

3. World War One: Origins

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A. Origins of Australia's Involvement in WWI

(a) Background: - Japan's Forced Awakening by the West

Before describing what became an insanely dangerous pre-WWI scene in Europe, I should say something about national security concerns which existed in our new nation, the newly-Federated Australia at the beginning of the 20th century. As thoroughly documented in John Mordike's book, "*We Should do this Thing Quietly: Japan and the Great Deception in Australian Defence Policy 1911-1914*", while Australians did indeed have strong security concerns, these were focused not at all on Europe, but on Japan. (JM,12)

At that stage, fears of a militarily powerful Japan were of comparatively recent origin. You see until the middle of the 19th Century, as a small island state, Japan had sought to remain in complete isolation, secure both from its neighbours and the colonising Empires of the West, - the destructive effects of which it could see in China. However, in the 1850s, following persistent pressure from the United States via its Navy's Admiral Perry, Japan was forced to open its doors to foreign trade, first with the US itself (Treaty of Kangara, 1854) later with other Western powers. The various unequal commercial treaties which followed were to have profound effects, the US, for example, undertaking to supply ships, weapons and expert advisers. Although there ensued a strong anti-Western response, culminating in Japan's 1863 attacks on foreign vessels, these were subsequently repressed through combined American, British, French and Dutch military actions.(see Michael Edwardes- ME,143-7)

For many Japanese elites the lesson taken from these unequal contests was that under their new Meiji Emperor they must rapidly unify and, in the Western sense, modernise

both economically and militarily. For such a crash programme, Western expertise and finance were welcomed. As a result Japan's economy grew prodigiously fast, in the process importing food for its growing population, raw materials for its industries and, in line with the Western pattern of development, seeking foreign markets for its swiftly-expanding industrial output. Not surprising therefore that in the Age-of-Imperialism spirit of the day, Japan soon also sought to build an overseas Empire like those of the Western powers in N.E.Asia, - a region it regarded as *its* back yard.(ME,147-54; WC4iii, 514-6)

Although foreign finance (mostly British) controlled nearly all Japanese foreign trade until 1880, this was to change greatly over the following 20 years. Indeed, by the turn of the century not only did Japan control its own economy but it controlled, or made claim to control, those of foreign territories such as Sakhalin, the Kuriles, the Ryukus (includes Okinawa), Hokaido (home of the Ainu people) and Korea. And when in 1894 its by then fully 'Westernised' army confronted Chinese government forces in Korea, the ensuing war resulted in the sound defeat of China, it being forced to give up much territory, including the Liaotung peninsula, Formosa and the Pescadores. In the event this territorial take-over was challenged by Western powers, - Germany, France and Russia (supported by Britain) - on the grounds that Japan's acquisitions threatened China's integrity. However, since these same powers were soon to extend *further* their own control over various parts of China, (including deep inroads into Manchuria by Russia) Japan's cynical view of the West could only have been greatly accentuated. It was indeed learning fast! (see Churchill's comment, WC4iii, 515, - quoted at 'Japan Enters WWII', 9D(a) below)

Notwithstanding objections by many Western Powers, Japan's concern to have her claims in Korea internationally accepted led to the *Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Alliance of 1902*, Britain, for its part aiming to counter Russia's ambitions in the Far East. By this Treaty, Britain 'recognised' that Japan had "...in a peculiar degree, politically as well as commercially and industrially ... special interests in Korea". By 1904, the Russians, who had been flooding troops into their Far Eastern province, were close to completing a Trans-Siberian rail line to the Pacific at Vladivostok. On February 10, Japan declared war on Russia and in May its forces crossed Korea's Yalu river border into Manchuria. Other Japanese forces besieged the Manchurian ice-free port of Port Arthur which fell in January, 1905. Despite these 'successes' both sides were greatly weakened by the land battles, and Russia, beset by internal revolution, sought to break the stalemate by sending its Baltic fleet East to block the re-supply of Japan's forces. But when confronted in the Straits of Tsushima by the modern (built with British assistance) Japanese fleet, Russia's Baltic fleet was utterly destroyed. Japan thus attained victory, though one bought at enormous human and financial cost.(ME, 153-4)

Wishing to set limits on the fast-emerging economic and military strength of Japan, the US President, 'Teddy' Roosevelt, hosted the '*Treaty of Portsmouth*' settlement. While its terms recognised Japan's 'paramount interests' in Korea and its take-over of the Russian lease of the Liaotung Peninsula and South Sakhalin, the Treaty restored Chinese sovereignty to Manchuria. In contrast, Britain's response to Japan's 'victory' was to

negotiate the even stronger *Anglo-Japanese Treaty of 1905*, a military alliance to operate if the 'territorial rights' or 'special interests' of either were attacked by another power - not by *two or more*, as in the 1902 treaty. And for fear of Russian aims, it was extended to cover British India! Moreover, by explicitly accepting Japan's special interests in Korea, Britain encouraged Japan's subsequent annexation of that country in 1910.(ME, 154-5)

Independently Japan reached an agreement with France by which each other's 'situation and territorial rights' in the Chinese empire were mutually 'recognised' (Treaty of June, 1907). A month later a similar treaty with Russia contained secret clauses agreeing to partition Manchuria into Russian and Japanese 'spheres of influence'.

