

German Assessments of British-Australian Relations, 1901-1914

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“The Federal Government does not have the most basic grasp of military matters”.

Consul-General Dr Georg Irmer, November 1909

An examination of how Australia’s closest colonial neighbour in 1901 viewed the event of Federation and its implications for British Imperial unity and regional defence contributes much to the continuing debate over the development of an Australian national identity. Germany in its Pacific colonies had a direct strategic and financial interest in how the new entity would present and project itself in the region. Long before Australian troops faced Germany in 1914 Australia had become an object of considerable interest in the age of imperial rivalries.

While the more superficial assessment of Australia’s defence capability made by Germans was largely correct, the underlying assumptions of the fragility of Imperial unity and that in wartime Dominion concerns would be placed before Imperial ones were incorrect. While the enthusiastic reception Australian Federation received in German eyes was based on a tangible reality in the new Commonwealth, the political and military implications drawn from it clearly were not, and the consequences of this had catastrophic results for Germany in the Pacific in August 1914.

Irmline Veit-Brause noted that as early as 1879 the establishment of a Consulate-General demonstrated “a fundamental change in the assessment of Australia’s importance in the Pacific region”. There was a complex nexus between the commercial and political strands of German-Australian relations. By the next decade, Prusso-German views of Australia in an international context had changed from being a mere appendage of Britain, to one of providing a springboard into the Pacific.¹ In the decades before 1914 the focus of German attention shifted from fascination with exotic flora and fauna to the emerging characteristics of a new social and political

¹ Irmline Veit-Brause, “Australia as an ‘Object’ in Nineteenth Century World Affairs — the Example of German Consular Representation in the Australian Colonies”, *Australian Journal of Politics & History (AJPH)*, Vol. 34, 3 (1988), pp. 142, 153.

entity, which it was predicted would exert considerable regional influence. The growing trading partnership between Australia and Germany presented an increasing challenge to Britain's regional predominance, and the Teutonic commercial drive "was only part of a larger strategy for Germany's quest for 'world power' [...]"² That this is denied by some Australian historians despite the overwhelming archival evidence highlights the importance of the ongoing debate.³

Expectations of Australia acting independently of Britain existed quite early and were based on the experience of American expansion into the Asia-Pacific region, which Germany was encountering in a number of places. The Americans "sought to make the Pacific their own lake by means of the Monroe Doctrine", wanting not only Hawaii, but also Samoa and Tonga as stations on a route through a future Panama Canal to Australia. "There are, indeed, Americans who dream of a future republican union and federation of the various Australasian Colonies with the United States", observed Herbert von Bismarck.⁴

German interest in Australia finds its significance in the problems of Imperial defence, which were not solved simply and which were implicit in the geographical position of Britain and its Empire.⁵ 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.⁶ German observers were always seeking trends which would indicate a divergence of policy from that of Britain, if not an actual political break, and at this time there were several issues of disagreement between

² Irmline Veit Brause, "German-Australian Relations at the Time of the Centennial International Exhibition, Melbourne, 1888", *AJPH*, Vol.32, 2 (1986), pp. 210, 212.

³ See Gerhard Fischer, "'Negative integration' and an Australian road to modernity: interpreting the Australian homefront experience in World War 1", *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 26, 104 (April 1995), pp. 452-476. More realistic are the essays in John Moses and Christopher Pugsley, eds, *The German Empire and Britain's Pacific Dominions 1871-Essays on the Role of Australia and New Zealand in World Politics in the Age of Imperialism* (Claremont, 2000).

⁴ J. Lepsius, et.al., *Die Große Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914: Sammlung der diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes* (Berlin, 1922-7), Bd. IV, Nr. 818, Herbert von Bismarck to Salisbury, 24 August 1887.

⁵ For an examination of "Imperial defence" and Colonial/Dominion interpretations of it see Richard A. Preston, *Canada and "Imperial Defense": A study of the origins of the British Commonwealth's defense organisation, 1867-1919* (Durham, N.C., 1967), pp. xiii-xxi.

⁶ This was a long-term consideration. See Reinhard Meyers, "Die Dominions und die britische Europapolitik der dreißiger Jahre", in J. Hütter, R. Meyers, D. Papenfuss, eds, *Tradition und Neubeginn. Internationale Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Köln, 1975), p. 177f.

London and the Dominions.⁷ As one German historian has noted, foreigners often had difficulty understanding the imponderables of the peaceful continuance of the British Empire, and all too often its break-up was predicted.⁸ This was especially so in the years before the War when German planners were eagerly seeking cracks in Imperial unity which they could widen to their advantage.

