

“SECRETARY OF EVERYTHING IMPORTANT”:

An Analysis of Maurice Hankey and his role during the wartime Asquith government, 1914-5.

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For My Parents, Vicky, and Phillip.

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ABSTRACT

Maurice Hankey, Britain's first Cabinet Secretary, has traditionally been portrayed as an apolitical bureaucrat who helped guide but never cajoled Britain's decision makers during the First World War. This thesis argues otherwise. It illustrates Hankey, contrary his own self-presentation and the judgement of both contemporaries and historians, was in fact a figure of considerable influence, a wartime *éminence grise* who actively used his informal influence with Britain's first wartime premier, H.H. Asquith, to manipulate British decision-making and advance his own wartime strategy. Hankey's intrigues subsequently played a major role in the planning and enactment of the disastrous Dardanelles and Gallipoli campaigns, the culpability of which has been placed on other actors.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CIGS	Chief of Imperial General Staff
DNI	Director of Naval Intelligence
DMO	Director of Military Operations
NID	Naval Intelligence Department
RND	Royal Naval Division

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the fall of 1916, the Dardanelles Commission, established by an Act of Parliament, gathered in London to investigate the failed Dardanelles and Gallipoli campaigns. The campaigns, originally intended to deliver a swift victory for the beleaguered Entente against the supposedly inferior Ottoman Empire, had ended in abject failure months earlier with several warships destroyed and 300,000 Allied soldiers killed, wounded, missing, or captured trying to take Gallipoli. Now, answers were demanded, and the fate of the Asquith government hung by a thread as key decision-makers delivered testimony that could destroy it with one wrong word. One of the first witnesses called was a thin, shrewd-eyed, mustached, and balding bureaucrat, aged no more than thirty-nine and dressed in the uniform of an officer of the Royal Marines, named Lt. Colonel Sir Maurice Hankey, the Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence. Despite his nondescript appearance and seemingly modest position, it was Hankey who had been charged by the Prime Minister, Herbert Henry Asquith, to justify the fallen Liberal government's actions by organizing and presenting its case to the commission.¹ The Prime Minister's decision was supported by the members of the old War Council because - despite their personal enmities - they recognized that all their reputations would be eviscerated if they indulged in mutual recriminations.² Therefore, Hankey, who was universally trusted by the senior

¹ Christopher Bell, *Churchill and the Dardanelles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 231.

² “[Lloyd George] alarmed me suggesting that I should go to the Dardanelles inquiry & speak for the War Council. But I alarmed him by reminding him of his part in it [the inception and execution of the Dardanelles campaign] & asking him how he would like me to say it all to the C[omit]tee.” Hankey diary, 21 July 1916, HNKY 1/1. Hankey Papers, Churchill College Archives Centre, Cambridge; Bell, *Dardanelles*, 231-2.

decision-makers and knew the particulars of the campaigns, was the perfect individual to craft their case for the Commission.

Hankey, however, was not enthused by the task before him. He was painfully aware of the slapdash decision-making undertaken by the War Council and his own role in those decisions. Nonetheless, he accepted the responsibility for creating the defence out of loyalty to Asquith, whom he remained devoted to whatever his flaws, and because, while the War Council was more interested in blaming each other than him for the disaster, he recognized his own position might be compromised by a disorganized defence. "Then began," in July 1916, Hankey later wrote, "one of the most dreary tasks that has ever fallen to my lot."³ Between July and September 1916, Hankey estimated that he spent 174 hours creating the perfect case for the government and, as illustrated by Christopher Bell, coaching ministers on their testimony for the forthcoming commission.⁴ The case Hankey devised proved itself to be palatable to all involved, because "Hankey studiously avoided controversy and presented the broad outlines of the War Council's deliberations in a matter-of-fact manner, based on the minutes he had kept."⁵ Within his defence, Hankey emphasized how the then First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill's proposal for a naval assault against the Dardanelles was influenced by the sense that, considering the worsening political and military situation in Russia and the

³ Lord Hankey, *The Supreme Command, 1914-1918* (2 vols, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961), 2: 523.

⁴ Bell, *Dardanelles*, 231; Hankey, *Command*, 2:523; "I have the Prime Minister's permission to show you, for your personal and confidential information, a proof copy of Part II. of the evidence I propose to give before the Dardanelles Commission. At the end I have alluded to one or two Secret matters ... which I thought had bearing on the Dardanelles operation. Will you be particularly careful not to make any allusion to these?" Hankey to Churchill, 31 August 1916, Churchill papers, Churchill College Archives Centre, Cambridge, CHAR 2/85/1; "Lunched with Grey to coach him on his Dardanelles evidence." Hankey, 21 September 1916, HNKY 1/1.

⁵ Bell, *Dardanelles*, 231.

Balkans, “*some* military action in the east had been both essential and unavoidable.”⁶ Hankey also excised claims that there was any hostile criticism of Churchill’s plan other than the implied criticism of the First Sea Lord, Admiral Lord (“Jacky”) Fisher. Moreover, he illustrated Churchill, contrary to the belief of some, told the War Council that losses were expected and argued that the plan enjoyed the support of Russia and France. About the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign, Hankey outlined how a joint campaign against the Dardanelles was rendered impossible from the outset by the Secretary of State for War, Field Marshal Lord Herbert Kitchener’s claim that no troops were available until a scheme to preserve Serbia fell through, thereby providing the necessary troops. Finally, to explain why the whole operation was not called off when the naval assault ran into difficulties, Hankey argued that the ministers responsible had been influenced by the military and political repercussions of not carrying out the campaign.⁷ The result of this approach was that no scapegoats were named, and Hankey cast a favourable light on the War Council’s decisions by emphasising the influence of the military and political situation on the continent.

At the same time as Hankey emphasized the influence of political and military factors on the War Council’s decision-making, he downplayed his own role in the Dardanelles and Gallipoli campaigns. To that end, even before he stated the government’s case, Hankey commenced his introductory remarks by issuing a statement on his own constitutional position and functions as secretary, clarifying:

The Secretariat ... will be in direct relation with, and under the direct control of the Prime Minister. Its duties are to be defined as follows: - (1.) To preserve a record of the deliberations and decisions of the Committee. (2.) To collect and co-ordinate the use of the Committee information bearing the wide problem of

⁶ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 232-3.

Imperial Defence, and to prepare any memoranda or other documents required for the purposes of the committee. (3.) To make possible any continuity of method in the treatment of the questions which may from time from time come before the Committee. As the Committee itself is only a consultative or advisory body, so the Secretariat will have no administrative or executive functions. Any decisions arrived at by the Committee, which require executive action must, of course, be carried out under the directions and on the responsibility of the Minister in charge of the department concerned. In the same way, any information required by the Committee from a Department will be procured only in such a manner as the Head of the Department may from time to time direct.⁸

Hankey continued by informing the commissioners that these “acted as a general guide to me in the performance of my duties *mutatis mutandis* since the commencement of the war.”⁹ Furthermore, Hankey solidified a good relationship with the Commission by simplifying their work through the production of his own detailed statement, by helping them navigate the documents provided, and answering their questions about the decision-making process. This secured Hankey the good-will of the Commission, which was more interested in determining the roles of the leading decision-makers: Asquith, Kitchener, Churchill, and to a lesser extent Fisher. As such, the commissioners readily accepted Hankey’s responses that he was merely “an official recorder of what happened,” or that military details “were not really my province at all,” when questioned.¹⁰ Thus, Hankey successfully presented himself as a dedicated, loyal, and efficient bureaucrat who offered administrative support to his political masters but had no influence on the decision-making process in general, and on the Dardanelles campaign in particular. In this regard, Hankey set himself apart from the other witnesses as an unbiased observer, one who stood above the fray of cabinet intrigue and was devoted to the nation’s best interests by virtue of his station.

⁸ Hankey, Notes for Evidence, September 1916, TNA: CAB 19/29.

⁹ *Ibid.*; The Latin phrase *mutatis mutandis* translates to, “things being changed that have to be changed.”

¹⁰ Dardanelles Commission, Hankey testimony, 27 September 1916, Q. 277 and 359., CAB 19/33.

The ultimate success of one of Hankey's "most dreary tasks," can be measured by the Dardanelles Commission's first report, which agreed with Hankey's case and singled Hankey out alone for praise, due to how his efforts had simplified the investigation.¹¹ The subsequent press coverage of the report, which captured national attention, readily seized upon the document once it was released on 8 March 1917 and squarely focused the national spot light on the perceived leading actors behind the operation: Churchill, Asquith, Kitchener, and, to a lesser extent, Fisher. Once the report was available, the press quickly embraced the narrative presented to them, albeit their political allegiances or editors' personal prejudices did not prevent them from sifting through the report's findings to criticize one figure more than another. The overwhelming majority, with one exception, never bothered to question Hankey's role in the decision-making, as attested by his absence from the resulting news coverage.¹² Hankey successfully imprinted his narrative on the public, which was reinforced by the decision-makers utilization of Commission's conclusions to batter their rivals' reputations and bolster their own.¹³ Most notably, two historiographical camps emerged, one siding with Churchill and the other with Lord Fisher, whose narrative criticized the former First Lord of the Admiralty. Time and the lack of other available documentation ensured that both camps heavily relied on

¹¹ Great Britain, Dardanelles Commission, *Final report of the Dardanelles Commission*, (3 Volumes, London: H.M.S.O., 1917), 1:41-3, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-62583>; Christopher Bell, *Dardanelles*, 280; Hankey diary, 10 March 1915 and 15 February 1916, HNKY 1/1.

