-grown youth towards parents and educators, is becoming recognised...as a great danger for the healthy development of national life.⁸⁶

Commenting on the press reaction to the 1913 visit of the *New Zealand* to Sydney, Ebert stated that what was written about the manning of Australian ships in comparison to the British had to be viewed with some scepticism, the rosy coloured articles being far wide of the actual mark. He had more than once heard the fears expressed that the force would regress in both training and discipline.⁸⁷

The implications of British Imperial defence policy

In the years before the War German planners were eagerly seeking cracks in Imperial unity which they could widen to their advantage. Imperial defence had been discussed only in an academic way at the Colonial Conferences from 1897, and as a result the relationship of the Navy to the colonies was, in the British view, not understood by them, and no single colony understood its position in Imperial defence. How this would develop was of some interest to German observers, for whom the significance of the implementation of the Australian Fleet Unit and the recall of British vessels from the

⁸⁴ RM5/v 1160, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 6 February 1912; also RM5/v 1160 Bl. 32, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg 5 December 1911 about *Warrego* delays and the difficulty of finding sufficient crews. Details of naval organisation were given in Bl. 214, Foreign Office-Navy Office, 20 January 1913, enclosing Kiliani's report of 14 December 1912.

⁸⁵ RM5/v 1660, *Amtliche Mitteilungen*, Heft 5, 4 October 1913.

⁸⁶ RM5/v 5717, Bl.113, Commander *Cormoran*-Kaiser, 1 February 1913.

⁸⁷ RM 5/v 5705, Commander *Cormoran*-Kaiser, 29 May 1913.

Asian-Pacific region lay in the savings for Britain which could be redirected to its European naval strengthening.⁸⁸ In an article in 1908 in the *Kreuz-Zeitung* commented that Britain would be unable to avoid sending back a part of its fleet to Far Eastern Stations, and it certainly would be in Germany's interests to hasten the necessity if it could.⁸⁹



In April 1900, Ambassador Paul Graf Wolff Metternich in London composed a lengthy assessment of the moves then underway for the federation of the Australian colonies. The recurring thread was the extent to which a unified nation would and could contribute to British defence.⁹⁰ At the core of 'Imperialistic thought' was certainly the desire to give an organic structure to relations between colonies and motherland.⁹¹ Colonial participation in the Boer War had given an impetus to the creation of a comprehensive defence system. As a corollary of involvement in military undertakings in the interest of the whole Empire stood the claim to participation in decision making at the Imperial level. The main aim appeared to be the creation of an organised land-based Imperial military force (Reichskriegsmacht zu Lande) but concerning the political formulation of the new unity there was 'complete unclarity'.⁹²

Indeed the Kaiser was concerned to use the occasion of Australian federation to parade Germany's naval presence and through this, political and strategic interests in the Pacific. In March 1901 the Chief of the Admiralty Staff noted that while no official invitation had been forthcoming from London, the Kaiser had raised the matter of whether a cruiser of the East Asian Squadron should not be present in Melbourne for the reception of the Duke of Cornwall and York (later George V), since *SMS Cormoran* was currently stationed in Australian waters. A Russian armoured cruiser was to be present, and a German absence would be to the nation's political detriment.⁹³ Metternich advised Bülow that 'In the instance that other powers send warships to the national celebrations, it naturally would be highly desirable that we participate to an equal extent...'⁹⁴ The Kaiser reached a speedy decision and by April the Chief of Admiralty Staff advised the Foreign Office that *SMS Hansa* with the second admiral of the Cruiser Squadron, Rear-Admiral Hermann Kirchoff, to the official reception for the Duke of York. Squadron Chief Vice-Admiral Felix von Bendemann had telegraphed instructions to *Hansa* to be present in Melbourne before 6 May. A whole month was set aside for *Hansa* to remain in Australian waters before returning to China. In addition, *Cormoran*, already in Sydney undergoing repairs, would attend in Melbourne, and then proceed to Adelaide for one month.⁹⁵ Clearly, there was a determination to impress Australians with Germany's naval presence in the region.