Federation and Imperial Defence Policy

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.⁹ At the core of "Imperialistic thought" was certainly the desire to give an organic structure to relations between colonies and motherland.¹⁰ 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". In addition the natural opposition of interests between motherland and colonies, with each part jealously striving to maintain its independence, would limit discussion and implementation. Nevertheless Germany's world-political interests required consideration be given to developments.¹¹

The Kaiser himself was concerned to use the occasion of Australian federation to parade Germany's naval presence and through this, political

⁷ A comprehensive treatment of later aspects of the topic is in N. Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901-1914* (Sydney, 1976), Chap.8, "The Breakdown in Imperial Co-operation, 1911-13", and Chap. 9, "Anglo-Australian Conflict over Pacific Naval Defence, 1913-14".

⁸ Rudolf von Albertini, "England als Weltmacht und der Strukturwandel des Commonwealth", *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd.208 (1969), p. 80.

⁹ The significance of federation and role of the Commonwealth is treated in Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg (BAMA), 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.

¹⁰ 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. E. Francke, "Weltpolitik und Seemacht", *Nauticus. Jahrbuch für Deutschlands Seeinteressen 1903* (Berlin, 1903), p. 143.

¹¹ Politisches Archiv-Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin. (PA-AA), R 6118, Metternich-Hohenlohe, 6 April 1900.

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 the light cruiser *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.¹² The Kaiser reached a speedy decision and by April the Chief of Admiralty Staff could advise the Foreign Office that the Kaiser had commanded *Hansa* with the second admiral of the Cruiser Squadron, Rear-Admiral Kirchoff, to be present. In addition, *Cormoran*, already in Sydney undergoing repairs, would attend in Melbourne and then proceed to Adelaide for one month.¹³

Throughout his time in London, Metternich made perceptive observations about empire-colonial relations. While Britain felt reassured by the support its colonies had provided for the Boer War, this was not necessarily a sign of closer connections. This support had strengthened the view that Britain should do more to implement an encompassing Imperial defence system. 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 Kimberley, 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*, and his words found more acclamation among the Britons present than the Australians. "Imperialist voices are being heard less frequently from the colonies, and many a reminder of the expected reciprocity is becoming vocal". Metternich drew a clear link from trade-political to Imperial defence issues:

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 [...] Overall, the present situation of the Imperial idea is one of lively flux, and is creating ever wider circles [...] Clearly in the foreseeable future the Empire will

¹² PA-AA, R19,276, Chief of Admiralty Staff-Foreign Secretary, 19 March 1901.

¹³ PA-AA, R19,276, Chief of Admiralty Staff-Foreign Secretary, 1 April 1901; Report on the visit of the *Cormoran* to Melbourne and Adelaide, PA-AA 19,277, Commander *Cormoran*-Chief of Admiralty Staff, 8 June 1901.

become a world trade trust underpinned with mutual military insurance [...].¹⁴

Metternich saw the only really binding factor as the colonial need for naval protection, and if in the future this factor ceased, such as when the colonies catered for their own naval and land defence, “then they would separate from the motherland politically as they no longer need her”. The coming together of the Australian Colonies “provided no step toward Imperial unity but is only a stage on the way to independence [...]”.¹⁵

The less one considered the positive results, the more prominent became the negatives: previous Colonial Conferences lacked positive results, and most importantly, the idea of an inter-Colonial naval and military association (*Kriegsverein*) appeared to have been abandoned. The colonies were reluctant to specify details of wartime assistance and to make this binding, which was what the Admiralty and War Office were seeking.

With Australia and Canada leading, the Colonies emphasised the voluntary nature of their troop contributions [...] [which] cannot be seen as exactly reassuring for the Motherland [...] Clearly there are some not uninteresting observations about the psychology of the colonies, which offer indicators for the development of the Imperial concept [...] the tendency is more for the colonies to make capital from the Motherland’s need for their troops, than to offer them out of purely Imperial enthusiasm.

On the whole, it appeared that 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 although the British would not see it this way, any attempt to weld together such heterogenous and geographically disparate elements must sooner or later burst apart from the friction and pressure such a tight association would cause.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

¹⁴ PA-AA, R6118, Metternich-Hohenlohe, 6 April 1900. On Imperial federation see *Morning Post*, “The New Commonwealth”, 17 April 1901, clipping encl. Bundesarchiv (BA) Berlin, 10.01/8940.

¹⁵ BA Koblenz, Nachlaß Bülow, Nr.23, Bl. 98, Metternich-Bülow, 24 June 1900.

¹⁶ PA-AA, R 6119, Metternich-Bülow, 24 August 1902.

¹⁷ “Welt Politik: Germany and Great Britain”, *National Review* (October 1913), p. 295.