¹² Although Hankey was worried about the newspaper references to his presentation of evidence and the attentions of the observant military correspondent, Charles à Court Repington, ultimately the newspapers only wrote about him, that "As a preliminary to the work of the commission there was prepared for it a summary of the proceedings of the War Council ... this was done by Sir Maurice Hankey who was secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence and subsequently the War Council." "The Dardanelles Report." *Times*, March 9, 1917, 9+. *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed August 7, 2022). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/apps/doc/CS152242281/TTDA?u=udalhousesie&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=11b0e10c>.

¹³ Bell, *Dardanelles*, 305-56.

the report to argue their cases for over fifty years and in the process rendered both the document and Hankey's status as an unbiased observer and humble bureaucrat sacrosanct. Yet, while the Commission's findings laid the cornerstone for Hankey's later reputation as an impartial and virtuous witness, this thesis contends that this perception of Hankey is in fact a carefully crafted myth, one that disguises Hankey's status as the Asquith government's wartime *éminence grise*.

The idealized portrait of Hankey or the 'Hankey Myth', as I have termed it, originated with Hankey himself. More specifically, Hankey's determination to control his reputation and ensure it matched the image he had cultivated for himself at the Dardanelles Commission was born out of a sense of political and historical self-preservation. The evolution of this myth can be divided into three phases. The first phase or foundational period occurred between the publication of the Dardanelles Commission's final report and the publication of Hankey's memoirs, *The Supreme Command*, in 1961. During this period, as indicated above, the Dardanelles Commission's conclusions were used by memoirists, the press, and historians to uphold their version of the truth, due to the lack of available documentation and the secrecy laws enforced by Hankey in his role as post-war Cabinet Secretary. The result of these factors was that by the time of *The Supreme Command*'s publication, the case Hankey created had become the prevailing historical interpretation (aided in no small part by Churchill's own mythmaking) and by extension his own historical reputation as a loyal bureaucrat and champion of institutional reform was firmly in place.¹⁴ Hankey's well-manicured memoirs merely reinforced this narrative by perpetuating his image as a virtuous and

¹⁴ Bell, *Dardanelles*, 348-9.

apolitical bureaucrat whose contributions to the nation ran beyond his judicious advice to the decision-makers. Specifically, Hankey emphasized his role in recognizing the failures of the pre-existing informal system of government and remolding it under the strain of war into the modern system of governance Britain subsequently enjoyed.

Hankey's role in the reformation of the informal system has been described as his most lasting and important accomplishment, and for good reason. Prior to the establishment of the War Cabinet and Cabinet Secretariat in 1916 by Hankey and Lloyd George, British decision-making was a continuation of the old Victorian cabinet system that had remained effectively unchanged since the days of Napoleon. At its core, the informal system was built on the joint premises of British elitism and supremacy in a time of relative peace. As such, the Victorian system of governance was a small realm, with only a handful of individuals making up the ranks of the bureaucracy. For instance, the Foreign Office in 1914 was only made up of fifty-two bureaucrats (rising from thirty-seven in 1861) and all these individuals came from the same elite background.¹⁵ Moreover, the department's homogenous nature was not simply limited to its bureaucracy, as its political leadership, the ministers themselves, was also cut from the same cloth as their subordinates. This inevitably resulted in echo chambers within the halls of power, as evidenced by Zara Steiner's discovery that the Foreign Office was practically a monolith in terms of ideals. This appears to have been typical throughout other departments and in a world without any major threats to the British Empire the system was allowed to flourish and entrench itself. Moreover, beyond entrenching the idea of small ministries run by elites sharing similar backgrounds and ideas, peacetime

¹⁵ Zara Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 4, 16-20.

also ensured that the system remained decentralized. Subsequently, the government did not require a highly centralized decision-making apparatus, with tight lines of communication and an army of bureaucrats to maintain it. Instead, when ministers gathered to discuss matters, under the mediation of the prime minister, at cabinet meetings where no minutes were kept, the only written evidence of what was discussed came from private recollections of events or “the ‘Prime Minister’s Letter’ [which] reflected the cabinet’s intentions ... [to] the King.”¹⁶ As a direct result of this informality, cabinet meetings were lax and the lack of clearly written and communicated resolutions by cabinet meant that its members only possessed, according to Lord Curzon, “the very haziest notion as to what its decisions were.”¹⁷ Worse still, within this political haze “an errant minister could mislead his own department.”¹⁸ This last assertion by the historian, John F. Naylor, is based on a Cabinet minute directed to the post-war Bonar Law administration by Hankey, which asserted that during the pre-war period “the First Sea Lord would write his own Minute of the Cabinet decision ... notifying the Office of whatever it was essential they know.”¹⁹ Clearly this was an inefficient practice during wartime and yet it persisted under the wartime Asquith premiership, despite internal pressures for reform, well into 1916. Hankey was one of the leading advocates for reform, preferring to install a modern system of governance and decision-making wherein the day-to-day affairs of the nation and war were handled by separate bodies (the Cabinet and War Cabinet, respectively). Moreover, Hankey envisioned the institution of a written

¹⁶ John F. Naylor, *A Man and an Institution: Sir Maurice Hankey, the Cabinet Secretariat and Custody of Cabinet Secrecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

record system, formal agenda, and stronger interdepartmental communications to overcome the glaring communications barriers imposed by the old system and ensure war proper planning was in place. Instead, the informal system ensured military decision-making was carried out in a slap-dash manner, with few if any written records, often without the proper officials' input, and with the relevant departments acting in an independent and disjointed manner.²⁰ When David Lloyd George came to power, he and Hankey swept away this model and replaced with the complicated and highly formalized structure that Hankey desired, while also expanding the size of the civil service to meet Britain's wartime needs.

Furthermore, beyond emphasizing his institutional legacy, Hankey also waded into the fractious post-war debates about British strategy and actively intervened to control the narrative and prevent any aspersions towards pre-war British strategy and thereby his own actions as Secretary to the CID. In August 1930, when Hankey's one-time mentor General Sir George Aston asked Hankey, in his role as keeper of the Official Histories, to endorse his new book about the First World War, wherein Aston argued "the government had not made adequate provision for the threat of major war and that as a result Britain had entered the Great War without a properly defined grand strategy."²¹ This did not sit well with Hankey, who as Secretary of the CID had been deeply involved in war planning during the period and as such he flatly rebuked Aston's request and tried to sway him against this point of view. Thereafter, Hankey argued in his memoirs that "the plans of the Army and Navy had ... been worked out in time of peace," and were

²⁰ Hankey, *Command*, 1: 196-7.

²¹ Matthew Seligmann, "Failing to Prepare for the Great War? The Absence of Grand Strategy in War Planning before 1914," *War in History* 24:4 (2017): 414.

only jeopardised by the defects of government machinery.²² Interestingly, although Hankey intended for his memoirs, *The Supreme Command*, to popularize his institutional and strategic contributions and cap the reputation established by the existing myth, it was his biographer, Stephen Roskill's work *Hankey: A Man of Secrets* that accomplished this.²³ The popularity of Roskill's assessment spawned the second phase of the Hankey Myth, its zenith, wherein subsequent historians continued to accept the myth as they used Hankey's reputation to underpin their own arguments about other topics related to the First World War and the assembly of Britain's modern structures of governance.

Ultimately, however cracks have appeared in myth. Although Hankey preferred to exercise influence behind the scenes, several of his contemporaries were aware that Hankey was more than he appeared. In 1916, the observant military correspondent, Charles à Court Repington, astutely remarked that Hankey "was too much in the position of military adviser to the Prime Minister especially at the beginning of the war."²⁴ Likewise, amidst parliamentary debates in 1917 about the "threat" to representative democracy posed by the ongoing reformation of the cabinet system under Lloyd George, Hankey and his position came under intense scrutiny. Specifically, the opposition decried Hankey's emergent Cabinet Secretariat as "almost a ministry in itself," which undermined the liberal ideas implicit in the old cabinet system in favour of a vastly impersonal and imperial regime.²⁵ While Hankey's critics in the papers and parliament painted him as an *illuminati*-esque figure, his defenders such as Lord Curzon upheld the necessity of the new system while simultaneously paying high tribute to Hankey and

²² Hankey, *Command*, 1:178.

²³ Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:138-42.

²⁴ Quoted in Hankey diary, 28 September 1916, HNKY 1/1.

²⁵ Naylor, *Institution*, 49-51.

declaring he should have “a niche in history next to myself.”²⁶ Hankey and the organization he subsequently represented entered into the political limelight as a target for opponents to the new regime and as a symbol of modernization to its supporters both in the dying days of the First World War and again amidst the downfall of the Lloyd George ministry in 1922.²⁷ Just as a few of Hankey’s contemporaries realized that his role buttoned over a great many duties that should have been beyond his purview, several historians have since also concluded that Hankey was more than he appeared or preferred to let on to varying degrees. For example, while John F. Naylor acknowledged that the informal system allowed Hankey to exercise some influence over policy, he never plumbed the depths of said influence due to his focus on Hankey’s institutional legacy. George H. Cassar’s biography of Asquith follows a similar pattern, wherein he identifies instances of Hankey wielding undue influence over his subject (Asquith) but fails to explore fully this influence because Hankey is merely a subsidiary character in his analysis. Recently, critical research on the Dardanelles by Christopher Bell and Nicholas Lambert, and on British strategy by Matthew Seligmann and David Morgan-Owen, have undermined the validity of the Hankey Myth and thereby spawned the third period of the Hankey Myth wherein its validity has been questioned and undermined.