As Edwardes commented, these new treaties did not diminish the importance of the Anglo-Japanese alliance but, in fact, "*...made it even more purposeful, since Britain herself was moving towards a rapprochement with Russia in the hope of establishing a new grouping of European powers against Germany. In August 1907, an Anglo-Russian entente was concluded which settled the two powers' outstanding differences in Persia, Afghanistan, and Tibet. The alliances between France and Russia and Britain and Japan now became interlinked.*" (ME,156), Britain already having come to terms with France through its 'Entente Cordiale' of 1904. (WC1i, 22)

Certainly as early as the Algeiras crisis of 1905 (over Germany's right to trade access in Morocco) Britain's new-found links with France (like those with Russia, aimed at thwarting the rising power of Germany) could easily have ended in war.(WC1i, 32) Yet because that new understanding between Britain and France concerning Germany was based on military 'conversations' that were entirely confidential, then (just like the people of the British isles) Australians could have had no inkling of their own possible involvement in a European war. That is not to say they had no serious security concerns. Quite the reverse, for due to the above-mentioned developments in NE Asia, they had become extremely fearful that Australia might come under attack from Japan's expanding and vastly superior naval and military forces.

Looking back from today, our great distance from Japan might make that fear seem fanciful. However, we need bear in mind Australia's awareness of its extreme isolation in the Pacific, Japan's recent military and naval successes against Korea, Russia and other countries, - as well as Australia's experiences of the depression of the 1990s, the job shortages and perceived threats from under-paid Asians.

(b) Japan, Europe, and Australian Security

Given that fear at the end of the 19th century, we can better understand the attitudes of our new Federal politicians. In developing an Australian defence force their clear aim was to protect this land against a possible Japanese invasion. The story of how this force was formed and controlled is related in John Mordike's highly illuminating book.(JM) Based on this thoroughly-documented work, what follows is a brief outline of how, with much subtle and not-so-subtle guidance from British Imperial interests intent on

blocking the growing competition from Germany, Australia became involved in a major European war, World War I.

Now although the willingness of many Australians to serve voluntarily in a war that might threaten Britain's own homeland security was not in doubt, it was beyond question that Australia's *primary* focus should be on its *own* territorial defence. For any politician to have stated otherwise would have spelt political suicide. And in any case, given the power of the Japanese military and our distance from Britain, as well as its other commitments, none here were convinced that Australia's protection could be left to Britain's discretion and possible help from its navy.

Reflecting that situation, from early last century the Australian Defence Act of 1903 denied any government the power to direct its troops beyond Australia's shores.(JM, 2) Thus any Australian contribution to British plans for an Imperial Force would have to be voluntary. So when in 1904 Lt.-General Sir Ian Hamilton, Quartermaster General in the British War Office, requested 3-4,000 Australian troops to serve with Japanese forces against the Russians in Manchuria, his request was refused. Indeed, as already indicated, it was that very war which heightened fears of Japan's possible intentions and hastened preparations for our own defence. But as described below, the Imperial response to these augmented Australian fears was to harness them to an accelerated military preparedness in the expectation that such preparedness could be exploited later, once the anticipated 'European emergency' occurred.

After returning from the 1907 Imperial Conference in London, Prime Minister Alfred Deakin planned not only an independent Australian army but (cancelling our naval agreement with Britain) an Australian navy that would include both destroyers and submarines. In addition, an Australian defence industry would be set up and Australian youth (12-20 year-olds) would be conscripted for defence training. Moreover since Japan was seen as the major threat, his government "*...was not preparing for any expeditionary adventures outside Australia.*" (JM,13-5)

In November 1908 Deakin's Protectionist government fell. It was replaced by Andrew Fisher's Labor administration which in turn was succeeded in 1909 by the Fusion government of 3 non-Labor factions.(JM,18) And although the new government leaders were agreeable to standardising our arms, ammunition and training methods with those of Britain, Defence Minister Cook emphasised that while Germany might concern Britain, more likely threats to Australian security came from Japan or the United States.(JM, 23) So compulsory military training went ahead and in February 1910 Lord Kitchener was invited to review Australia's preparedness to defend itself.(JM, 26) However, Britain's Secretary of State for War, Richard Haldane, saw the visit differently, announcing in Bradford to the people of England, "*....we are within sight - and, indeed something more than within sight-of common plans, which will unify the forces of the Crown throughout the whole of the Empire.....Wherever the theatre of war may be we should have the forces of the Empire so organised that they can be concentrated wherever the field may be, and that plans for our mutual defence may be worked out by one Empire, one whole.*", going on to conclude that "*Kitchener was going to Australia*

and then to New Zealand to work out the details". (JM, 27)

The Melbourne Age interpreted Kitchener's visit in just the same way. Yet, that is not how Kitchener presented himself in Australia, his eventual report focusing on the need for greater preparations to defend us against invasion. Subsequently, in April 1910, it fell to the incoming Labor government under Andrew Fisher and his Defence Minister George Pearce, to apply Kitchener's recommendations, including the transition from voluntary militia to the new compulsory system.