The German Rationale

Germany's main European concern was to prevent a strengthening of British naval forces in home waters. Related to this was the necessity to know the level of naval and military support the Dominions could offer. Apart from the specific reports of the German Naval Intelligence Service (*Marine-Nachrichtenwesen*) operatives in Australia, most of the information passing through the Sydney Consulate-General was of a general nature.¹⁸ However, when put together over a period of time it provided a clear enough picture of Australia's defence capability. With the dual concerns of British concentration in the North Sea and effective implementation of cruiser warfare plans against Anglo-Australasian commerce and communications in the Asian-Pacific region, there were numerous reports on the progress towards an Australian Fleet and the internal political debate which could affect 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 Foreign Minister Oswald von Richthofen.¹⁹

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 1901.²⁰ Some of the implications for German naval planning were considered relevant enough for the Report to receive the Kaiser's attention.²¹ The Germans saw a major weakness in the assumption 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 British overconfidence and short-sighted view which caused alarm and anger in Australia.

¹⁸ On German intelligence gathering see P. Overlack, "German Interest in Australian Defence, 1901-1914: New Insights into a Precarious Position on the Eve of War", *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, Vol.40, 1 (1993), pp. 36-51.

¹⁹ BAMA, 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)".

²⁰ BAMA, RM 5/v 5970, Bl. 177, "Zum Immediatvortrag", 19 October 1901. Another early detailed study is Wieting, "Organisation des Commonwealth of Australia". On the CID see J. P. Mackintosh, "The Role of the Committee of Imperial Defence before 1914", *English Historical Review*, Vol. 77 (1962), pp. 490-503; N.H. Gibbs, *The Origins of Imperial Defence* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 9-10; Meaney, *The Search for Security*, p. 138f.

²¹ 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.

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.²² Even Ambassador Hermann Graf Schenck von Sternburg in Washington indicated the appeal of the Monroe Doctrine in the antipodes and its world-political implications. The American example was being followed by the British Pacific Dominions in their desire to repel all foreign incursions, to annex unclaimed territory, and even to call into question the legitimacy of the German presence in New Guinea.²³ Later, an alliance with the United States was part of Prime Minister Alfred Deakin's motivation in inviting the "Great White Fleet" to Australia in 1908. He suggested an extension of the Monroe Doctrine to all the countries around the Pacific rim supported by the guarantees of Britain, Holland, France, and the United States. This ambitious proposal was directed against a possible alliance between Germany and Japan. However the plan was soon scuttled by the Colonial and Foreign Offices in London.²⁴

Consul-General Georg Irmer saw the moves for the creation of an Australian fleet as part of the Commonwealth's desire for independent control of Pacific policy. A major factor in this was a fear of Japan's long-term ambitions:

Nothing would be more certain to loosen the link between Australia and England than the British Government's Japanese policy. If in London one believes that the Australians would ever sacrifice the flooding of "white Australia" with Japanese immigration on the altar of the bonds with England, it is a disastrous misconception. Australia [...] in such a conflict would undoubtedly separate from the Motherland.²⁵

While Irmer overestimated the political realities of a political break with Britain and read more into events than existed, other writers such as the peripatetic journalist and adventurer Alfred Manes probably were influenced by the republican sentiments of the workers they "knocked around" with during their travels here, and for them loyalty to Britain was a proclivity of the well-off. In an article in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Manes saw a direct correlation between the growth of Australia's wealth and the desire for independence leading to "a complete political separation" from Britain. An independent Australia "is much nearer than one would gather from the highly one-sided press". He regarded such things as the

²² See Peter Overlack, "Bless the Queen and curse the Colonial Office: Australasian reaction to German consolidation in the Pacific 1871-1899", *Journal of Pacific History*, Vol.33, 2 (September 1998), pp.133-152.

²³ PA-AA, R17, 325, Sternburg-Bülow, 2 July 1901, enclosing and commenting on "The New Monroe Doctrine", *Times of India*, 26 June 1901.

²⁴ Norman Harper, *A Great and Powerful Friend. A Study of Australian-American Relations between 1900 and 1975* (St Lucia/London/New York, 1987), p. 20.

²⁵ BA Berlin 10.01/8937, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 5 October 1909.

participation in the Boer War and the later *Dreadnought*-gift movement as a diplomatic move by politicians, dismissed by the younger generation unwilling to make sacrifices for the idea of British Imperialism.²⁶ The tensions inherent in the relationship appeared inexorable: Australia was highly protectionist, Britain free-trade. Socio-politically, Australia had nothing to learn from a Motherland where aristocracy and plutocracy contrasted with the democracy which permeated all aspects of Australian life. Australians and Britons “will continue to grow apart in their sensibilities and ideals. The fear of conquest by a foreign people will not, in the long run, serve to bridge this chasm.”²⁷ This aspect at least was confirmed in Irmer’s mind given the apparent British lack of comprehension of Australia’s concerns about the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. It came as not unexpected to Irmer when Joseph Cook spoke of the world views, “which in the areas of foreign and economic policy between Australia and the British Motherland, are moving towards an almost unbridgeable gap”.²⁸ However, fostered by a misunderstanding in German political circles of the practical implications of and differences between the concepts of self-government and independence, the Commonwealth’s striving for local defence responsibility, trade frictions, and resistance to aspects of Imperial federation were sometimes interpreted as more severe a split with London than was real.²⁹