When Maurice Hankey finally published his memoirs in 1961 - ironically, he had tried to publish them in 1943 only to be blocked by the Churchill government- he invoked the Athenian historian, Thucydides, who chronicled the Peloponnesian War, throughout his work.²⁸ Hankey’s decision to invoke a man, who was and has - for

²⁶ Hankey diary, 16 June 1918, HNKY 1/1; Naylor, *Institution*, 52.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁸ Hankey, *Command*, 1:8; “[Hankey’s] two-volume account of the First World War, *The Supreme Command*, had actually been finished in 1943 but official restrictions on the release of confidential

millennia - been considered the epitome of an impartial historian, was undoubtedly intentional. From the moment he started his journal in 1915 (which serves as the basis for his memoirs) it appears that Hankey, like Thucydides, was aware that he was not only shaping how the events he chronicled would be perceived, but his own reputation as well.

This is evident in the opening paragraph of Hankey's diary, where he states:

For a long time I had felt that my association with many interesting people, and my many experiences as Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence ought not to go entirely unrecorded. Now, as Secretary to the Prime Minister's War Council I find myself directly associated with the central policy of the great European war... I have decided that no further time should be lost and that ... I will jot down from time to time any incidents of historical, political, military or personal interest with which I may be formally connected.²⁹

Hankey's self-awareness of his historiographical impact and subsequent behaviour is indicative of a historical subject who was cognisant that he was building his own reputation and therefore must be regarded with suspicion. During the inter-war years, Hankey acquired control over the Official Histories and utilized the Cabinet Secretariat's powers of censorship for the purpose of "'vetting' ministerial accounts of service."³⁰ In his role as censor that Hankey was able to influence the memoirs of several historical figures, including Winston Churchill and Lloyd George. Hankey was sympathetic to Churchill, allowing him to publish official documents (perhaps because he was contemplating the publication of his own memoirs), while simultaneously influencing him to remove chapters and references that could shine too strong a light on wartime Cabinet decision-making.³¹ Likewise, Hankey actively assisted Lloyd George with the production of his own memoirs and prevailed upon the former prime minister to "tone

information – restrictions that Hankey had a hand in establishing, and that Churchill was evidently happy to enforce – delayed publication until 1961." Bell, Churchill, 349; Naylor, *Institution*, 270-2.

²⁹ Hankey diary, 8 March 1915, HNKY 1/1.

³⁰ Naylor, *Institution*, 119-22

³¹ Bell, *Dardanelles*, 310-11; Naylor, *Institution*, 119.

down his remarks [about Churchill] after he vetted the manuscript.”³² Yet, while Hankey could be generous to those willing to tow the official line, he could equally rebuke those who deviated from it, as in the case of Aston. Overall, Hankey’s actions as censor and controller of the Official Histories are indicative of his desire to control the narrative of the First World War and hints at his growing interest in writing his own memoirs per the example of his superiors. Moreover, even his most sympathetic defenders have acknowledged that despite his claims of modesty, Hankey possessed an overweening sense of vanity that led him to desire greater fame than he was given.³³ Surprisingly, none of this raised red flags for subsequent historians, who have accepted Hankey’s own assertions; instead they argued that their comparison of the diary and memoirs with the cabinet records backed Hankey’s record.³⁴ If they had performed a deeper analysis, however, using documentation such as Asquith’s letters to Venetia Stanley and the diary of Lord Riddell, their perceptions might have been altered.

Hankey’s reputation would be popularized by the work of his official biographer: Captain Stephen Roskill, a retired naval officer who had previously written the official British history of the Royal Navy during the Second World War. In Roskill’s three volume biography, *Hankey: Man of Secrets*, the portrait of Hankey rarely diverges from the image the Cabinet Secretary crafted in his memoirs. As such, Roskill proceeded to reinforce Hankey’s image as a virtuous bureaucrat whose

[V]ast knowledge and experience which [he] accumulated during his thirty years at the centre of affairs, aided and reinforced by an astonishing memory and a capacity for work which never ceased to amaze his colleagues ... not only won

³² Bell, *Dardanelles*, 335.

³³ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

him the confidence of the Monarchs, Ministers and heads of the fighting services, but made him the repository of innumerable confidences.³⁵

Moreover, the biography lauded Hankey for his loyalty to his superiors, his restraint, strategic insights, and role in establishing the modern British form of government with Lloyd George. Roskill equally downplays Hankey's role in the Dardanelles campaign to that of a mere advisor who never actually shaped policy, but merely drafted proposals for the attack and tried to influence his superiors for the better.³⁶ On a strategic level, Roskill is effusive in his praise for Hankey and while more critical than his subject on the development of British grand strategy prior to the conflict, he argues that if not for Hankey and the CID, "Britain would have been almost certainly less prepared for war than she was in 1914."³⁷ Roskill toes Hankey's line about Britain possessing many strategies from which to choose at the start of the conflict. The other major differences between Hankey and Roskill's biographies are a matter of thoroughness and humanity. While it cannot be doubted that Roskill's work is overly favourable and wanting in critical nature, it is comparable to Martin Gilbert's biography of Winston Churchill in the sense that both authors gathered a great deal of information about their subjects. Beyond a high degree of thoroughness, the book also humanizes its subject's virtues and flaws by acknowledging that while Hankey was akin to an "inhuman machine of computer-like efficiency," he was nonetheless a loving family man, whose chief flaw was that he "relished the exercise of power behind the scenes."³⁸ Alas this did little to persuade Roskill to interrogate his subject deeper and as a result he merely cemented the legacy Hankey wanted for himself.

³⁵ Roskill, Hankey, 1:19.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:149-53.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:140-2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:19.

The next major scholarly work directly concerned about Hankey was Naylor's *A Man and an Institution* (1984), which examined the development of the Cabinet Secretariat as an institution through the lens of Hankey's career. The resulting scholarship arrives at a more nuanced portrait of Hankey. However, it remains flawed and decidedly part of the second period of Hankey scholarship due to its prevailing interest in Hankey's institutional legacy and both its reliance upon and unwillingness to challenge Roskill's "magisterial" portrait of Hankey.³⁹ This project must acknowledge that Naylor has identified instances of Hankey influencing decision-makers during the war. However, while Naylor acknowledges that Hankey's indispensability as an advisor in military and administrative affairs allowed him to win the trust of decision-makers, who took his advice seriously, he eschews the idea Hankey actively intrigued to achieve his own strategic or institutional agendas.⁴⁰ For example, while Naylor acknowledges that during the Dardanelles scheme Hankey effectively acted as a wartime counsellor to Asquith, like Roskill before him, Naylor argues that Hankey was never in a real position to influence strategy. Rather, Hankey continued to play the role of a good advisor, who acted as an institutional assistant to those responsible by seeing through their ultimate vision.⁴¹ In this role as an institutional assistant, Naylor goes on to argue that Hankey lent credibility to the idea of establishing a formal Cabinet Secretariat premised on his own informal duties under Asquith once Lloyd George came to power. In time, Hankey's continuing effectiveness ensured that his position, and by extension that of the Cabinet Secretariat, solidified despite the arguments of traditionalists, who perceived Hankey and

³⁹ Naylor, *Hankey*, 5 and 45.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 49-58.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 46-7.

the reform he embodied as detrimental to their own liberal ideas and representative democracy more generally.

While Naylor nicely illustrates the institutional ramifications of Hankey's career, he nonetheless fails to challenge the "Hankey Myth." This is due to Naylor's overriding concern with Hankey's institutional legacy and, as such, Naylor's analysis of Hankey's wartime career, while useful, is ultimately lacking. In this regard, however, Naylor is not alone. His acceptance of and espousal of the "Hankey Myth" reflects a larger trend in scholarship about the period. Most scholarly work touching on Hankey is not informed by a scholarly desire to investigate the career and influence of Maurice Hankey. Instead, these scholars' interest in Hankey and Roskill's work is rooted in their desire to obtain information about other subjects from a supposedly impartial and well-respected source. Examples of this behaviour are too numerous to count, but they include students of "great men" such as George H. Cassar and V. Markham Lester, to students of systemic phenomena such as Robert S. Jordan and to some extent Nicholas Lambert. In nearly every case, Hankey continues to be portrayed as a virtuous bureaucrat concerned by the need for institutional reform, but ultimately is depicted as being either too powerless to act, or if he is granted a modicum of influence, he is depicted as not influential enough to see through his grander ambitions.⁴²

Yet, while these scholars and others like them have reinforced the "Hankey Myth," there have been others who broke from the pack. The most noticeable of these is

⁴² George H. Cassar, *Asquith as War Leader* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1994); V. Markham Lester, *H.H. Asquith: Last of the Romans* (London: Lexington Books, 2019); Robert S. Jordan, "The Contribution of the British Civil Service and Cabinet Secretariat Tradition to International Prevention and Control of War," in *The Limitations of Military Power*, ed. John B. Hattendorf and Malcolm H. Murfett (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 95-110; Nicholas A. Lambert, *Planning for Armageddon: British Economic Warfare and the First World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