⁸⁸ Even though the Australian ships would receive a subsidy, the British still would save several million pounds. PA-AA, R 19,288, Metternich-Bethmann Hollweg, 25 September 1909.

⁸⁹ Prof. Schliemann quoted in Hislam, 178; 'The greater the force we have in the Pacific, the less we shall have in the North Sea.'

⁹⁰ The significance of federation and rôle of the Commonwealth is treated in RM5/v 4702, Bl. 199, Wieting, 'Organisation des Commonwealth...'

⁹¹ This was clear in the evidence of what the Germans viewed as British trade sanctions: the 'Made in Germany' stamp, subvention of steamship lines, the Canadian preferential tariff and similar moves in Australia and South Africa, all elements of an Imperial policy designed to forge the disparate parts into close economic and political union. Francke, 'Weltpolitik', 143.

⁹² PA-AA, R 6118, Metternich-Hohenlohe, 6 April 1900.

⁹³ PA-AA, R19,276, Chief of Admiralty Staff-Foreign Secretary, 19 March 1901.

⁹⁴ PA-AA, R19,275, Eckardstein-Bülow, 10 November 1900.

⁹⁵ PA-AA, R19,276, Chief of Admiralty Staff-Foreign Secretary, 1 April 1901;

Metternich continued to make perceptive observations about empire-colonial relations. The Imperial idea, which in recent years had degenerated into a kind of 'vague idealism expressed at most in trade-political developments', now once again was assuming its military character. Lord Kimberly, addressing the Australian delegation present for the Federation negotiations, stated that it was only with the assistance of the colonies that the Empire could be maintained. This came from the former Colonial Secretary who had used most efficiently the method of *divide et impera*. He drew a clear link from trade-political to Imperial defence issues which would impact on Germany:

While the federation of the Australian colonies may at first sight appear an emancipation from the influence of the home country, it is more to be viewed as a significant step towards the unity of the whole Empire...it provides the example for the foundation of a greater Empire, providing Britain with only three united groups with which to deal- the Canadian, Australian, and South African, whose unification will be easier than that of a larger number of competing colonies...Clearly in the foreseeable future the Empire will [be] underpinned with mutual military insurance...⁹⁶

Nevertheless, there were reservations. On the whole, it appeared that Foreign Secretary Joseph Chamberlain's attempt to weld the Empire into a greater unity 'in the flames of martial enthusiasm' had failed: 'The Colonies remain jealous guardians of their independence and cool pragmatists who give the Motherland nothing without a price'. Metternich concluded that any attempt to weld together such heterogeneous and geographically disparate elements must sooner or later burst apart from the friction and pressure such a tight association would cause.⁹⁷ This of course was in Germany's interests, and is an aspect of the Anglo-German antagonism easily overlooked in the glamour of the naval debate. The correspondence between the two Foreign Offices from the commencement of Wilhelm II's 'new course' in 1897 reinforced the view of many in Britain that 'it was Germany's intention to prevent the federation of the British Empire ...' with the intention of maintaining a divided defence requirement.⁹⁸

In mid-1906 Consul-General Paul von Buri commented on the circumstances of two reports which the Government had received as a result of a request to the CID concerning improvements to defences. While one was secret, the other put the view that Australia had nothing to fear from a naval attack, 'contrary to the general opinion here.' There was much upset in Government circles that William Rooke Creswell's⁹⁹ proposals for an Australian Navy had been rejected in London; '...the Commonwealth Government appears to support its Captain Creswell more in the interest of national self-conceit'. Apart from the somewhat comical rock solid belief that 'a whole army corps' were going to invade, the other ill-tasting part of the report was the costing of improvements to coastal defence.¹⁰⁰

Report on the visit of the *Cormoran* to Melbourne and Adelaide, PA-AA 19,277, Commander *Cormoran*-Chief of Admiralty Staff, 8 June 1901.

⁹⁶ PA-AA, R6118, Metternich-Hohenlohe, 6 April 1900. On Imperial federation see *Morning Post*, 'The New Commonwealth', 17 April 1901, clipping encl. BA Berlin, 10.01/8940.