A report from the Naval Attaché in London, Carl Coerper, to Tirpitz in September 1908 throws light on the German view of Alfred Deakin’s persistent and eventually successful campaigning for an independent Australian naval fleet unit. Deakin had taken the first step shortly after becoming Prime Minister in 1905, but the CID condemned this local defence fleet as going against every principle of sound Imperial strategy. Most noteworthy was the fact that the proposed force would be under Commonwealth control in time of war, even when a British commander was 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

²⁶ *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 28 August 1909. There is an informative account of Australian troops for the Boer War — “private persons who amuse themselves playing soldiers” — in Karl Schmidt, “Erinnerungen eines australischen Freiwilligen”, *Die Woche*, 10 February 1900, pp. 258-9.

²⁷ A. Manes, “Australasische Probleme”, *Internationale Wochenschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik* (23 October 1909), pp. 1523-6.

²⁸ BA Berlin 10.01/8937, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 5 October 1909.

²⁹ As in Paul Voigt’s Australian “sonderbündlerische Tendenzen” in “Deutschland und der Weltmarkt”, *Preußische Jahrbücher*, Bd.91, Heft 2 (1898), p. 278.

Commonwealth, which might be the first step synonymous with a break of this rising colony in questions of self defence.³⁰

By 1909 Dominion participation in Imperial defence was seen as a political rather than a strategic problem.³¹ 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 Asian-Pacific region lay in the savings for Britain which could be redirected to its European concerns.³² 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.³³

One of the more perceptive analyses of events 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. Irmer considered it a comprehensive and farsighted plan which Britain was following in granting the Dominions wide-ranging independence, with the aim of strengthening Imperial defence. However many years would pass before all difficulties had been overcome and colonial forces would be able to significantly lighten Britain's defence burden, particularly in remoter areas of the Empire.³⁴

1909-10 and Defence Issues

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

³⁰ BAMA, RM5/v 5704, Coerper-Tirpitz, 25 September 1908. "One navy, one control" was considered essential for continuing command of the seas. See D.C. Gordon, "The Admiralty and Dominion Navies 1902-14", *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 4 (December 1961), p. 411. Finally accepted, the Fleet Unit consisted of four ocean going destroyers; sixteen *River*-class coastal destroyers; four submarines; four *Pandora*-class cruisers for training purposes, on loan from Britain; improvements to coastal fortifications and docks.

³¹ *The Times*, 8, 12 December 1909.

³² PA-AA, R 19,288, Metternich-Bethmann Hollweg, 25 September 1909.

³³ Prof. Schliemann quoted in P.A. Hislam, *The Admiralty and the Atlantic* (London, 1908), p. 178.

³⁴ Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 5 October 1909, op.cit.

Germany than Japan.³⁵ 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”.³⁶ There was indeed considerable concern that these two powers could well join up after the expiry of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The head of the Navy, W.R. Creswell³⁷ stated that “a German-Japanese alliance would be our death knell”.³⁸ With Japan’s then rate of naval expansion, it and Germany would have an overwhelming preponderance over Britain in capital ships when the Alliance expired.³⁹ This confirmed Creswell’s view of world trends as they affected the security of Australia and the Empire. Within a short time the *Sydney Morning Herald* predicted the formation of a German-Japanese alliance.⁴⁰

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”.⁴¹ Metternich reported to Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow about the moves by New South Wales and Victoria to offer a *Dreadnought*-class battleship to Britain.⁴² And Irmer observed that while there was a strong feeling for the presentation of battleships the government was by no means united as to what action should be taken.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ In April Irmer advised Bülow that more opportunity needed to be taken to sway the views of the rare Australian personalities visiting

³⁵ BAMA, RM5/v 5706, Bl. 256, Irmer-Bülow, 22 October 1908.

³⁶ PA-AA, R 19287, Irmer-Bülow, 11 May 1909.

³⁷ 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 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)” (PhD Thesis, Monash University, 1976).

³⁸ Creswell-Jebb, 24 March 1908, Jebb Papers, 813/1/42, cited in Meaney, *The Search for Security*, p. 157.

³⁹ Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1908, “The Defence of Australia by Colonel H. Foster, Director of Military Studies, Sydney University, Together with Remarks Thereupon by Capt. W. R. Creswell”, II, p. 363.