Bell's *Churchill and the Dardanelles*. In his study of Churchill's role in the Dardanelles, Bell highlighted the role of other factors and concluded that Hankey enjoyed significantly greater influence over the decision-making process than previously recognized. Specifically, Bell charges that Hankey "used his influence behind the scenes to persuade Asquith and possibly other members of the War Council to release troops to support the naval attack."⁴³ This influence originated, according to Bell, from the trust placed in Hankey's abilities by Asquith, who called upon Hankey for strategic advice and used him in an executive role alongside the omnipresent service ministers, Churchill and Kitchener. Bell's focus on Churchill, however, prevents him from delving deeper into Hankey's role in the wartime government beyond its relation to the Dardanelles campaign and Churchill, an issue which our project shall rectify. Nicholas Lambert challenges the perception that Churchill alone was responsible for the Dardanelles in his book, *The War Lords and the Gallipoli Disaster*. Therein, Lambert completely removes Churchill from the equation and emphasizes, albeit incorrectly, the role of economic forces and peripheral figures such as the Secretary of State for India, Lord Robert Crewe-Milnes, and organizations like the Food Prices Committee. In the process, however, Lambert wrongfully dismisses Hankey's role in the Dardanelles and falls into the same trap as his predecessors by painting him as a toiling bureaucrat with little influence.⁴⁴ Another scholar who questions Hankey's role in the decision-making process is Andrew Lambert, who takes a more hostile approach towards Hankey due to his arguments in favour of Sir Julian Corbett and Admiral Lord Fisher. Nonetheless, while this thesis disagrees with Andrew Lambert's findings it must acknowledge his unorthodox position

⁴³ Bell, *Dardanelles*, 360-1.

⁴⁴ Lambert, *War Lords*, 2-5, 152-3 and 162.

on Hankey's role during the war.⁴⁵ Finally, with respect to outside scholarship concerned with the First World War, four scholars of pre-war British strategy -- Nicholas D'Ombra, David Morgan-Owen, Shawn Grimes, and Matthew Seligmann -- have explored Hankey's role in the development of British pre-war strategy and decision-making institutions. Each of these historians has challenged Hankey's representation of pre-war British strategy and in the process dented the "Hankey Myth." Seligmann represents the general tone of the group by challenging the perception that Britain had a single coherent strategy at the outset of the conflict, let alone multiple strategies to choose from. Instead, Seligmann argues that while Hankey and other pre-war strategists contributed to the theoretical development of maritime strategy, for example, and created war plans, they never produced a *bona fide* strategy.⁴⁶ This thesis, after carefully investigating the literature and researching Hankey's career, agrees with Seligmann's conclusion. Furthermore, beyond being influenced by these scholars' arguments on pre-war strategy, this thesis' arguments about Hankey's strategic and institutional agendas were heavily influenced by the above scholars' works.

This project deviates from the existing literature by adopting a more critical perspective and focusing directly on Hankey and his career under Asquith's wartime Liberal government (1914-5). By shifting the scholarly perspective to investigate Hankey directly, and by regarding his often-larger-than-life contemporaries as secondary actors in his story, this thesis has built upon recent scholarship to re-evaluate Hankey. Beneath the veneer of a loyal and impartial bureaucrat Hankey was in fact the calculating *éminence grise* of the wartime Asquith government. Hankey's position was built upon his

⁴⁵ Lambert, *Way*, 438 n. 4.

⁴⁶ Seligmann, "Prepare", 435-6.

usefulness to Britain's increasingly frustrated and martially disinclined premier, H.H. Asquith, as a military adviser. Hankey's position as a bureaucrat with extensive military knowledge, rather than being an elected official, made him increasingly useful to the politically vigilant Asquith, who in turn rewarded Hankey's usefulness by granting him several unofficial responsibilities. These unofficial responsibilities subsequently transformed Hankey from the secretary of a previously embattled committee into Asquith's military advisor and *de facto* chief of staff. In this unique position, Hankey amassed a great deal of informal influence over the increasingly out-of-depth and frustrated Prime Minister, who had enmeshed himself in an archaic system of governance unsuited for the stresses of modern warfare. Asquith's frustration with the shortcomings of the system and the failings of early British wartime strategy allowed Hankey to advance his own strategic and institutional agendas with varying degrees of success. Hankey accomplished this by using Asquith's growing trust in him; a shifting cohort of political allies; and his unique position as Asquith's interlocutor with the armed services and role as gatekeeper to the Prime Minister. The most notable projects that emerged from this influence was the Dardanelles scheme, which was born in part out of Hankey's fertile mind and nurtured by the secretary until the very machinery of government he sought to reform and yet also manipulate undermined him from within. Other projects which this thesis shall examine as part of our analysis of Hankey's range from his wider strategic initiatives in the Balkans and Middle East to his initial attempts to reconcile "business as usual" with his own maritime-dominated strategic agenda in 1914. Furthermore, Hankey built-up institutional influence through the slow but sure transition of Britain from an informal system of governance towards a more structured and formal

one, despite the constraints imposed by Asquith's unique personality and style of leadership. Yet, ultimately, despite the power Asquith's informal system provided, the machinery was unstable and the flaws in the system inevitably resulted in the system's meltdown at the Dardanelles. This meltdown subsequently allowed Hankey to not only to garner greater influence, as evidenced by the Gallipoli campaign, but also forced him, once the campaign ended in failure, to construct the very myth that later disguised his achievements and propped up those of other men.

Chapter 2: The Pre-War Years

When Admiral “Jacky” Fisher learned that his protégé Maurice Hankey had been appointed as Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) on 1 March 1912, he gleefully wrote to their mutual friend and ally, Reginald Brett, Viscount Esher, “Hankey is better than [Rear Admiral Charles] Ottley [the previous Secretary]. He is Napoleonic!”⁴⁷ Though Fisher’s enthusiasm at Hankey’s appointment can be construed as a mentor’s over-enthusiastic pride in a favoured pupil, Fisher’s letter in fact reflected the wider hopes of a clique within the British political establishment for the CID and the clique’s decision to rest those hopes on Hankey’s shoulders. But what were those hopes? And who made up this group that Hankey would later owe everything to? The answer is that by 1912 the Committee of Imperial Defence had devolved from an institution that was supposed to “consider the larger questions of naval, military, and political co-ordination,” into a fairly impotent committee whose primary “[responsibilities] came to consist of [addressing] issues of technical details that could be resolved by sub-committees.”⁴⁸ For Fisher and Britain’s greatest political fixer and defence enthusiast, Viscount Esher, this situation was intolerable because the advancement of the CID not only served their institutional interests, but also could tip the scales in favour of their preferred strategic doctrine.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Stephen Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets* (3 vols, London: Collins, 1970), 1:112.

⁴⁸ David Morgan-Owen, *The Fear of Invasion: Strategy, Politics, and British War Planning, 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 231.

When the Victorian era ended British military planners feared that other powers would threaten British security and therefore planned accordingly. Prior to 1904 these plans had been predicated on the continuation of the complementary roles played by the Army and Navy, whereby the Army would preserve the colonies and threaten enemy territory in conjunction with the Navy, which would carry out its traditional role as the protector of British maritime trade, move troops where necessary, and isolate the enemy from the sea.⁴⁹ However, as noted by David Morgan-Owen, this traditional “British way” of warfare was challenged when “Britain’s position within the constellation of Great Powers shifted after the conclusion of the Entente Cordiale,” and thereafter “the durability of this precise division of naval and military labour came under strain.”⁵⁰ From here on, the services and various governments were forced to contend with questions about Britain’s military’s commitments to France, in the event of a great Power conflict, and therefore a divide emerged. This divide is often represented as being between two distinct strategic schools of thought: the “continental” and “maritime” schools. Ultimately, while David Morgan-Owen has illustrated this is a flawed dichotomy, they are nonetheless useful labels for summing up the strategic divisions within the defence establishment.⁵¹ The “maritime” school, which was largely made up of naval officers, is best defined by its emphasis on the need for the services to complement each other *via* the undertaking of combined operations, economic warfare, the seizure of colonies and other peripheral operations against any continental power. The “continental” school similarly upheld the principle of the two services complementing one another. However,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

it envisioned the army, rather than the navy, taking the dominant role in British strategy by leading the offensive on the continent while the navy acted in a defensive role.⁵² As a result of these disagreements, both services “engaged in uncooperative, misleading behaviour, and political maneuvering to advance their own agendas.”⁵³ Fisher and Esher were often at the centre of these intrigues and both men recognized in the dilapidated CID an organization which, if revived and captained by a close ally, could co-ordinate military policy between the services and thereby advance a “maritime” strategy. As such, Fisher and Esher decided - despite past transgressions against each other during their long careers - to unite in 1912 once Ottley had resigned to advance their own candidate, Hankey, as his successor.

Esher and Fisher’s support for Hankey’s accession as Secretary to the CID and Fisher’s assertion that Hankey was “Napoleonic” was tied to his meteoric career. Within a span of fourteen years, Hankey had rapidly advanced through the ranks from the Royal Marines to become an intelligence officer with the Naval Intelligence Department (NID) in 1902; thereafter, Hankey became Undersecretary to the CID by 1908 until his final promotion to Secretary in 1912 - despite the availability of more experienced candidates. Key to Hankey’s professional advancement were his personality traits, skills, and strategic outlook. According to then Secretary of State for War, Richard Haldane, Hankey was blessed with great “wisdom, vigilance, imagination and organising ability, coupled with his charm and kindness.”⁵⁴ While all these qualities were important, this project wishes to emphasize the most important aspects of Hankey’s character: his

⁵² *Ibid.*, 229.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁵⁴ Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:117.

intelligence, drive, extensive knowledge of the bureaucracy and of strategy, to say nothing of his discretion. Hankey's knowledge and ability to analyze strategic questions, while certainly aided by his own natural intelligence, were also heavily complemented by his early professional experiences.