⁹⁷ PA-AA, R 6119, Metternich-Bülow, 24 August 1902.

⁹⁸ 'Welt Politik: Germany and Great Britain', *National Review*, October 1913, 295. The theme is also treated in Ellis Barker's *Modern Germany. Her Political and Economic Problems, Her Policy, Her Ambitions, and the Causes of Her Success* (London: Smith, Elder, 1907), Chap. VII.

⁹⁹ William Rooke Creswell retired from the Royal Navy in 1879 and had extensive experience in South Australia and as commandant of the Queensland naval force, becoming first commandant of the Commonwealth forces and in 1904 the first Director of Naval Forces. He was a vigorous supporter of a locally-based Australian Navy. See Stephen Webster, 'Creswell, the Australian Navalist: A Career Biography of Vice-Admiral Sir William Rooke Creswell, K.C.M.G., K.B.E., (1852-1933)' Ph.D. Monash University, 1976.

¹⁰⁰ RM5/v 5706, Bl. 207, Buri-Bülow, 20 August 1906.



A report from the Naval Attaché in London, Kapitän z.S. Carl Coerper, to Tirpitz in September 1908 throws light on the German view of Deakin's persistent campaigning for an independent Australian fleet unit.¹⁰¹ Now it appeared that the Admiralty was prepared to accept his program.¹⁰² Most noteworthy was the fact that the proposed force would be under Commonwealth control in time of war, even when a British commander were on the Station.

This point above all...would break with the principle "one navy, one control", and would mean a concession by the central government to the Commonwealth, which might be the first step synonymous with a break of this rising colony in questions of self defence.¹⁰³

The 1909 Imperial Conference created a Pacific Squadron with the assistance of Australia and New Zealand.¹⁰⁴ However, as this Squadron would consist of only 3 *Dreadnoughts*, it was clear that even with this measure Britain in the Pacific was completely dependent on Japanese goodwill – another factor which was a constant in German strategic thought and planning. Australia and New Zealand, where the antipathy towards Japanese was only slightly less than that toward Germans, were repeatedly raising their dissatisfaction with the current arrangement. The essence of Defence Minister Cook's complaints had been the topic of conversation in English clubs for months. The only startling thing was that he had paraded all these uncomfortable things before the world.¹⁰⁵



London Embassy Counsellor Richard von Kühlmann reported that at a meeting of specialists at the Royal United Service Institution in April 1911, Asian expert and writer A. R. Colquhoun (who was also prominent in the Royal Colonial Institute) described the Pacific as promising to become the Mediterranean of the

¹⁰¹ Deakin had taken the first step shortly after becoming Prime Minister in 1905. Although the proposed Australian fleet was intended, in Creswell's words as 'a purely defensive line that will give security to our naval bases, populous centres, principal ports and commerce', the CID condemned this local defence fleet as going against every principle of sound strategy. A similar fate met his proposals at the 1907 Imperial Conference, where once again the motto of an Imperial navy one and indivisible triumphed; 'one navy, one control' was considered essential for continuing command of the seas. See Gordon, *Admiralty*, 411.

¹⁰² This consisted of 4 ocean going destroyers; 16 River-class coastal destroyers; 4 submarines; 4 Pandora-class cruisers for training purposes, on loan from Britain; improvements to coastal fortifications and docks.

¹⁰³ RM5/v 5704, Coerper-Tirpitz, 25 September 1908.

¹⁰⁴ It 'was brilliantly successful in reconciling official admiralty considerations with the nationalistic aspirations of the various dominion governments.' Gordon, *Admiralty*, p. 412. Having accepted the Dominions' position, the Admiralty was in a good position to push its own views on how these might best be used; see Meaney, 181-191.

¹⁰⁵ BA-Berlin, 10.01/8937, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 5 October 1909.

twentieth century, that the completion of the Panama Canal would increase the region's importance considerably. As a consequence, in the long run it would be impossible for Britain to protect its interests solely by diplomatic agreements. In the following discussion, 'a series of ranking naval officers raised the complaint that England had no real practical policy for the Pacific...'¹⁰⁶ This raised ongoing concerns in Australia and New Zealand about their defence. Metternich's assessment of the 1911 Imperial Conference was that was regarded as a 'miserable failure' by those striving for closer federation.