⁴⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial of 11 August 1910 (“Australia and Japan”).

⁴¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 March 1909, under a banner “Naval Supremacy in grave peril”. British Opposition leader Arthur Balfour quoted Tirpitz’ statement that “We can build as fast as the English.”

⁴² PA-AA, R19,287, Metternich-Bülow, 2 April 1909.

⁴³ PA-AA, R 19,287, Irmer-Bülow, 29 March 1909.

⁴⁴ On the “Dreadnought-scare” see A. J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow. The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904-1919* (London, 1961), Vol. I, p. 151f.; Meaney, *The Search for Security*, pp. 175-181.

Germany “[...] as they are an important means of negating the all too frequent prejudices current here about developments in Germany”.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶

Nevertheless the Commonwealth Government was cool on the idea of sending ships, and it regarded the current agitation as unjustified by any urgent grounds. For this Fisher was dubbed “the most popular Australian in Germany”. The Commonwealth had stood fast in its rejection of sending battleships to Britain 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.⁴⁷ 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.”⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

Copies of Australian defence arrangements continued to be forwarded to various ministries in Berlin. Münzenthaler in Sydney commented that some “anxious spirits” believed that Germany was waiting for the right moment to fall upon Australia, and British interests were concerned about the safety of trade routes, for whose protection Australia definitely had to maintain a strong naval capability. 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 due to the lack of personnel, for in Australia, even less than in Britain, was there any enthusiasm for the introduction of universal military service. The

⁴⁵ PA-AA, R19,287, Irmer-Bülow, 16 April 1909.

⁴⁶ PA-AA, R19,287, “Die englische Flottenvorlage und ihre Wirkung auf die australische Stimmung gegen Deutschland”, 29 April 1909.

⁴⁷ PA-AA, R19, 287, Irmer-Bülow, 26 March 1909.

⁴⁸ 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.

⁴⁹ PA-AA, R 19,928, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 18 August 1909; also PA-AA, R 19,287, Irmer-Bülow, 13 April 1909.

population “has shown no great enthusiasm for service in the future Australian Army” and the introduction of military service was described almost as a standing joke.⁵⁰

Kapitänleutnant Paul Wülfing’s “The Planned Defence of the Australian Commonwealth and its Participation in the National Defence of Great Britain” 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. 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 British fleet. 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, and British officers frequently expressed the opinion that they were less than thrilled at the prospect of training and commanding Australian crews.⁵¹

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”.⁵² 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 defence 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.⁵³

⁵⁰ PA-AA, R19,928, 13 November 1909; 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.

⁵¹ BAMA, RM5/v 5707 “Die geplante Landesverteidigung der australischen Commonwealth und ihre Beteiligung an der nationalen Verteidigung Grossbritanniens.” Admiralstabsaufgabe Nr. 10, 1909.

⁵² BAMA, RM5/v 5707, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 1 November 1909.

⁵³ *Ibid.*; see also *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XLIX, 2 July 1909, p. 766.

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.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵

The 1910 Defence Act 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 1911.⁵⁶ Extensive comments on defence details and Kitchener’s report were also in the report of the Senior Officer, Australian Station (Kranzbühler) the previous year.⁵⁷ 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. Irmer deemed the Defence Act “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 [...].⁵⁸

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. If the assessments of Australian politicians as to the effectiveness of Australian forces did not

⁵⁴ 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.

⁵⁵ Cablegram 9 July 1909, in G. Greenwood and C. Grimshaw, eds, *Documents on Australian International Affairs 1901-1918* (Melbourne, 1977), p. 246. Meaney, *The Search for Security* (p. 187) points out that Deakin had already committed himself to a defence policy which ignored the CID’s advice.

⁵⁶ BAMA, RM 5/v 5707, Münzenthaler-Bethman Hollweg, 5 January 1911. See also *Koloniale Rundschau*, 1910, “Australische Probleme”, pp. 491-3.

⁵⁷ BAMA, RM5/v 5707, Bl. 175, 3 July 1910.

⁵⁸ BA Berlin 10.01/8937, Irmer-Bethmann Hollweg, 5 October 1909.

appear overstated to them, to the Germans the opposite was so. There was not much antipodean perspective in such matters.⁵⁹

Ongoing concerns were raised in Australia and New Zealand about their defence. Metternich's assessment of the 1911 Imperial Conference was that it was regarded as a "miserable failure" by those striving for closer federation.