(c) The 1911 Imperial Conference

Conference Background: By 1911, Britain's planning with France for an increasingly likely war with the fast-growing Germany was well advanced. Since in this event the Royal Navy would have to be deployed close to home, it would simply not be available to defend Australia should such need arise. Unaware of Britain's expectations of an early European war, but concerned at the possible threat from Japan, Australia proposed the Conference tackle the broad issue of 'defence cooperation'. Accordingly, Sir William Nicholson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, requested Brigadier Henry Wilson, Director of Military Operations and architect of the planned British Expeditionary Force for Europe, to outline the position to be taken by the War Office.(JM,36) The approach decided was to ask the Dominions whether they "*...would now be prepared to undertake certain definite responsibilities in connection with the defence of the empire as a whole.*" (JM,37)

In considering a possible threat to Australia from Japan, Britain's Colonial Defence Committee had earlier reported that, should the Anglo-Japanese alliance for any reason be terminated, it must be assumed that the "*...local command of the Pacific might for a brief period rest with Japan*", such "*...making it possible for Japan to convey overseas to Australia a military force of considerable size*", - Japan having available 19 divisions "*...complete and fit for service in every detail.*" (JM,39) And for his part, Sir William Nicholson was at pains to stress that any suggestion that the Royal Navy would in such an emergency shield Australia and New Zealand from invasion, should be negated "*...because its acceptance by the Dominions will tend to check the instinct of self-defence which renders young and growing nations virile and vigorous, as well as the patriotism which ought to induce every part of the empire to take its due share in the obligation of Imperial defence.*" (JM,47)

Conference Proceedings The Imperial Conference, meeting as the *Committee of Imperial Defence*, (CID) was opened by Prime Minister Asquith on Friday May 26, 1911. It was the first time the members of an Australian Labor government had been to London.(JM, 53) At its outset Foreign Secretary Edward Grey overviewed European developments. As he reported, currently the German and British governments were "*...not having difficulties with each other*". However, while there was "*..no danger, no appreciable danger, of our being involved in any considerable trouble in Europe..*", this could change if there was "*..some power or group of powers, in Europe which has the ambition of achieving what I would call the Napoleonic policy.*" (JM,54) No hint here of

the well-advanced contingency planning with France for war with Germany. Only the emphasis that "*..if there is any trouble in Europe in which we are engaged and in which we have to appeal to the Dominions, it will be solely because, if we do not take part in it, we shall see the combination against us in Europe may be such that the command of the sea may be lost.*" (JM,55) This clearly implied that for their own future protection by the Royal Navy, the Dominions would need to support Britain in any such war. Then, in relation to the relative strengths of the British and German navies and armies, Grey emphasised "*But however much our fleet is superior to the German fleet, however much we defeat the German fleet, with the army which we have, we could never commit a serious aggression by ourselves upon German territory.*" Only if Germany was to use its military strength "*..to obtain the dominating Napoleonic position in Europe, then I think there would be trouble.*" (JM,55) But, according to Grey, that was not anticipated.(JM,55) With that assurance, the issues raised by Fisher and Pearce, focused entirely on the potential threat to Australia from Japan and its modern navy. (JM,58)

On the third day Secretary of State for War, Richard Haldane, gave an overview of British Military Developments. As Haldane explained, British forces comprised several components: one force to defend India, another Africa, a third Egypt and the Mediterranean, and so on. In addition, he said "*...we have concentrated now on producing an expeditionary army which is in this country ready for mobilisation and which we can send to any part of the Dominions of the Crown to your assistance as you may need.* In fact, at that stage, Britain had some 300,000 troops available for overseas deployment, Germany but 2,850 for its overseas use.(JM,62, 63)

On that same theme, but *prior to the Conference*, Brigadier-General Henry Wilson (chief planner of Britain's expeditionary force) had proposed to General Nicholson that "*...we might say to Australia that for the present any forces she was prepared to lend for overseas operations would in all probability not be sent any further west than Capetown, further to the north than Egypt, the north-west frontier of India, Singapore or Hong Kong, or employed for some minor operation such as the capture of some outlying coaling station belonging to the enemy.*" Sound OK? Well, maybe! - until he continues..." *But the real truth of the matter is that in order to get the full value out of such assistance the Dominion may elect to give us, their troops should be placed under the orders of the War Office (C.I.G.S.) and made available for service in any part of the world.*" So, now we begin to see the underlying meaning of 'mutual assistance' in 'Imperial defence cooperation'!(JM,67-8)