Seen from a political standpoint, the positive results are few...The Dominions have left no doubt that as far as possible they intend to defend their independence of action...The creation by some Dominions of local defence forces has quickly led to the demand for influence on Britain's foreign policy...The axis of all these discussions is the Anglo-Japanese Alliance...Australia and New Zealand regard the Yellow Peril as very close and very threatening.¹⁰⁷



Reporting on the reception of the Conference in Australia, Acting Consul-General Carl Bünz commented that while the British declaration to the delegates that there would be detailed consultation on matters of defence and foreign policy made a most favourable impression, the Opposition had upset the cosy atmosphere by stating that Australia would gain little from being granted a peek into the holy-of-holies of policy every four years. Measures had to be implemented which would enable the Australian Government to be regularly informed about world political trends, 'to be firmly seated in the Imperial carriage and not dragged along behind it'.¹⁰⁸ At least the priorities of the different Dominions at this time served to keep Imperial naval strength in the Pacific from assuming a level which the Germans could see as posing a real threat.¹⁰⁹

The implications for Germany of the formation of Dominion fleets were considered 'from the standpoint of our strategy in a possible German-English war' in an Admiralty Staff briefing paper in 1911. While in German eyes the three large and five small Australian armoured cruisers had 'no great battle value', the money expended on their maintenance would be diverted from more effective fighting ships. Britain was now somewhat relieved of the financial and moral burden in its extra-European responsibilities, having passed on to the Dominions the greater part of the burden for their own defence. This meant that for the moment, the British Government could implement the measures for strengthening home defence without increasing the budget for foreign requirements -which clearly had implications for Germany. However,

¹⁰⁶ RM5/v 5704, Kühlmann-Bethmann Hollweg, 6 April 1911. Kühlmann strongly advocated an overseas direction for German policy.

¹⁰⁷ BA Berlin, 09.01/5372, Metternich-Bethmann Hollweg, 29 June 1911.

¹⁰⁸ There were nevertheless items of importance to Australia, such as the right of the self-governing Dominions to conclude trade treaties with foreign nations without consulting London, but the negative mood was reflected in the leading articles of the press, and indeed the *Daily Telegraph* went so far as to describe the affair as 'the most destructive piece of alleged constructive statesmanship ever formulated.' BA Berlin, 09.01/5372, Bl. 88, Bünz-Bethmann Hollweg, 21 November 1911. On the implications of the Conference see Meaney, 213-223.

¹⁰⁹ The facts, without comment but with an emphasis on local control, are provided in RM5/v 1160, Bl. 86, Metternich-Bethmann Hollweg, 29 July 1911.

Whether political conditions in the Pacific after the modification of the Japanese Alliance will not require England to strengthen its East Asian Station from the Home Fleet is still an open question, for Australia is currently constructing a more defensive naval force...In conducting its wartime tasks our Cruiser Squadron will certainly only have to deal with Australian ships inside the Australian Station...We would perhaps have to deal with a separate Australian fleet later on, in view of the strong Australian aspirations towards our Pacific possessions.

The fleets would assume particular significance for Germany when, as a result of the Dominions developing their current areas of naval responsibility into their own power areas, 'these centrifugal endeavours have taken on more acute forms...and have moved across to affect the [British] control of the oceans'.¹¹⁰



The commander of *Cormoran* (Korvettenkapitän Adalbert Zuckschwerdt) commented in 1913 that due to the state of flux in British and Dominion policy, Germany would not have much to fear for some time. He saw no prospects of agreement for the unification of Australian, New Zealand and Canadian forces into a Pacific Fleet. The jealousy, particularly between Australia and New Zealand, and the striving for independence would certainly not permit this union for the present.¹¹¹ At this time the German press also saw a distinct failure on the part of London to enthrone the Dominions for its Imperial policy, particularly Churchill's artificial attempts to introduce fear of the German fleet in 1911-1912.¹¹²