Seen from a political standpoint, the positive results are few. A reticent attempt to establish a permanent representative body for the Dominions in London found no acceptance and was quickly dropped. The Dominions have left no doubt that as far as possible they intend to defend their independence of action and have no inclination to support attempts at closer federation of the British Empire [...] 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. As far as the Empire is concerned, this is the most important problem of foreign policy [...] Australia and New Zealand regard the Yellow Peril as very close and very threatening.⁶⁰

Reporting on the reception of the Conference in Australia, Acting Consul-General 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". The negative mood was reflected in the leading articles of the press, and indeed the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* went so far as to describe the affair as "the most destructive piece of alleged constructive statesmanship ever formulated".⁶¹

Local Defence versus Imperial Concerns

The conflicting 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. 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

⁵⁹ See PA-AA, R 19 270, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 16 November 1912, commenting on *The Bulletin*, "Armageddon", 14 November 1912, p. 8.

⁶⁰ BA Berlin, 09.01/5372, Metternich-Bethmann Hollweg, 29 June 1911.

⁶¹ 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. BA Berlin, 09.01/5372, Bl. 88, Bünz-Bethmann Hollweg, 21 November 1911.

Australian armoured cruisers had “no great battle value” and thus would not considerably increase the operational effectiveness of the Home Fleet (which was contrary to Prime Minister Andrew Fisher’s view), 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. However,

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”.⁶²

Defence Minister Pearce had declared that as to the establishment of a fleet in the Pacific, the 1912 Canadian fleet proposal would be hailed with delight.⁶³ New Zealand’s Prime Minister Massey also expressed support. Kiliani observed perceptively that perhaps at the back of their minds were the writings of such authors as General von Bernhardt, “who through their projected prophecies of the secession of the colonies were only welding the Empire more solidly together”.⁶⁴ In 1913 Naval Attaché Erich Müller succinctly reported to Tirpitz that nothing had come of the “deep moral impression which it had been sought to make [...] and to convince Germany

⁶² BAMA, 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.

⁶³ BAMA, RM5/v 5704, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 27 November 1912. On 5 December Prime Minister Borden stated that “nothing less than the absolute security of the trade routes would be sufficient” and introduced a bill authorising the Government to provide for the construction of three battleships for Imperial naval use. See *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7, 9, 10 December 1912.

⁶⁴ BAMA, RM5/v 5705, Bl. 142, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 10 December 1912.

of the pointlessness of its naval program”, and that while Australia had decided to effectively contribute to the defence of British naval interests, this was “only in so far as these were also *Australian interests*”.⁶⁵

Kiliani, reporting on the Australian press discussion of the proposed joint-Dominion Pacific fleet, noted that the current period for the British Empire was portrayed as a very critical one in which the existence of a common danger required common action and sacrifices. The Admiralty was changing its position from that of 1909 due to the passage of the 1912 German Navy Law, and Churchill’s appointment as First Lord of the Admiralty. The participation of all Dominions in decision making would open up the difficult question of a closer Imperial union in general, the control of naval defence, and in particular London’s control of foreign policy.⁶⁶ These factors would serve to complicate and perhaps weaken the effectiveness of the British defence response.

The commander of *Cormoran* 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. Jealousy, particularly between Australia and New Zealand, and the striving for independent decision making would certainly not permit this union for the present.⁶⁷ At this time the German press also saw a distinct failure on the part of London to enthuse the Dominions for its Imperial policy, particularly Churchill’s artificial attempts to introduce fear of the German fleet in 1911-1912.⁶⁸ There was a strong view in the Dominions that the fleet concentration in British home waters directed solely at Germany was providing scant protection for them. This was riveted home by Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey’s statement that the security of British interests in the Far East had to rest with the Japanese Alliance, as they were subsidiary to European ones.⁶⁹

Kiliani regarded as particularly significant a statement reported in *The Age* by the newly-appointed commander of the Fleet Unit, Admiral Sir George Patey, which marked a turning point, an acceptance under the pressure of events by Britain of the Australian Imperial defence concept.

⁶⁵ BAMA, RM5/v 1173, Bl. 190, Müller-Tirpitz, 20 June 1913. Müller certainly was competent militarily, but he ignored Ambassador Lichnowsky’s instructions about reporting on political matters, considered damaging because he was as anti-British as his predecessor Widenmann.

⁶⁶ PA-AA, R 6124, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 6 November 1912, with a copy to the Embassy in London.

⁶⁷ BAMA, RM5/v 5708, Commander *Cormoran*-Kaiser, 12 August 1913.

⁶⁸ See *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.

⁶⁹ Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. XL, 10 July 1912, col. 1991-2.

Patey, then underway from Britain with *Australia* and *Sydney*, reportedly had stated when in Cape Town that it was the “undoubted right of the Dominions to decide in which manner they wished to contribute to the strengthening of Imperial defence”. Such a statement was a victory for the Australian concept of Imperial defence and would have shaken London to its foundations a few years before. As a direct result of British naval concentration in home waters, now even the conservative camp was forced to accept the necessity of local defence in the face of existing conditions.