Not surprisingly, conference discussions between Dominion representatives and senior British army officers on defence cooperation were conducted in closed session. Sir Frederick Borden, Canada's Minister of Militia and Defence had received his copy of CID War Office discussion paper 80-C, "*The Cooperation of the Military Forces of the Empire*" (a paper prepared over the past 10 months) only on the previous evening! His Prime Minister, Laurier, had yet to get his. Misunderstanding its start time, Pearce was late for the meeting. In any case it was clear that the material for discussion was not intended for advance consideration by Dominions' governments or their representatives. And as Borden soon realised, notwithstanding phrases like 'mutual cooperation', Britain's

underlying intention was to enlist military support *from* the Dominions rather than arrange for *mutual* support as the need arose. So Borden made the point that, expressed as they were, the paper's proposals would be unacceptable to their home constituents unless the language was appropriately changed, that is "*...if it is to be made public at all, to the people of the other Dominions.*" (JM,72,73)

(d) Australia's Covert Commitment

Fisher and Pearce also privately accepted the need for the Dominion commitment, at the same time pointing out that whereas Australian troops were trained for home defence and, by law, could not be forcibly sent abroad, many could be expected to volunteer.(JM,72) Borden indicated that his position was similar, adding that "*I do not know how it is in Australia but our political conditions in Canada, perhaps, make it undesirable that such matters should be discussed openly.*", to which Pearce responded "*I do not propose that either...*". Borden then stated that it seemed to him that the central idea behind the Imperial General Staff was "*...to prepare schemes not only for local defence of the different Dominions but a general scheme in which the Dominions might take part...*" But, as he stressed, such participation would not prove possible unless prepared in advance, work that he supposed would be done "*...quietly, carefully, and thoroughly, but about which little or nothing would be said.*" (JM,75) Indeed all further discussion on the issue was confined to the War Office, never within the general Conference. (JM,75; including his ref. 76)

As part of the overall planning it was broadly agreed that the War Office discussion paper should be altered to undo its image of Imperial bias. Instead it should stress that Dominion preparations would facilitate assistance *from* the Imperial Central Army, should such need arise - rather than its original emphasis, "*...which would not go down quite so well with the Dominions if it got out.*" (JM,75) Nicholson agreed and the paper was soon modified. In further discussions, Pearce undertook to make advance plans with the Australian General Staff for the equipping, mobilisation, and transport of (volunteer) troops whenever the need arose, once completed, those plans to be forwarded to the British War Office.(JM,79)

It was also agreed that no record of these discussions would appear in the official '*Proceedings of the 1911 Imperial Conference*'. For as Nicholson commented at the time, "*I think it much better we should do this thing quietly without any paper on the subject.*" (WO106/43; Public Records Office) (JM,79)

When Fisher and Pearce returned to Australia, whilst the military preparations according to War Office plans went ahead, their justification to the Australian public was strictly 'home defence'. For example, when Pearce, having visited Japan on his way home, addressed the Brunswick Political Labor Council, he stated his conviction that "*Australia's future would be more largely affected by the nations of the north rather than by any group of European powers*". And as he further stressed, Japan was a mere 8 days away and preparations for war were urgent. No mention of a possible expeditionary force for Europe.(JM, 83) Likewise Pearce told an audience in Broken Hill that "*Japan*

today was an arsenal from beginning to end - for what?.....For something in the future.....Australians must be prepared to fight for a white Australia." (JM,86) (SMH Jan. 13, 1912)

What can we make of this totally altered emphasis regarding the need for Australia's defence preparedness? On this one cannot do better than quote Mordike: "*The British authorities knew that warfare against a developed industrialised nation like Germany would require a large land force equipped with materiel of British pattern and trained on British doctrine. Early mobilisation planning to send the force overseas was critical, and this required commitment by dominion governments. This was the step the dominions had never been prepared to take, but in 1911, fear of Japanese aggression against Australia pushed Fisher, Pearce and Batchelor to take that step. They gave the commitment that Australia would begin planning for the provision of an expeditionary force for an imperial operation, whenever that might be. The Australian promise of assistance in time of crisis had been transformed into a commitment which would entail comprehensive military preparations and the development of mobilisation plans. This was not for the primary reason that Germany posed a threat to Australian security but for the reason that it demonstrated that Australia was a willing participant in imperial defence. It was an act designed to give substance to Australian expectations of reciprocal support in time of need, a time when Japan would move against Australia.*" Yet, as he goes on to explain, "*...they could not share this with the Australian people.they could not even share it with all members of their own government. They well knew that public knowledgewould produce a heated controversy with inevitable political outcomes.*" Hence the decision to follow Sir William Nicholson's advice that such preparations should be conducted 'quietly'.(JM,82)

(e) General Sir Ian Hamilton assesses Australia's Defence

And notwithstanding the change to a new government in May, 1913, one led by Liberal Prime Minister Joseph Cook, the quiet planning went ahead. In August the Australian General Staff reviewed its plans, - plans available only to senior Ministers, bureaucrats and army officers.(JM,87) Invited to inspect and report on the state of Australia's military forces, Sir Ian Hamilton** (later to command the disastrous Gallipoli land attack on Turkey) visited Australia in April 1914. Hamilton reported favourably to his Prime Minister Asquith on the universal training scheme and naval developments which he saw as '*costly, but effective*'.