Only a strong local naval presence could provide protection, and thus the naval question had become the central issue in relations between the three Pacific Dominions and Britain, under the energetic aegis of the New Zealand Defence Minister, James Allen. In Kiliani's analysis it was doubtful that the Dominions, lacking men and dockyard facilities, could produce and maintain a large naval force for any length of time. Even the euphoric mood of the official reception in 1913 on the arrival of the Fleet Unit was marred by the pessimistic observations of the British guests. A long speech by Admiral King Hall with intensely personal content 'dampened the mood in the auditorium considerably...Where the naval officers spoke to me...they treated the whole Australian naval issue as a joke and insisted on the unbreakable unity of the British Navy'. Kiliani saw the whole business of the 'Australian special-fleet-experiment' contributing to an 'excessive sense of importance for Australia and its few ships'.¹¹³

The function of the Australian Fleet Unit in the overall scheme of Imperial defence was a source of ongoing interest for the Germans - it was obviously to their advantage that the British Home Fleet be weakened as much as possible by the demands of Dominion defence. While Britain indeed had succeeded in ensuring that in wartime the Dominion fleets would be an integrated component of the Royal Navy under the command of the Admiralty, this was 'if the colonies place them at England's disposal for a war'.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ RM 5/v 1160, 'Zum Immediatvortrag', 23 October 1911. See also RM5/v 1160, Kapitänleutnant Rehder, 'Die Entwicklung der englischen Colonialmarinen. Augenblicklicher Stand der Frage und Betrachtungen über die Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten, sowie über die Beteiligung der Colonialflotten in einem deutsch-englischen Krieg', June 1914.

¹¹¹ RM5/v 5708, Commander *Cormoran*-Kaiser, 12 August 1913.

¹¹² *Hamburger Nachrichten*, 'Die Rassenfrage im Stillen Ozean und die britische Reichsflotte', 31 August 1913. The *HN* was distinguished by its anglophobia and advocated renewal of former treaty relations with Russia.

¹¹³ RM5/v 5705, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 20 October 1913.

¹¹⁴ RM5/v 1160, 'Zum Immediatvortrag. Die englische Colonialmarinen', 23 October 1911.

Perhaps the most clear understanding and important assessment of the defence relationship between Britain and the Dominions was a report composed by Admiralty Staff Chief Admiral Georg von Müller for Naval Secretary Alfred von Tirpitz in November 1913.¹¹⁵ Central to this was the idea of the 'whole-world needs' of the Royal Navy. Combined with the costs of social reforms, the financial burden of maintaining the Navy with a continued undefined increase in defence spending which the requirements of Britain's world rôle demanded, could only be met with the assistance of the Dominions. It was quite obvious that under present conditions, namely as long as the Navy was directed by a Cabinet that represented only Britain, 'the tendency of the Dominions, in the absence of a voice in the Government, would be directed toward local navies which they could control themselves'.¹¹⁶ He concluded that Imperial defence policy had made some superficial advances, but its inner substance and cohesion had suffered a weakening. The present lack of clarity in the defence relationship between Britain and the Dominions was the result of basing the whole of British seapower in home waters; '...a change in this naval policy appears to be slowly in the making, under the pressure of necessity...'.¹¹⁷ Tirpitz commented that Churchill 'did not take sufficient note of the mood of the Dominions, which were more interested in their own position than that of England in Europe...'. In addition, they were disappointed because of the broken 1909 Admiralty promise to station two groups of modern ships in the Far East. 'The Imperial Squadron was a stillborn proposal'.¹¹⁸

Kiliani noted in November 1913 that the Admiralty would station in New Zealand waters an additional two light cruisers from the former Australian Squadron for the protection of trade and pan-British interests in the Pacific.¹¹⁹ The reason for this was fear of German attacks upon trade, as outlined in the *New Zealand Herald*:

Germany with its increasing naval construction, which was directed at one fine day annihilating the British Fleet and conquering British colonies, had forced the Motherland to concentrate its forces more and more in home waters and to denude the Colonies.