My impressions are, from contact with all social circles and conversation with leading personalities in both political parties, that the article indeed reflects the dominant public opinion in a particularly precise way. This is so strong that no government could risk opposing it.

Pro-Dominion public statements by British personalities — such as the new Admiral in support of Australia’s position — could be seen as diplomatic icing born of necessity.⁷⁰ The reality was quite different. Even the euphoric mood of the official reception 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”.⁷¹

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. This situation was being aggravated by Churchill’s and Fisher’s policy of concentrating naval forces staring into the Elbe estuary. The Royal Navy was large enough to be present in sufficient strength in all parts of the world, but the completely unnecessary war concentration in the North Sea was forcing the Admiralty to denude all other seas of ships and to leave the distant daughter states to their own devices. Thus they were loosening the bands between motherland and colonies and weakening the Imperial concept. Kühlmann in London commented cynically that all things pointed to Churchill doing the rounds of the Dominions “rattling the collection plate for the Navy with great energy. Whether he succeeds at a new Imperial Conference [...] overcoming the tight-fistedness and parochial patriotism of the overseas possessions, appears questionable.”⁷²

Perhaps the most clear understanding and important assessment of the defence relationship between Britain and the Dominions was a report

⁷⁰ PA-AA, R 19,268, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 2 September 1913.

⁷¹ BAMA, RM5/v 5705, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 20 October 1913.

⁷² PA-AA, R 6124, Kühlmann-Bethmann Hollweg, 22 October 1913.

composed by Naval Attaché Erich Müller for Tirpitz in November 1913.⁷³ Central to this was the idea of the “whole-world needs” of the Royal Navy, as expressed in an influential article by respected naval commentator Archibald Hurd in the *Quarterly Review*.⁷⁴ This was a journal whose contributors the Germans took seriously, and the *Hamburger Nachrichten* in its consideration of the article found the key to the change of mood of the Pacific Dominions. Hurd maintained that 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 role demanded, could only be met with the assistance of the Dominions. It was an unlucky coincidence that this threatening naval situation was occurring at a time when “a unified naval policy was sadly lacking [...] The constitutional-theoretical problem underlying the military question, namely the participation of the Dominions in the political leadership of Imperial matters, has not been grasped and today still requires a solution.” 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. Britain was becoming less inclined to carry the burden of a Home Fleet alone, and was looking to the Dominions. The phrase “whole-world needs” had been invented in order to make this Dominion support more palatable. However, the proposal to base an Imperial “flying squadron” at Gibraltar left only a sour taste in the Pacific.⁷⁵

Müller 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 [...]”⁷⁶ 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 [...]”. The broken 1909 Admiralty promise to station two groups of modern

⁷³ BAMA, RM5/v 1160, Müller-Tirpitz, 9 November 1913; also in PA-AA, R 6124.

⁷⁴ Archibald Hurd, “The Whole-World Needs of the Navy”, *Quarterly Review*, Vol. 219 (July-October 1913), pp. 493-508.

⁷⁵ 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 twenty-eight days from Sydney and twenty-three 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.

⁷⁶ BAMA, RM5/v 1160, Müller-Tirpitz, 9 November 1913.

ships in the Far East would have considerable ramifications.⁷⁷ 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”.⁷⁸

Kiliani noted in late 1913 that the main press concern for the coming Imperial Conference was, apart from defence questions, the role of Australia in the Pacific.⁷⁹ 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”. This reservation arising from Canada’s position⁸⁰ was the most interesting and important aspect of the agreement, since

In England one is apparently considerably disturbed at the consequence of this reservation, that in the future England cannot count in *every* war on the unconditional participation of the Dominions and their naval forces.

Still, there were some doubts on the German side as to the seriousness of possible Dominion neutrality — perhaps the idea was being used as a means to pressure Britain for a greater say in the determination of foreign policy.⁸¹

Müller, to a large extent seeing what he wanted to see, assessed British Imperial defence policy as wracked by internal problems despite outward signs of progress, and thus inevitably weakened. The existing unclarities in the relationship between Motherland and Dominions were the result of the collection of all Britain’s naval forces in home waters, which was incompatible with its world-wide interests. Whether the constitutional problems and the establishment of a unified organisation would be worked out remained to be seen.⁸² The main problem was maintaining a single mind between any super “Imperial Admiralty” and the British Admiralty. The imperative necessity for this was because in an Anglo-German war, “the

⁷⁷ Alfred von Tirpitz, *Politische Dokumente. Der Aufbau der deutschen Weltmacht* (Stuttgart/Berlin, 1924), p. 417.

⁷⁸ *Koloniale Rundschau*, Heft 11/12, 1914, p. 566.