And on the key issue of an Australian contribution to Imperial needs, Hamilton's report included: "*I had fully meant when I came out here to urge upon the Commonwealth the importance of having some small section of their army earmarked, in peace, for expeditionary Imperial service. But I see now I could defeat my own object and weaken the effect of the whole of the rest of my report were I to touch that string. The whole vital force of the country, i.e. the rank and file of its people, are standing firm against any such proposition. Play the tune, an Australian army for Australia, and they dance to any extent. Not otherwise. Australia - not Empire - is then the string we must harp on. That is to say, we must encourage them to do what they will do willingly and lavishly,*

namely, pay up for safeguarding a white Australia from the cursed Jap. Then when the time comes, and when we are fighting for our lives in India or elsewhere, I for one am confident that the whole military force of Australia will be freely at our disposal. But tell the Australian that he must contribute to a force which may have to fight outside the areas washed by the Pacific, and he at once begins to talk of tribute."

"Therefore I am acting on the principle of encouraging Australia to make her land forces as efficient and strong as possible to meet dangers threatening their hearths and homes and am talking as little about overseas Imperial needs as possible." (JM, 90)

**** Footnote**

General Sir Ian Hamilton, born 1853, commanded the failed and costly military attack on Gallipoli in 1915. As mentioned above, in 1904 he had attempted, unsuccessfully, to have Australia send 3-4,000 young men to fight with the Japanese against Russia in Manchuria. There he had been observing the First Japanese Army - and was mightily impressed by the unquestioning military spirit and performance of the young Japanese soldiers. Indeed, he was a great believer in having a similar military spirit inculcated into the youth of Britain and the Empire from a very early age. As he wrote of Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese war, in his account, "*A Staff Officer's Scrap-Book*", (IH,12-13) "*Providentially Japan is our ally, and not one, if I may presume to judge so early, who will prove ungrateful. England has time therefore - time to put her military affairs in order; time to implant and cherish the military ideal in the hearts of her children; time to prepare for a disturbed and anxious twentieth century.giving the young generations an ideal for which they would lay down their lives. From the nursery and its toys to the Sunday school and its cadet company, every influence and affection, loyalty, tradition, and education should be brought to bear on the next generation of British boys and girls, so as deeply to impress upon their young minds a feeling of reverence and admiration for the patriotic spirit of their ancestors.*" On the next page (IH, 14) he quotes Ruskin on the necessity and virtues of war, contrasting those virtues with 'peace and selfishness', 'peace and death'. Clearly Imperialism and following a military 'manifest destiny' was, in his mind, *the way* for Britain to prosper and succeed during that anticipated "*disturbed and anxious twentieth century*"!

And what a disastrous outcome it has been, not just for the rest of the world's peoples, but for the British people themselves. Until WWI, Britain had been the pre-eminent world power. But then, although it claimed to have prevailed, 'winning' the war against Germany and Austro-Hungary, the only possible winners were the United States and Japan - precisely because they had NOT invested the lives of their young, along with their treasure (causing extreme indebtedness) in such a truly self-defeating enterprise. Britain, which never recovered its old position, would have fared far better had it worked WITH Germany (its competitor, yet principal trading partner (JMK, 15)) towards a cooperative peaceful, Europe - rather than debilitating itself, along with Germany and so many other countries, in that terrible war - the war that then set the stage for WWII, an even more horrible war. **(end footnote)**

On June 30, 1914, a prescient Melbourne Age published an article "*Moloch of Militarism*" which, pointing to the darkening European scene, charged that by its military

expenditure, "*Australia has become one of the most heavily burdened nations of the earth*", that, like Britain, France and Germany it was making the error of engaging in an arms race. Then, as it further warned, "*But the jealousies and mutual distrust that have turned Europe into an armed camp need not inspire Australia to similar insanity,..*". Next it went on to point out that Australia's per capita defence expenditure had surpassed Germany's and was third only to that of Britain and France. All too tellingly, the same edition reported the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in Sarajevo, the spark that was allowed to set off the long-planned-for conflagration, the First World War.(JM,90-1)

In short, in the years preceding WWI, Alfred Deakin and other politicians, fearing that Japan, the newly emerged fast-growing industrial and Imperial Asian power, might attack and invade Australia, *covertly* agreed to an Empire defence cooperation scheme that, in effect, committed us to support Britain in any European war. And thus, despite Australia having no formal alliance with Britain, once WWI was declared a steady stream of Australian volunteers were encouraged by their government to participate. Indeed, because the war was expected to last but a few months (a walk over, 'home by Christmas', etc.) many were anxious lest it be over before they could get there. Tragically that hugely mechanised war, stalemated by the defence (machine guns, pill boxes, barbed wire, etc.) and agonisingly prolonged, resulted in simply horrifying casualties all round. Although after 4 years of terrible slaughter and maiming, the Triple Entente eventually 'won', the awful reality was that the peoples of *all* combatant countries lost and, as shown by the aftermath, lost very heavily indeed.(PK, WC2, GD, MH, BK, JMK, AO, WW, N-B1, N-B2, RC, VB, GLD, WO1,WO2, BT2)