New Zealand had to be secured against foreign attack for the maintenance of Britain's world-power position. The conquest of the Dominion by Germany would hardly assist in this.¹²⁰ According to the *Koloniale Rundschau*, what bound the Dominions to Britain was their 'military unpreparedness'. Although they paid money to Britain, the Royal Navy was 'in no way present where it counts, protecting English trade interests on distant oceans'.¹²¹

Kapitänleutnant Hermann Rehder wrote in his 1914 study that it was only with Dominion assistance that British naval supremacy on other oceans could be maintained. In his assessment, by 1909 it had become clear to the British that their hope of securing a lasting preponderance through the construction of large battleships would not only not come to fruition, but that the existing level of armaments among the naval powers who had followed the British construction example, would completely

¹¹⁵ RM5/v 1160, Müller-Tirpitz, 9 November 1913; also in PA-AA, R 6124.

¹¹⁶ The Imperial Squadron, consisting of the battle cruisers *New Zealand* and *Malaya*, and three Canadian battleships, was intended to soothe Dominion opinion. It would be 28 days from Sydney and 23 from Vancouver. Sir George Reid said that Australia did not consider it as 'a sufficient guard for a world-wide Empire'. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 March 1913.

¹¹⁷ RM5/v 1160, Müller-Tirpitz, 9 November 1913

¹¹⁸ Tirpitz, *Politische Dokumente. Der Aufbau der deutschen Weltmacht* (Stuttgart/Berlin: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachf., 1924), 417.

¹¹⁹ RM5/v 5717, Bl. 184, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 11 November 1913. The New Zealand Government wanted two *Bristol*-class cruisers, for whose support it was prepared to raise its annual £100,000 subsidy by £50,000. This was rejected by London. The Government then decided to order the construction of its own *Bristol*-class cruiser at a cost of £400,000.

¹²⁰ *New Zealand Herald* 30 October 1913, enclosed in Kiliani, *ibid.*

¹²¹ *Koloniale Rundschau*, Heft 11/12, 1914, 566

exclude this hope, and without the effective participation of the colonies it would be impossible to maintain the Two-Power Standard.¹²² Australia saw the naval concentration in the North Sea leading to the loss of British dominance in the Pacific, and 'this dominance could become a question of survival for the colonies'. If they were drawn fast into naval armament, the question of the extension of the British Squadron in East Asia hopefully would retreat into the background. It was possible that the British desire for the creation of an 'Imperial Service Squadron' to cruise the Dominions in peacetime, and which would pass to Admiralty command on the outbreak of war, was coming closer to reality. The imperative necessity for this was because in an Anglo-German war, 'the main danger for Britain lay in the interdiction of its great maritime import routes'.¹²³

A possible danger to German plans was seen in the creation of one or more 'flying squadrons' of Dominion and British ships under the command of British admirals and operating in conjunction with the new Eighth Cruiser Squadron based at Milford Haven, whose task would be to prevent the effective operation of German cruisers and converted mercantile auxiliary cruisers. Suitable bases for these squadrons were to be found, apart from Canada and Singapore, only in Australia. While Rehder saw bases as a possibility, and not a probability, the matter of the flying squadrons 'lies well within the bounds of possibility'.¹²⁴

German conclusions

One of the more perceptive analyses came from Irmer in 1909. Discussing the parliamentary passage of the Defence Bill of that year, he stated that while the manner in which Australia came to terms with its defence was a question of little interest for most other countries, the matter was in no way indifferent for Germany, given that a major reorganisation of British-Australian land and naval forces was being carried out 'before the gates of our militarily and navally unprotected colonial areas in the Pacific'. This was a serious concern in view of the part these had to play in fuelling and supplying the East Asian Cruiser Squadron.¹²⁵ Joseph Cook had revealed such expansionist Australian thoughts inadvertently when he spoke of the provision of an expeditionary corps for overseas duty in the event of war, and where else could such a force be directed than against the neighbouring German possessions in the Pacific? Imperialistic circles were pressing for the practical implementation of 'a new Australian Monroe Doctrine'.¹²⁶