Hankey's Strategic and Institutional Agendas

Since his earliest days in the Royal Marines, Hankey demonstrated a fascination with the direction of British grand strategy. This fascination in turn led Hankey to wade into the fraught debates of the period – often on the side of the “maritime” school – by producing several papers that attracted the attention of his superiors and formed the basis of his later strategic agenda. Amongst the most important of these debates was on the question of whether amphibious warfare and peripheral operations should be employed as part of British strategy. Hankey, who was deeply impressed by his service in the Royal Marines, long gravitated towards the usage of amphibious operations and even developed a theory he termed “warfare on the littoral” or “littoral warfare.”⁵⁵ Hankey premised his theory of “littoral warfare” on the inevitability that, in a contest between two naval powers, the superior power assumes “control of the seas,” and thereafter must exploit this control.⁵⁶ “This is especially important in the case of Great Britain,” Hankey argued in one of his many memoranda on the subject, because her “overseas communication could be threatened by the escape of even a few raiding cruisers.”⁵⁷ Hankey further noted that

⁵⁵ Matthew S. Seligmann, “The Special Service Squadron of the Royal Marines: The Royal Navy and Organic Amphibious Warfare capability around 1914.” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 44:5 (2021), 719-20.

⁵⁶ Hankey, Proposals for improving the Constitution our Military Striking Force, 12 December 1906. CAC: HNKY 6/4; Hankey, A Suggested improvement in the Composition of the Military Forces of Great Britain, after 1912, HNKY 7/1.

⁵⁷ Hankey, A Suggested improvement in the Composition of the Military Forces of Great Britain, after 1912, HNKY 7/1; Hankey, Proposals, HNKY 6/4.

historically, the successful surveillance of the enemy ports had been achieved *via* the rapid seizure of an “advanced base.” To that end, Hankey advocated the usage of combined warfare as part of wider peripheral operations, designed to outflank the enemy and deliver a *coup-de-main*. Islands were the preferred site of these operations because “they could easily be defended by 3,000 marines with artillery, wireless and boom defence.”⁵⁸ This argument ran contrary to existing theory because his superiors and colleagues preferred more traditional targets, i.e., overseas colonies and harbours.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Hankey saw in the accomplishment of a *coup-de-main* not only an opportunity for control of the seas, but also “the seizure and preparation of landing-places for the subsequent advance of an army.”⁶⁰ Hankey’s intelligence background and interest in misdirection also caused him to envision the utilization of combined operations to effect a *ruse de guerre* behind enemy lines, thereby drawing enemy forces from the front lines towards the periphery, while the main army delivered the decisive blow.⁶¹ Towards accomplishing these operations, Hankey, who bemoaned the lack of a capable national striking force, argued that “the marines by their organisation and training no less than by their traditions are peculiarly qualified to undertake this responsibility.”⁶²

⁵⁸ Grimes, “Combined Operations”, 870.

⁵⁹ Grimes, “Combined Operations”, 870; Although the “admiralty had adopted an observational strategy involving the employment of islands as advanced bases for British squadrons and flotillas,” (Grimes, “Combined Operations,” 868) prior to 1904, these plans were subordinate and often overruled by more traditional plans for combined operations. Most notably “between 1901 and 1905, the services examined combined operations against France and Russia,” and concluded the best means to defeat both powers were through France’s colonies which “could be used as ‘valuable hostages’ ... Since Russia’s weakness was ‘poverty,’ the loss of France’s colonies and its withdrawal from the conflict would imperil the former’s financial position [French loans],” Grimes, “Combined Operations,” 868. Thereafter, even once the *Entente Cordiale* was approved British combined operations still revolved around amphibious landings targeted at enemy harbours and colonies (see: Grimes, “Combined Operations,” 869-70) and it was only by June 1905 that other planners had re-considered the possibilities offered by islands.

⁶⁰ Parliamentary Papers, Reports of Departmental Committees appointed to consider certain questions concerning the Extension of the New Schemes of Training Officers of the Navy &c. 1906, Cd. 2841.

⁶¹ Hankey, *Command*, 1: 194-6.

⁶² Hankey, Proposals, HNKY 6/4.

After Hankey's transfer to London, he impressed both the Head of the NID's War Division, Captain George Alexander Ballard, and the Assistant Adjutant General, Lieutenant Colonel James Henry Bor, with his initial memorandum entitled, "Advanced Bases for the Fleet," wherein he detailed his theories on littoral warfare and advocated the seizure of islands to serve as advanced bases.⁶³ Less than a year later, in 1905, the First Morocco Crisis reignited old debates about combined operations. As a result, both Hankey and his memorandum came to attention of the highest echelons of the defence hierarchy including, the First Sea Lord, Fisher. The first evidence of Fisher's growing interest in Hankey can be detected in October, when Hankey and Fisher's naval assistant, Captain Thomas Crease, prepared a memorandum entitled "Organisation of an Expeditionary Force." Therein, they advocated for "the extreme usefulness, in case of war, of a small fully equipped Military Expeditionary Force, capable of being launched a few hours after notice."⁶⁴ This force, it continued,

Might be required to take possession of an island, or temporary harbour on the enemy's coast that is to be used as a temporary base for naval operations ... it might be employed in advance of the landing of an army in foreign territory ... to seize some portion of the enemy's territory and hold it.⁶⁵

Clearly this memorandum drew significant inspiration from Hankey's earlier one, as it not only recycled his ideas, but also the very language and justifications which he employed. The most notable of these recycled justifications was Hankey's usage of recent military history, i.e., the Russo-Japanese and Spanish-American Wars, to vindicate his arguments.⁶⁶ Thereafter, the ever-ambitious First Sea Lord wielded said document in

⁶³ Seligmann, "Special Service", 720-1; Grimes, "Combined Operations", 870.

⁶⁴ Crease and Hankey, "Organization of an Expeditionary Force," October 1908. T[he] N[ational] A[rchives of the United Kingdom]: CAB 63/1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ "That such raiding forces are still an essential factor in modern warfare is evident from their employment in the China-Japan, Hispano-American, and Russo-Japanese wars in recent years," *Ibid.* In Hankey's

his quest to prompt the formation of a subcommittee on joint operations and thereby “use the body [the CID] to re-assert the Admiralty’s control of strategic planning.”⁶⁷

Less than a year later, Fisher established committees to explore British strategy and the pursuit of a “maritime” strategy. The most significant of these was the Ballard Committee, a purely Navy rather than CID committee, likely as a reward for his work (despite his junior station) Hankey was named secretary to the committee. There, Hankey and other officers drafted a series of war plans, labelled A-D, dealing with a possible Anglo-German War - with a sub series (A1-D1) in which Britain was allied to France. Ultimately, except for A1, all the plans reflected Hankey’s and Fisher’s vision of utilizing advanced bases in the event of a war.⁶⁸ To that end, the plans relied on joint land and sea power to bring Germany to heel, often with the Royal Marines seizing North Sea islands, the Navy blockading Germany, and even a series of *coups-de-main* against the enemy.⁶⁹ Beyond its continuing devotion to combined operations and advanced bases, the Ballard Committee also operated on another key principle: the Baltic scheme. “On Fisher’s instructions, doubtless, plans were also investigated for blockading Kiel, the easterly German Baltic ports, and the German North Sea ports,” all of which formed the basis of a major offensive plan dubbed the Baltic scheme.⁷⁰ Although Fisher’s name has become synonymous with the scheme, his actual devotion to it as a legitimate military stratagem

memorandum on advanced bases “using historical examples from previous conflicts most notably the Sino-Japanese and Spanish-American War – he stressed that a blockading fleet would require proximate advanced bases ... he now fleshed out the force that would be needed for such a lodgment. Arguing that this force be made up exclusively of Marines on the grounds that there was no other military unit ready for the role ... In compiling this roster, he drew heavily on reports of recent maneuvers conducted by the United States Marine Corps in Subic Bay in the Philippines.” Seligmann, “Special Service,” 721.

⁶⁷ Morgan-Owen, *Invasion*, 126.

⁶⁸ Grimes, “Combined Operations,” 876-8.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 877-8.