B. European Origins of WWI: 'National Interests' & 'Manifest Destiny'

(a) Flawed (self-defeating) Motivation

So of course we have to ask, if the end result of World War I was so patently destructive of life and so economically counter-productive (see e.g., Lord Gowrie's terse assessment, Appendix L), how could the European combatant states have gotten themselves into it in the first place? The short answer appears to be: the unrealistic economic ambitions of the Great Powers or, more to the point, the ambitions of those claiming to represent the national interests of those Powers. Although the present short essay cannot cover the full story, taken together, six key works - Adam Smith's "*An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*" (AS); J.A. Hobson's "*Imperialism: A Study*" (JH); G.Lowes Dickinson's "*The International Anarchy*" (GLD); Winston Churchill's "*The World Crisis*" (WC1i) Michael Howard's "*The Lessons of History*" (MH) and Barbara Tuchman's *The Proud Tower*, (BT1) - provide a highly enlightening background picture.

As economist and historian John Hobson warned at the outset of the 20th century, all major industrial powers suffered from a primary economic problem (we might well call disease!). The problem was that these mostly European economies had long failed to give *top* priority to serving their own populations' material and other needs. Instead of

developing self-sustaining *domestic* markets as the core element of their economies, (as advocated by Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations* (AS)) those claiming to represent their country's 'national interests' relegated their internal markets, along with their under-appreciated under-classes, to third place in favour of export markets and, increasingly during the second half of the 19th century, to various Colonial enterprises involving the exploitation of native peoples and their resources. (JH,80-7; IB1)

Hence the further development and rapid competitive expansion of 19th century Imperialisms, with the formation of Empires which saw themselves (altogether unrealistically) as following their own unconquerable 'manifest destinies'.(MH) Sensing the coming struggle with one another for supremacy as being not just inevitable, but right, these Empires sought alliances with other powers, alliances having both overt and covert provisions, many of the latter promising their allies spoils with the final victory. And whether formal commitments or less formal 'understandings', these alliances ended up locking the powers into fatalistic arrangements which ultimately misled them into the final tragedy, their *mutual* downfall.(see GLD; WC1i, 22, 31-33; WC2, 31, 452-455; MH; BT1; BT2)

(b) Alliance Entrapment: The Case of Britain (its Dominions) and France

Here I will concentrate on the covert role the British government's inner Cabinet 4 played in involving not only their own people, but those of the Empire's Dominions as combatants in World War One. I've placed Dominions in brackets to symbolise their true position in what occurred.

As described by Churchill, until the beginning of the 20th century Britain, as an island state protected by the Royal Navy and largely preoccupied with her extensive overseas territories, remained 'in splendid isolation', free of European alliances. But seeing the alliances developed by other Empires, - the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austro-Hungary and Italy, and the Franco-Russian, - and finally concerned at their own ever-increasing isolation and vulnerability, early in the century Britain had invited Germany to join in its alliance with Japan. However, when that offer was declined, Britain decided it had better settle its differences with its long-standing traditional enemies, France and Russia and, if possible, link with them. Beginning with France, this is what it did, systematically cultivating good relations, a task made easier once France saw its ally, Russia, defeated by Britain's ally Japan in 1904. (WC1i, 21; c.f., also 2C above)

The outcome was a compact with France (the Entente Cordiale of 1904) whereby in return for France's acceptance of British interests in Egypt, Britain agreed to support France's interests in Morocco.(WC1i, 22) Of course, neither had any moral or legal right to dominate in either country. Indeed, in the case of Morocco, by the 1880 *Treaty of Madrid*, the European powers were bound both to Moroccan independence and to equal rights for outside traders.(GLD, GG1) France, having fought Germany in 1870, and having lost that war, along with disputed territories (Alsace-Lorraine) and considerable 'honour', was anxious to regain both should war come again. So when in 1905 Germany insisted on its right to trade in Morocco, France, which by then regarded that country as

its Protectorate, was in no mood to accede.(WC1i,31) In the international crisis of Algeciras which followed, despite France's admittedly weak moral and legal position, Britain was determined to back France, regardless of the consequences. As Churchill related, had the Algeciras crisis come to war between France and Germany, "...*Great Britain could not have remained indifferent.*" And although war was for the time being averted, secret "*military conversations*" between the British and French General Staffs were promptly instituted "...with a view to concerted action in the event of war", Algeciras being seen as "...a milestone on the road to Armageddon." (WC1i, 32-3; also Appendix C, 6-11)