Irmer likened New Zealand's deceased Prime Minister Seddon to Cecil Rhodes, and did not doubt that another of equally forceful nature would soon arrive on the scene, this time to carry out Seddon's proposed *Normannenfahrt* for the conquest of Samoa and other German possessions. Had London not intervened, 'this act of piracy would have succeeded, but such things are capable of being repeated at any time'.¹²⁷ Britain would not 'under present political circumstances, be able to denude other spheres of interest of war vessels...'¹²⁸ which had significant implications for Germany. Clearly Britain was attempting to create a Two-Power-Standard in non-European waters, in which Australia was to play a crucial part: the Indian Ocean was to become 'a second

¹²² On the Two-Power Standard see Marder, *Dreadnought*, 123-5.

¹²³ RM5/v 1160, 'Die Entwicklung...'

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ BA Berlin, 10.01/8937, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 5 October 1909. Cook's speech is in *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. LI, 1909, 3630.

¹²⁶ Hobson pointed out in 1902 that if Australasia could obtain from Britain adequate naval power to enforce its own Monroe Doctrine without paying for it, (as British South Africa had obtained land forces) 'it will not be likely to enter closer formal bonds...' Hobson, 368. See also Rudolf Asmis, *Das Ende eines Paradieses. Wandel und Werden in der Südsee* (Berlin, 1942), Chap.VII 'Australischer Imperialismus und australische Monroedoktrin', 114f.

¹²⁷ Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 5 October 1909, op.cit.

¹²⁸ Lüttwitz, 330.

Mediterranean, whose east and west exits are in British hands, so that the Pacific Fleet is ready to appear in the western Pacific, the south Atlantic, and even in the Mediterranean when the political situation permits'.¹²⁹

What was the German view of the strategic value of the Dominion fleets? While in Irmer's analysis the concern was primarily local, for German Pacific possessions, the implications lay in another direction. Even when placed under the control of the Admiralty in wartime, local forces could not provide the same service –or pose the same threat- as a unified Imperial fleet. With their small fleet units, the Dominions could not withstand serious attack from a naval power, and their defence would fall, as before, to the Royal Navy, with a proportionate weakening of its strength in European waters.¹³⁰ Similar sentiments were expressed in 1912 by Müller, and it was in Germany's interests that the Admiralty did not succeed in its desire to limit the independent Dominion fleet units.¹³¹ However, this was a double-edged sword. In a section on the Dominion fleets and their implications for Germany, Rehder saw an immediate problem for the Cruiser Squadron. If their planned formation into flying squadrons came about, 'then this changes the situation for our cruiser warfare considerably'. Germany then would have to concentrate on the protection of its own and the destruction of British trade with similar formations. Similarly, in his 1912 Report on Admiral Henderson's plan to bolster Australian naval forces, Oberleutnant z. See Fabricius stated that 'In my opinion, in wartime the Second Destroyer Flotilla based at Port Western could be detached for service with the main fleet...'¹³² This would have serious repercussions for the operational plans of the Cruiser Squadron.

The extension of the Dominion fleets already had a certain political implication for Germany, which would increase to the degree that the Dominions contributed to the armaments of the Empire, and to the degree of influence they exercised on its foreign policy. Rehder and others had no doubt, however, that despite latent discontent in some Dominions, they would not remain neutral in an Anglo-German war, and this had to be a crucial consideration in operational planning. While a benevolent neutrality could not be counted upon, every indirect support Germany obtained from a British colony, such as supplies, 'would be a heavy blow to the Motherland, which must shake the fabric of the Great British commonwealth of states to its foundations'.¹³³

While the more superficial observations on the 'nuts and bolts' of Australasian defence capability made by Germans were largely correct, the underlying assumptions of the fragility of Imperial unity and that Dominion concerns would be placed before Imperial ones were incorrect. In September 1914, the Australian correspondent of the *National Review* could write that the unanimity of the Dominions in regard to the moral necessity of the War was a factor which would greatly disturb the calculations of the makers of German policy, as 'The world-politicians of Germany have always held that the Dominions would not support Great Britain in a war the theatre of which was in the Old World...'¹³⁴ The consequences of this had catastrophic results for Germany in the Pacific in August 1914.