⁷⁰ Mackay, *Fisher*, 367; Lambert, *Way*, 437-8.

is controversial. Whereas some historians such as Andrew Lambert argue that Fisher was a true believer in the scheme, Ruddock Mackay has presented evidence that Fisher used the scheme as a strategic boogeyman to frighten the Germans and likewise as political leverage within the Admiralty to achieve the more accomplishable aspects of his agenda such as the build-up of the fleet.⁷¹ Ultimately, however, Fisher's real views are obscured because "no systemic account of [Fisher's views] was ever recorded," and it shall remain the subject of continuing controversy.⁷² Whatever Fisher's motivations, it cannot be denied that combined operations were part of the Admiralty's wider efforts to consolidate strategic planning in its own hands *via* the CID and moreover tilt the scales in favour of a "maritime" strategy. Yet while the members of the Ballard Committee, including Hankey, shared in these wider goals, they nonetheless realized that such operations were not without severe difficulties. Specifically, the committee "agreed that close blockade, with its increasing attendant dangers in the form of mines and torpedoes, should be avoided; and coastal landings were likewise deprecated."⁷³ To soften these findings for its patron, the committee "recommended that, if attempted at all, these operations should be concerted with the French."⁷⁴

Even after committee's findings highlighted the enormous risks and pitfalls posed by the operations Fisher desired, neither he nor Hankey completely ruled them out as a viable strategy.⁷⁵ Rather, in Hankey's case, "as early as 1906 I had formed the opinion

⁷¹ Grimes, "Combined Operations," 866-7; Seligmann, "Special Service," 716-7.

⁷² Mackay, *Fisher*, 367.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ "The first sea lord's correspondence and pronouncements extolling amphibious operations in either a first strike or deterrent capacity are likewise significant. Fisher again revealed this philosophy in meetings of the 1908 overseas attack subcommittee which came together with the D.M.O. – D.N.I.'s discussions over a Danish expedition. Previous studies have also overlooked a pre-existing strategic policy upon which Fisher built ... on Britain's traditional employment of amphibious warfare ... While there was undoubtedly an

that the [Baltic] plan could not be accomplished unless carried out as a *coup de main* at the very outset of the war.”⁷⁶ So long as such a combined operation was performed under the correct circumstances, Hankey was more than willing to support it. Yet, if such circumstances were unfavourable, his support was easily withdrawn in favour of a distant blockade until favourable circumstances emerged.

Hankey’s internalization and continued espousal of the “maritime” school and maritime operations here was further supplemented by his experiences as an intelligence officer. One of the most formative of these experiences occurred while Hankey was on an intelligence gathering mission in the Near East and more specifically the Ottoman Empire. There, Hankey - a devoted Hellenophile – abhorred Ottoman rule and was interested in the development of a combined strategy against the Ottoman Empire, which he perceived, like so many of his contemporaries, as a weak power and an empire in decline.⁷⁷ When Hankey was sent to tour the strategic Dardanelles, he later recorded that

During the journey up and down the Dardanelles I made such scrutiny of the defences as possible from the ship, enlisting the assistance of the most able officers of the fleet. We all agreed that they [The Dardanelles] could not be forced by a naval attack, and I reported accordingly to the Admiralty.⁷⁸

Here, as with the Baltic scheme, while Hankey recognized the pitfalls posed by such an ambitious operation, he nonetheless saw an enormous opportunity in utilizing combined operations (under the right circumstances) against the Ottomans. Hankey was encouraged by his superiors who, he noted, entertained projects “for defending the Suez Canal against Turkish aggression ... and for occupying certain Turkish islands by parties landed

economist strain underlying the admiralty’s pre-1914 strategy, combined operations were also a central component.” Grimes, “Combined Operations,” 884.

⁷⁶ Hankey, *Command*, 1:241-2.

⁷⁷ Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:44

⁷⁸ Hankey, *Command*, 1:42.

by the Mediterranean fleet.”⁷⁹ Hankey’s work on littoral warfare was not only focused on the necessity of utilizing combined operations against Germany, but also the recognition that such operations “require the co-operation of a small force on shore.”⁸⁰ Hankey understood that for any of these combined operations to be accomplishable, whether they were performed in the North Sea or Mediterranean, institutional backing was also required. To that end, many of his early proposals were predicated on the “consideration of the Committee of Imperial Defence,” because Hankey felt that the CID was the best body to resolve questions “involving radical changes in constitution of a portion of our national striking force and affecting both the Navy and Army.”⁸¹ We can detect here the beginnings of Hankey’s famed institutional agenda from which sprouted not only his desire to reform the CID, but also the eventual wartime institutional reforms that birthed the Cabinet Secretariat. However, if Hankey wanted to accomplish both his strategic and institutional agendas, he required powerful backers. Fortunately for Hankey, his work as strategist and advocacy for institutional reform had won him the attention of potentially powerful patrons.

Overall, Hankey’s positions on the strategy and the importance of the CID did much to strengthen his professional relationships and advance his career. The most important connection that these positions and his own natural abilities fostered was with Fisher. Long regarded as everything from a larger-than-life prophet of naval reform to a vindictive and arrogant evil-genius (or just vindictive and arrogant), Fisher cast a long

⁷⁹ Hankey, Proposals, HNKY 6/4; Maurice Hankey, Russia and Constantinople, 11 March 1915. TNA: CAB-24-1-11.

⁸⁰ Hankey, Proposals, HNKY 6/4.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

shadow over history and for our purposes Hankey's career.⁸² For although, as Hankey later wrote, "until I came to the Committee of Imperial Defence I had not known him intimately ... he later told me, he had watched my career."⁸³ Fisher was deeply impressed by Hankey's abilities during the First Morocco Crisis and per his habit of cultivating useful subordinates, subsequently arranged for Hankey to come under his "close supervision" during the Ballard Committee.⁸⁴ By 1908, Hankey, who was now serving as assistant secretary to the CID, recognized that he "at least in part ... owed his appointment to Fisher."⁸⁵ In return, Hankey intervened at numerous points in Fisher's favour and Fisher freely adopted and promoted Hankey's ideas at numerous points. Another example of this behaviour was Fisher's adoption (however emasculated) of Hankey's principle establishing a naval staff to placate Haldane and other members of the Admiralty.⁸⁶ This was by no means unusual behaviour on either Fisher or Hankey's part. Rather, it outlines the beginning of a complex master-mentee relationship, often defined by *quid pro quo* deals between the two men. This type of relationship was not uncommon to Fisher, who, while certainly cunning, was technically, rather than strategically brilliant, and therefore relied on the borrowed strategic brilliance of his subordinates to burnish his own larger than life reputation. Hankey, in turn, although impressed by Fisher's "genius," was by no means unaware of Fisher's flaws. Hankey subsequently used his strategic insights and natural charm to fully gain Fisher's trust during the future secretary's time as

⁸² Mackay, *Fisher*, 421-2; Winston S. Churchill, *Great Contemporaries*, 'Lord Fisher and His Biographer' (London: Reader's Union., 1939), 333-42.

⁸³ Hankey, *Command*, 1:72.

⁸⁴ Mackay, *Fisher*, 370; Hankey, *Command*, 1:72-3.

⁸⁵ Mackay, *Fisher*, 415; Hankey, *Command*, 1:72.

⁸⁶ Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:99-100; Mackay, *Fisher*, 415-6.

at the NID and later as Assistant Secretary to the CID. By 1910, the fruits of these efforts were made evident to Roskill, who noted that

[Fisher] decided that Hankey could be a useful ally. At any rate on 15th April he wrote to invite Hankey to join “a small bachelor’s party [sic]” at Kilverstone. That letter started a correspondence which was to last almost to the day of Fisher’s death in 1920, and which rapidly developed in intimacy – and in indiscretion. By the beginning of 1911 Fisher’s usual mode of address had warmed to “My beloved Hankey”, and he was energetically canvassing [Hankey’s] claims to succeed Ottley.⁸⁷

While Fisher gained strategic insights that eluded him, Hankey was able convince the Fisher to lend his reputation as to strategic ideas that would not have garnered attention from higher-ranking elements of the hierarchy otherwise. Moreover, as Fisher’s trust in Hankey’s abilities and personal affection for Hankey grew, he eagerly advanced the latter’s career, much to Hankey’s benefit, because he desired a close ally at the CID. Hankey’s proximity to Fisher subsequently, as we shall see below, offered him an opportunity to learn the arts of intrigue from Fisher and paved the way for Hanky to meet his other great political mentor: Lord Esher.

Esher, who met Hankey during his time at the NID (Naval Intelligence Department), favoured Hankey because he “was ‘sound’ on the two concerns Esher held dear – the importance of a maritime strategy and the development of the co-operative principle in imperial defence.”⁸⁸ Moreover, it appears that their mutual friendship with Ottley and Fisher further deepened their relationship and overall alliance.⁸⁹ As such, when Ottley failed to achieve Esher’s ends at the CID and Hankey began carrying out more and more of his despondent chief’s duties, Esher recognized that Hankey would be

⁸⁷ Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:108-9.

⁸⁸ Nicholas D’Ombrain, *War Machinery and High Policy: Defence Administration in Peacetime Britain, 1902-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 198.

⁸⁹ “[Hankey’s] favour in Fisher’s eyes had brought him to Esher’s attention. The latter became Hankey’s patron.” *Ibid.*, 197.

Ottley's eventual successor. Perhaps the most important factor behind Hankey's eventual succession, though, was Fisher, to whom Hankey demonstrated great deference. This deference in turn appears to have motivated the wily old admiral to canvass support for Hankey's accession to the Secretariat as it became increasingly clear that Ottley's days were numbered.⁹⁰ By the time Ottley resigned, Hankey had, through the machinations of Fisher and his own natural talents, amassed a sizable camp of supporters. To that effect Roskill informs us that:

Hankey's appointment was on the whole well-received by the Press ... Among the congratulations which came to Hankey were letters from Haldane and Colonel J.E.B. Seely, who was about to succeed Haldane at the War Office ... Such warmth from the head of one of the two great departments of state with which Hankey was bound to be chiefly augured well for the future ... [Moreover] [w]hen Hankey took over the office of secretary he was already assured the support of many leading politicians – including Haldane, Esher, [Home Secretary Reginald] McKenna and Seely [and] [former Prime Minister Arthur] Balfour.⁹¹

Indeed, from Roskill's perspective and given Hankey's aptitude, it seemed like his tenure as Secretary should have proven Napoleonic from the onset. However, this was not the case. Instead, Roskill's version of events once more disguises a much more difficult road Hankey had to take as he rose within the government.