That is how the future war was viewed: 'Armageddon', the Apocalypse, the final battle between good and evil! Also the view that it was inevitable, only a question of time - time for more thorough preparation. Indeed, after Algeciras all the major European powers were intent on arming as fast as they could. There had been a Peace Conference at the Hague in 1899, and another in 1907 through which the world's leading powers were supposed to explore the possibilities of arms prohibitions and limitations, - as well as dispute arbitration - all to halt the drift to war, but their governments reached no significant agreements (see 'The Steady Drummer' in Barbara Tuchman's, *The Proud Tower*, BT1, 227-288; reviewed in Appendix B). A further crisis (Agadir, 1911) again over the issue of German trade access to Morocco (also coming close to war) served only to reinforce the determination of Britain and other European Powers to prepare even more thoroughly for what they saw as the inevitable clash.(IB2,7-8; also Appendix C, 6-11)

What is extraordinarily revealing about Churchill's account of the resulting military arrangements between Britain and France is that they were kept secret not only from the British public but from their parliamentary representatives, even from *most* members of Cabinet! (WC1i, 46, 203) That bizarre situation derived from the way the British commitment was made to fight alongside France, *whenever* that country might go to war with Germany. Had there been a formal alliance, its terms would have been subject to debate and approval within the British parliament. Instead, the commitment was made secretly through a set of high-level 'understandings' and 'military conversations'. The *only* people privy to these commitments and defence arrangements with France were members of the Committee of Imperial Defence, certain high-ranking Naval and Military Staff Officers and but *four* Cabinet Ministers: Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, Foreign Minister Sir Edward Grey, Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George and First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill. One cannot better illustrate the arrogant 'know best' attitudes involved than by quoting Churchill's discussion of whether Foreign Secretary Grey should have taken early action to prevent the war.

Thus, writing some 4 years after WWI, Churchill reflects: "*Suppose after Agadir or on the announcement of the new German Navy Law in 1912 the Foreign Secretary had, in cold blood, proposed a formal alliance with France and Russia, and in execution of military conventions consequential upon the alliance had begun to raise by compulsion an army adequate to our responsibilities and to the part we were playing in the world's affairs; and suppose we had taken this action as a united nation, who shall say whether*

that would have prevented or precipitated the war? But what chance was there of such action being unitedly taken? The Cabinet of the day would never have agreed to it. I doubt if four Ministers would have agreed to it. But if the Cabinet had been united upon it, the House of Commons would not have accepted their guidance. Therefore the Foreign Minister would have had to resign. The policy which he had advocated would have stood condemned and perhaps violently repudiated; and with that repudiation would have come an absolute veto upon all those informal preparations and non-committal discussions on which the defensive power of the Triple Entente was erected. Therefore, by taking such a course in 1912, Sir Edward Grey would only have paralysed Britain, isolated France, and increased the preponderant and growing power of Germany." (WC1i, 203; emphasis added)

How very revealing! Indeed, how absolutely astounding!! For that was what the real concern was all about: - preventing the British parliament using *its* judgement on what to do about the 'growing power of Germany'. And except for the four Cabinet Ministers who took it on *themselves* to determine the outcome, that state of ignorance within Cabinet, the Parliament and among the British peoples, Dominions included, concerning the decision that Britain would fight with France *if* and *whenever* that country went to war with Germany (regardless of the precipitating issue) persisted until after Sarajevo, the very eve of the war. Only then did Foreign Minister Grey, backed by Asquith, Lloyd George and Churchill, instruct the rest of Cabinet and Parliament concerning their supposed 'binding moral commitment' to France. (EM2, 279-99; GLD, 465-80). Referring to the resulting crisis, Churchill wrote: "*The Cabinet was overwhelmingly pacific. At least three quarters of its members were determined not to be drawn into a European quarrel, unless Great Britain were herself attacked, which was not likely.*" (WC1i, 199; see also Appendix C)

Tragically, in the event most of the British Parliament and public went along, accepting their alleged responsibility, initially supporting the war. Of course they knew nothing of what lay behind it, just as they knew nothing of what it would entail, that it would not be 'over by Christmas', that the casualties, the human sacrifices would be unspeakably awful. Nor did they (or its proponents) know that even in 'victory' the outcome, far from strengthening, would greatly *weaken* Britain and its Empire in every way!