⁷⁹ PA-AA, R 6124, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 1 October 1913.

⁸⁰ Canada rejected the idea of one Fleet Unit as it had two coasts to defend; it was politically impossible for any Government to accept a proposal in which only Pacific naval requirements were addressed. See Gordon, “The Admiralty and Dominion Navies”, p. 413.

⁸¹ BAMA, RM5/v 1160, “Zum Immediatvortrag. Die englischen Kolonialmarinen”, 23 October 1911.

⁸² BAMA, RM5/v 1160, Müller-Tirpitz, 9 November 1913.

main danger for Britain lies in the interdiction of its great maritime import routes”, and here Australian wool, wheat, meat, and minerals were crucial. It was only with Dominion assistance that British naval supremacy on other oceans could be maintained.⁸³

What was the German view of the strategic value of the Dominion fleets? With their small fleet units, the Dominions could not withstand serious attack from a non-European naval power, and their defence would fall, as before, to the Royal Navy, with a proportionate weakening of its strength in European waters.⁸⁴ Here Irmer was thinking primarily of Japan, which Germany was seriously attempting to woo from its British alliance. Similar sentiments were expressed in 1912 by Müller, and it was in Germany’s interests that the British Admiralty did not succeed in its desire to limit the independent Dominion fleet units.⁸⁵

The extension of the Dominion fleets already had a certain political implication for Germany, and this 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. It was difficult to assess any advantages which would accrue to Germany from a possible neutrality of one or more of the Dominions. Indeed, the implementation of cruiser attacks on commerce was seen to be simpler and more effective “if we can deal with all English colonies as enemies”. Nevertheless, 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”.⁸⁶

Flawed Conclusions

The assumption that defence and trade disagreements were creating an ever-increasing spiral of ill-will between the Dominions and Britain was one of the basic flaws of German assessments. Too much was too often read into too little. In February 1914 Kiliani reported on the first flying of the Australian flag in Germany from its Trade Delegation on the occasion of the Kaiser’s birthday. This had created a public mood of “Australian independence and self-sufficiency in high degree [...] leading to the further

⁸³ BAMA, RM5/v 1160, Rehder, “Die Entwicklung der englischen Colonialmarinen”.

⁸⁴ BAMA, RM5/v 1160, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 9 November 1913.

⁸⁵ BAMA, RM5/v 1160, Müller-Tirpitz, 11 January 1912.

⁸⁶ Rehder, “Die Entwicklung der englischen Colonialmarinen”. 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, 1 (May 1992).

step of independent Australian overseas representation”.⁸⁷ From the German perspective, political separation was seen as the only way in which Australia in particular could achieve its defence goals. Churchill’s notorious speech in March 1914 when presenting the Naval Bill was assumed to be a turning point in Imperial relations. Australia and New Zealand publicly rejected the protection of the Dominions by Japan and the possible deployment of local ships in the North Sea. The maintenance of the White Australia Policy was and would remain the cornerstone of every Australian policy — replacement of British forces by “the ships and sailors of the Mikado” would not be accepted, and this idea had almost led to a mutiny on the flagship *Australia*. Churchill’s departing from the terms of the 1909 Defence Agreement was seen as a deep betrayal. His suggestion that “in the event of a defeat of British forces the Dominions rely upon American protection against Asiatic threat is being enthusiastically adopted”.⁸⁸

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. While the enthusiastic reception Australian Federation received in German eyes was indeed based on a tangible reality in the new Commonwealth, the political and military implications drawn from it clearly were not, and the consequences of this had catastrophic results for Germany in the Pacific in August 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 [...]”.⁸⁹

The Australasian contribution to the First World War marked 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’ aspirations. Their militarisation “has made amazing progress, providing Britain with an effective colonial army of which it is 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,

⁸⁷ BA Berlin, 09.01, 5537, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 2 February 1914.

⁸⁸ PA-AA, R19,272, Kiliani-Bethmann Hollweg, 25 March 1914.

⁸⁹ *National Review* (September 1914), p. 147.

but it was unlikely that they would be inclined to be satisfied with this territorial expansion [...] We have today the remarkable fact that overnight the colonies have become military powers [...] It is often pointed out that at the end of the development process to statehood this is the final consequence that most seriously threatens British imperialism. The fact that today the Australian contingents, which are not to be lightly dismissed, are fighting in the European War, makes this path significantly shorter. England will quickly learn that the assistance it has called upon will one day very confidently show its own strength.

Time would tell which consequences an increased feeling of self-confidence arising from this newly created military power, combined with economic differences — in particular the question of free access to British markets which had caused friction between the Dominions and Britain for so long — would have in the twentieth century.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ PA-AA, R6215, *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 October 1917.