Hankey's accession as Secretary to the CID was hardly as smooth as Roskill presented it. In truth, rather than ascending to the position with the clear support of the bulk of Britain's political establishment, the news of Hankey's meteoric rise was met with a mixture of confusion, indifference, and outright suspicion. The only real enthusiasm came from those close to him (Esher and Fisher). The chief source of the establishment's ambivalence towards Hankey was his "youth," "unknown quality," and

⁹⁰ Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:110-2.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1:116-117.

“lack of prestige,” and the fact he owed his promotion to Fisher and Esher, all of which denied him the accomplished reputations enjoyed by his predecessors.⁹² Reputation and prestige were essential in contemporary British politics, given that only a select few were allowed into the higher echelons of government and it was the connections these offered that could make or break an individual’s career. Already Ottley, despite his glittering reputation as a distinguished admiral, who enjoyed the friendships of Esher and the Secretary of State for War, Haldane, had tried and failed to capitalize on his prestige and connections to advance the CID.⁹³ Likewise, Lord Esher despite his deep connections to the royal family and status as Britain’s predominant political “fixer” had faced an uphill battle advancing the CID. For all Hankey’s talents, he was already dealt a glaring handicap, which weighed on Esher, who wrote to Fisher, ““I agree Hankey is first class, but I am not yet sure he will carry the necessary weight. You know how personality counts in this world. He doesn’t look Napoleonic.””⁹⁴

Asquith’s subsequent approval of Hankey’s appointment owed everything to the Prime Minister’s indifference to who was appointed so long as they enjoyed Esher’s support (for the primary purpose of maintaining Esher’s political support).⁹⁵ Outside 10 Downing Street, Hankey, after initially being subjected to Churchill’s suspicion, was given a lukewarm reception at the Admiralty because,

[Churchill] accepted Hankey as an unknown factor, being more concerned – or so he told Fisher – with the propriety in which Noble [an armaments manufacturer] procured Ottley’s [post-retirement] services. This was a predictable reaction because, beyond the very narrow confines of the tasks of an Assistant Secretary of the C.I.D., Hankey’s name was hardly known.⁹⁶

⁹² D’Ombrain, *Machinery*, 199.

⁹³ D’Ombrain, *Machinery*, 14 and 201.

⁹⁴ Quoted in D’Ombrain, *Machinery*, 199.

⁹⁵ D’Ombrain, *Machinery*, 271.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 199.

At the War Office, Haldane and his eventual successor, Colonel J.E.B. Seely, sent Hankey warm letters upon his accession not because they were impressed by him but because “it appeared Hankey had started out with the essential benefit of being ‘*persona graitissima*.’”⁹⁷ Therefore, D’Ombrain’s assessment of Hankey as “a cautious junior officer appointed to a post which, in normal circumstances, would have been beyond his reach,” is far more accurate than Roskill’s assertion that Hankey was all but acclaimed to the position.⁹⁸ Hankey was conscious of his shortcomings, and he subsequently used his charm and knowledge to impress his new superiors. For example, during an interview with Haldane, Hankey adeptly handled himself when,

Haldane then observed that I was very young for such an important post. ‘When you were my age, Sir,’ I replied, ‘you were a Queen’s Counsel and rising politician’ ... Haldane then sprung on me the question – ‘What would you do if you received this appointment?’ I launched into a long programme of defensive preparations, which needed urgent attention, and ended with two wider suggestions which gripped Haldane’s imagination and which he discussed for some time.⁹⁹

While Hankey worked to make a good impression on the ministers, Esher sought to improve his protégé’s reputation to give him the political weight necessary to advance the CID’s cause. To that end, Esher, and Fisher, both worked to expand Hankey’s network of allies through their own connections. A clear example of how far Esher was willing to go to ensure Hankey gained prestige was a failed attempt “to procure a Knighthood for Hankey in the 1912 birthday honours [instead] he was only made a Commander of the [Order of the] Bath.”¹⁰⁰ Likewise, Fisher worked to encourage friendly relations between

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁹⁹ Hankey, *Command*, 1:55.

¹⁰⁰ Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:117.

Hankey and his allies in government, most notably Winston Churchill.¹⁰¹ In time the benefits of these actions would become clear, as by 1914 Hankey had amassed a sizable network of real political supporters and contacts beyond Fisher and Esher. However, in 1912 this network was still developing and while Hankey was eager to advance the CID, he was forced to act within the constraints of what connections he then possessed.

Hankey as Secretary

Following his appointment as Secretary to the CID, it became abundantly clear to Hankey that no bureaucratic Austerlitz (to borrow Fisher's Napoleon comparison) would occur in the immediate future. Instead, Hankey's memoirs reveal that the newly-appointed Secretary quickly concluded that the CID's growing impotence was the direct result of Asquith's decision to invite politically convenient, but militarily inept, newcomers into the organization. This had the effect of undermining the organization's efficiency and general function due to the sheer number of regular attendees, which made the whole body unwieldy and resulted in the delegation of its business to a growing number of subcommittees.¹⁰² As a result, Hankey quickly embraced the view that a gradual approach was necessary to achieve the CID's aims. Hankey makes this view obvious in a letter to Fisher regarding Esher, dated 8 May 1912. In the letter it quickly becomes apparent that the master was more impatient than the student for reform, as evidenced by how Hankey vented to Fisher:

[Esher] is very eager to do away with *ad hoc* committees and to concentrate everything in a single permanent sub-committee of fixed membership, which would swallow all the defence policy of the country. This will not take place in my time as Secretary! It would be absolutely ruinous. The permanent officials

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1:118.

¹⁰² Hankey, *Command*, 1:48.

could not possibly spare the time ... and would boycott us. We would be perpetually treading on the toes of the Admiralty and War Office.¹⁰³

In *lieu* of Esher's scheme to brazenly place influence in the CID's hands, at the cost the eternal enmity of the major ministries, Hankey preferred a subtler course of action. Specifically, in his letter to Fisher, Hankey explained that he intended to take the "best parts" of Esher's scheme to advance the organization without treading on toes. To that effect, Hankey planned to capitalize on the CID "Co-ordination" subcommittee's successful completion of the War Book to make the sub-committee permanent under the chairmanship of both the Admiralty and War Office. The War Book's importance to Hankey and the CID rested in its role as Britain's detailed guide through "every step that had to be undertaken both by the central government and by individual departments should a period of strained relations result in the adoption of ... the 'Precautionary Stage,' and in the event of war being declared."¹⁰⁴ By controlling the maintenance of the War Book, Hankey hoped to engender true co-operation between the services through the War Book's maintenance and use the more harmonious subcommittee to review and accomplish prior work left unfinished by its parent body. Finally, Hankey hoped to strengthen and expand the nascent body's duties by adding Dominion representatives, charged with writing a War Book for the British Empire as a whole. To that end, Hankey also planned to intrigue while he was at a conference in Canada in 1913 and win over Esher, the Colonial Secretary Lewis Harcourt, and Haldane to his scheme.¹⁰⁵

Hankey's counter-scheme to Esher's own is highly revealing about his overall position, ambitions, and techniques in 1912. Instead of immediately souring the well (as

¹⁰³ Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:119.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:107.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:119-120.

Esher suggested with his more forceful plan), Hankey's strategy would have allowed him to both side-step the frequently inactive and cumbersome CID and instead make policy through a leaner and more effective series of subcommittees. Moreover, Hankey confirmed his intention to control this multitude of subcommittees here: "I dare say we shall have another Owen Commission," an immensely unpopular joint committee on naval defences and bases due to its decisions and whose ominous reputation Hankey strove to avoid by getting "one of my assistants appointed secretary, so as to keep them on the rails."¹⁰⁶ Through his candid letter to Fisher we see Hankey's vision for influencing policy and retaining the power of the CID. However, while Hankey's strategy was designed to advance the CID's influence gradually by garnering more and more useful allies, it was flawed in several regards. If Hankey expected Esher simply to acquiesce to his watered-down strategy, he was gravely mistaken. Instead of fully supporting his protégé, the old political fixer immediately informed Hankey:

That unless he would agree to do as [Esher] asked regarding the subcommittee, the establishment of which [Asquith] had already approved, he feared that they would have "come to a parting of ways." Esher sought Haldane's support, pointing out that unless Hankey did as Asquith had directed it would reflect badly on the new Secretary and therefore the C.I.D.¹⁰⁷

Ultimately, however, Esher's threats came to nothing, because Asquith's laxity, combined with Haldane's preference for Hankey's less radical scheme, quickly undermined his threats forcing Esher to concede and reconciled with Hankey.

Nonetheless, while Hankey seemingly gained a valuable ally in Haldane, it is abundantly clear that the War Minister's generosity would only go so far. Upon reviewing Haldane's tenure at the War Office, D'Ombraïn realized that the war minister was engaging in a

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:120.