And what was the precipitating issue which ultimately drew Britain (along with Australia and the other Dominions) into the general insanity of the Great War? As oft repeated, it was the assassination of Austria's Archduke Ferdinand by Serbian separatists on June, 28, 1914. On July 5 Germany reassured Austro-Hungary of its support should its quarrel with Serbia lead to war with Russia. Austro-Hungary, refusing to accept Serbia's 'independent terrorist' explanation of what happened, declared war on Serbia (July 28). The following day it bombarded Belgrade. That led Russia to mobilise along Austria's border. On July 30 both Austria and Russia, ordered general mobilisation. And on July 31, Germany, Austro-Hungary's ally, demanded Russia demobilise within 12 hours - or else! On August 1, Germany mobilised and declared war - first on Russia, then within days, on Russia's ally, France.(BT2, 78) So, at that stage, the issue for

Britain (which had no formal military alliance with France) was: should it go to war over an 'incident' in the Balkans which did not involve its national interests, something it had earlier vowed it would never do! (BT2)

(c) Britain's Inner Cabinet Four Decide – to join the War

Britain's inner cabinet decided that their contingency plans to commit Great Britain and the Empire to go to war alongside France should be proceeded with. And why? Well, despite the lack of any formal (i.e., open, transparent) alliance with France (or Russia) the logic of the cabinet four was indeed 'alliance logic'. That is, if your ally goes to war with your enemy, no matter the nature or justice of the cause, or instigating incident, you must also go to war *then*, for otherwise if your ally is defeated, your enemy (possibly by then the stronger) may defeat you in war - or (far more likely, since they are already growing faster) simply continue to outstrip you in economic development! (GLD)

That logic comes out clearly in Churchill's account. For example: *"It is true to say that our Entente with France and the military and naval conversations that had taken place since 1906, had led us into a position where we had the obligations of an alliance without its advantages. An open alliance, if it could have been peacefully brought about at an early date, would have exercised a deterring effect upon the German mind, or at the least would have altered their calculations. Whereas now we were morally bound to come to the aid of France and it was in our interest to do so, and yet the fact that we should come in appeared so uncertain that it did not weigh as it should have done with the Germans. Moreover, as things were, if France had been in an aggressive mood, we should not have had the unquestioned right of an ally to influence her action in a pacific sense; and if as the result of her aggressive mood war had broken out and we had stood aside, we should have been accused of deserting her, and in any case would have been ourselves grievously endangered by her defeat."* (WC1i, 205) And again, in discussing whether or not the German passage through Belgium was a key issue: *"...But whatever happened to Belgium, there was France whose very life was at stake, whose armies in my judgement were definitely weaker than those by whom they would be assailed, whose ruin would leave us face to face alone with triumphant Germany:...."* (WC1i, 203; emphases added)

Indeed, that the ultimate bottom line fear and motivation of the British Cabinet's inner four was the competition from Germany's faster-growing economy, is revealed in Foreign Secretary Grey's plea to members of the House to give their backing to the hitherto secret commitment to support France militarily should she go to war with Germany, - an eleventh hour appeal made on August 3, 1914, just *one day* before World War I began! Grey's words included, *"I ask the House from the point of view of British interests to consider what may be at stake. If France is beaten to her kneesI do not believe for a moment that, at the end of this war,.....we should be able to undo what had happened,.....to prevent the whole of the West of Europe opposite us from falling under the domination of a single power....and we should.... not escape the most serious and grave economic consequences."* (BT2,121-2)

The outcome for the British peoples, that terrible war, followed from their lack of questioning of the real issues, ultimately from their passive acceptance of the 'authority' of the four senior ministers. No doubt that followed a long tradition in Imperial politics in which decisions *always* came from the top. Yet, to some extent the public's complacency was understandable since, because of the close secrecy of the contingency plans to fight with France, they had been given no information on which to judge. And further lulling them into complacency, the international atmosphere had for some months *seemed* just so calm. As Churchill put it: "*The spring and summer of 1914 were marked in Europe by an exceptional tranquillity. Ever since Agadir the policy of Germany towards Great Britain had not only been correct, but considerate.British and German diplomacy laboured in harmony.Germany seemed, with us, to be set on peace.There seemed also to be a prospect that the personal goodwill and mutual respect which had grown up between the principal people on both sides might play a useful part in the future; and some there were who looked forward to a wider combination in which Great Britain and Germany, without prejudice to their respective friendships or alliances, might together bring the two opposing European systems into harmony and give to all the anxious nations solid assurances of safety and fair-play.*" (WC1i, 178) And as Churchill went on, even naval rivalry had ceased to be a 'cause of friction', because (Germany, having made no further increases in naval power since early in 1912) it was certain that "*...we could not be overtaken as far as capital ships were concerned.*" (WC1i,179, 244-7). What a wonderful positive vision of future cooperation it seemed - yet only on the surface!

All this underlies what by now will be clear - that the reason for all the vast preparations and ultimate decision for going to war was not about Sarejevo, not about any new issue arising between Britain and Germany, not even about 'loyalty' to the French, but essentially about the determination of a few self-appointed people (claiming to represent the 'national interest') to bring Germany's industrial and commercial power under control. Indeed, it was about what all the contending Empires were dreaming of, namely, following their 'manifest destinies' towards their own ever greater expansion, - expansion in the face of growing Empire competition and enmity with its inevitable outcome of war - instead of building more equitable, sustainable and just societies within their home territories (JH,80-7; BT1, 356-8; 382-5; AS) And tragically, in the event the lessons were not learned and a further similarly-generated war was but a mere 25 years away.

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