Interest in these questions continued into the War years. The Australasian contribution to the First World War was seen as marking a turning point in both national consciousness and Imperial relations. A lengthy article in the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1917, while still overestimating the forces for Imperial destabilisation, showed a realistic understanding of the Dominions' standing and aspirations. Their

¹²⁹ 'Die geplante Landesverteidigung...' op.cit.

¹³⁰ RM5/v 1160, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 9 November 1913.

¹³¹ RM5/v 1160, Müller-RMA, 11 January 1912.

¹³² RM5/v 5705, 'Winterarbeit...' op.cit., .Bl. 94

¹³³ Rehder, 'Die Entwicklung op.cit. Planning required fast postal steamers to bring supplies and coal from Dominion ports before the outbreak of war. See P. Overlack, 'Australian Defence Awareness and German Naval Planning in the Pacific 1900-1914', *War & Society*, Vol.10, No.1 (May 1992).

¹³⁴ *National Review*, September 1914, 147.

militarisation had made 'amazing progress', providing Britain with an effective colonial army of which it was making good use. However, it remained to be seen whether after the War it would be happy with the results of this militarisation in view of the rewards which would be asked for participation. Australia and New Zealand had clear designs on the German Pacific colonies,

We have today the remarkable fact that overnight the colonies have become military powers...The fact that today the Australian and Canadian contingents, which are not to be lightly dismissed, are fighting in the European War, makes this path significantly shorter.¹³⁵

This view marked a radical change from most of the assessments of Australasian defence capability that had gone before.

Parts of this essay appeared as:



German Interest in Australian Defence, 1901-1914: New Insights into a Precarious Position on the Eve of War

Peter Overlack

Historians of Australian defence concerns prior to the Great War have been hampered in coming to a realistic assessment of the Imperial German naval threat because of their inability to investigate the German naval records. A consequence of this has been that the presence of the German East Asian Cruiser Squadron based at Tsingtau in northern China, has never been fully taken into account. Knowledge of the war plans of this naval force throws not only considerable light on Germany's intentions as an imperial power generally, but also on their assessment of the resource-rich Australasian Dominions in particular. The fate of these would undoubtedly have been negotiable had imperial German ambitions as expressed in their overall military and naval planning been realised. That is to say, a military and naval defeat of British Empire forces would have exposed the then defenceless Dominions of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa to the possibility of political and commercial pressure from a victorious Germany which they would not have been able to withstand.

A consultation of the German naval records for the Pacific region reveals the extent of the threat posed to Australia and New Zealand by the East Asia Squadron. This is highlighted by the cruiser warfare plans of that naval force which were continually updated from 1902. Documents in the *Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv* in Freiburg show that Germany was preparing to implement cruiser warfare against Australasian shipping in the event of a war with Britain, with the aim of cutting supplies of raw materials and food, thereby weakening Britain's capacity to wage war. Details and emphases varied from time to time, but the main aim remained constant.¹ The information required for this planning was obtained both from open observation by imperial German consulate personnel, and through the naval intelligence gathering network coordinated from the Consulate-General in Sydney.

Australians were not unaware of a danger from Germany. Indeed, press and politicians had warned about German expansion in the Pacific since the first encounter between Queensland and Germany over New Guinea in 1884. By 1914, the semicircle of German Protectorates encompassing New Guinea, the Melanesian archipelago, the Micronesian islands and the Samoan group was seen as an impediment to British trade and communication with Asia and North America, and as providing bases for attack on Australasian coastal trade. Debates in Federal Parliament also pointed out the potential threat of German influence in, and assumed designs on, the Dutch Indies.

This article proceeds by first outlining the organisation of the German intelligence network in Australia; secondly, it analyses the observations made by consular staff and by

Volume 40, Issue 1, April 1994, Pages 36-51.

¹³⁵

PA-AA, R6215, *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 October 1917.