¹⁰⁷ D'Ombraïn, *Machinery* 268.

pattern of manipulation towards champions of the CID for his own ends. According to D’Ombrain’s work:

Haldane’s pragmatic agreement with Esher about the steering committee proposal ... in no way reduced his opposition to the C.I.D. as too large and diverse a body to direct national defence. He continued to favour the creation of an executive ministry. He could, therefore, hardly have looked other than askance at Esher’s ambition to expand the membership of the already bloated main Committee to include Dominion representation.¹⁰⁸

Continuing with this line of thought, D’Ombrain goes on to argue that

Haldane [had] supported Esher [and the CID], but only “to the extent of making the Co-ordination Committee part of the official machinery.” Thus his support counted for little, because he was only prepared to see the expansion of the technical activities of the C.I.D., rather than see the establishment of a steering committee as proposed by Esher.¹⁰⁹

In many regards Haldane appears to have transferred the attitude he took with Esher onto Hankey, often throwing Hankey the odd bone, but never fully backing him in his own ambitions, most likely out of fear for his own position. As such, while Hankey might have gained greater technical responsibilities through this arrangement, the War Office’s support for an actual expansion of the CID’s policy-making powers was nil. Rather, Haldane likely hoped that the marginal favour he showered on Hankey would transform the CID into a useful piece in his own game of departmental brinksmanship with Churchill and the Navy.¹¹⁰ Interestingly, despite Haldane’s best efforts to transform Hankey and the CID into the War Office’s agent, the young Secretary managed to stay in the good graces of both the Navy and Army.¹¹¹ However, while Hankey maintained cordial relations with both sides, his own pre-war schemes to advance the CID came to nothing. Instead, while the CID gained greater technical responsibilities because of its

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 248-249.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 260.

¹¹¹ Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:19.

secretary's politicking, Hankey was never able to realize the CID's full potential or establish a truly unified pre-war imperial grand strategy. In many regards this was hardly due to Hankey's political skills, but rather a stacked deck of systemic factors which bred smaller more individual obstacles, all of which made reform impossible during the pre-war period. Above all else, however, the greatest obstacle to Hankey and his allies' ambitions for the CID was none other than Hankey's relationship with Asquith.

Hankey's failure to secure a strong relationship with the prime minister was a blow to the cause of pre-war defence reform for a variety of reasons, the most notable being that the Prime Minister was the only official vested with the executive authority necessary to promote the organization. Unfortunately for Hankey and his supporters, however, Asquith and his predecessor, Henry Campbell-Bannerman, "through a combination of ideological, political, and personal factors ... abdicated the responsibility ... for preparing the defences of the Empire," because "neither man possessed the interest in or aptitude for issues of defence."¹¹² The root of this neglect, meanwhile, was deeply tied to the soul of the Liberal Party. According to Cassar, "Liberals were traditionally protagonists of peace. Their interests centred on social issues and they were inclined towards isolationism."¹¹³ Nonetheless a section of the Party, the Liberal Imperialists, took a more "aggressive" line by Liberal standards and therefore raising the threat of a party split. In many regards, then, it was hardly surprising that Asquith's premiership's primary focus was on maintaining the unity (and thereby electoral supremacy) of the Liberal Party over military matters. While this focus may seem odd in hindsight, in contemporary terms it was in many regards the necessary attitude a Liberal Party leader had to take

¹¹² Morgan-Owen, *Invasion*, 230.

¹¹³ Cassar, *Asquith*, 19.

during the period, because the Liberals owed their electoral viability to their status as a big tent party for the Edwardian centre-left. If Asquith had been a more martially inclined premier, any attempt to bolster the military at the (perceived) expense of social funding could have been grounds for the Radicals to break ranks and join the nascent Labour Party or overthrow Asquith in favour of a Radical premier. Likewise, however, Asquith still had to appease the Liberal Imperialists (with whom he shared a number of traditional assumptions) and therefore had to balance their competing interests with those of the Radicals.¹¹⁴ This was particularly problematic between 1911 and 1914 because the Liberals only enjoyed a single seat advantage over the Conservatives and therefore had to rely on the support of either the Labour Party or Irish Nationalists to pass legislation.¹¹⁵ With all this in mind it is unsurprising Asquith entrusted military matters, including the CID, to loyal subordinates and experts (Haldane, McKenna, Churchill, Seely, and Esher) out of a recognition that he knew little and cared even less about these affairs – unless they jeopardized the *status quo*. The reality of Asquith's lack of interest in the committee is made plain by how, “the full Committee met on a total of only thirteen occasions between January 1912 and the summer of 1914.”¹¹⁶ Moreover, Asquith's indifference coupled with his need to preserve the *status quo* between the Radicals and Liberal Imperialists, to say nothing of his preference for the old system, can be detected in two notable incidents. In 1911, after limited meetings of the CID, the prime minister - much

¹¹⁴ “For although Asquith had little time and no patience for defence matters, he was well aware of the careful balancing act between the factions in his Cabinet on which his premiership relied.” D’Ombraim, *Machinery*, 246; “The Liberal Imperialists (Grey, Asquith, Haldane, Fowler) preached a programme of national efficiency, imperialism, and social reform” Zara Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, first ed. (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977), 6; David French, *British Strategy & War Aims, 1914-1916* (London: Unwin & Allen, 1986), 1-2.

¹¹⁵ Cassar, *Asquith*, 4.

¹¹⁶ D’Ombraim, *Machinery*, 265.

to the rancour of the Radicals – tried to balance Britain’s political needs and Liberal unity with the needs of British defence planning. While this might have been expected to result in the continuation of the long-held “British way” of warfare, the government was unable to navigate the “unpalatable options of providing direct military support to France or imperilling diplomatic ties with Paris by pursuing a maritime strategy.”¹¹⁷ The inability to define the government’s strategic aims in tandem with the failure of the Admiralty to properly articulate its preferred strategy, represented a tentative (but not firm) step towards the adoption of Britain’s so called “continental commitment” prior to the outbreak of the First World War.

The “British way” reflected Britain’s historical strategy in the event of a conflict since the time of Napoleon, if not long before, wherein:

The Royal Navy would control global sea communications, ensuring the continuation of Britain’s lifeblood of trade, contact with her colonies, and security for the home islands. The Army would provide vital garrisons for vital naval installations and the most valuable colonies and would also constitute a modest “striking force.”¹¹⁸

However, while the Liberals accepted this tradition of British strategy, the Liberal Party’s internal politics precluded it from articulating or endorsing “a coherent vision for how it envisaged bringing a future Great Power to a conclusion before the outbreak of the First World War.”¹¹⁹ Most notably the Liberal Party’s preference for laissez-faire economics and social reform, precluded the possibility of the necessary economic interference required to produce a grand strategy. Furthermore, the Party’s Radical wing opposed any

¹¹⁷ David Morgan-Owen, “Cooked up in the Dinner Hour? Sir Arthur Wilson’s War Plan, Reconsidered,” *English Historical Review* 130:545 (2015), 905.

¹¹⁸ Morgan-Owen, *Invasion*, 7

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

discussion of military commitments to France after the *Entente Cordiale*, as evidenced by how in 1911:

When ... the Radical members of the Cabinet learned of the [pro-military] proceedings ... [they were] furious ... An initial row escalated into a potential split in the Cabinet between the Liberal Imperialists ... and their Radical colleagues ... Asquith defused the situation by agreeing no military commitments should be entered without the approval of Cabinet and by placing seemingly strict limits on the General Staff.¹²⁰

The result of these internal political divisions was that while the successive Bannerman-Campbell and Asquith premierships were by no means pacifistic, they were more focused “on defending British interests, rather than how to achieve victory in war with a great power.”¹²¹ Subsequently, despite the opposition of the Navy and political leadership towards committing the entirety of the Army to the Continent there were several factors that by the outbreak of the war ensured a “continental” strategy took precedence. First and foremost, amongst these factors was:

The steady development of German naval power, the fortification of Heligoland, and other stretches of the North Sea coastline, and the challenges posed by the developments in submarine and torpedo technology had rendered aggressive inshore operations on the far side of the North Sea highly problematic for the Royal Navy.¹²²

Moreover, although opponents of a “continental commitment” frequently cited the fear of an invasion, thereby underscoring the necessity of maintaining a stronger defensive force on the British Isles, these efforts proved fruitless. When these were combined with successive First Sea Lords’ refusals “to acknowledge military advice that the operations they contemplated were not realistic and failing to make adequate preparations to conduct them,” it was inevitable that they alienated even their closest supporters.¹²³ In 1911, the

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 203.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 202.

First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Arthur K. Wilson, acted as a spokesperson for implementation of a strategy of close blockade and even amphibious operations in the event of war with Germany.¹²⁴ Ultimately, while these strategies were sounder than previously realized, Wilson was unable to properly articulate the practicality of these operations or illustrate his ability to work in concert with the War Office.¹²⁵ As a result, although the new First Lord of the Admiralty, Churchill, supported the Navy and combined operations, he nonetheless recognized his subordinates' failings and "preferred to increase the size of the Army as a whole," thereby betraying his "continental" sympathies.¹²⁶ Moreover, when Hankey and the CID were called upon to investigate the opposing views of the Admiralty and Army regarding the retention of British forces they came down in favour of retaining only one division. Hankey, while cognizant of the Admiralty's shortcomings, nonetheless remained true to his "maritime" sympathies here by utilizing this opportunity to address the Prime Minister and advance the new First Lord's idea of a "flying column" of Royal Marines, which although intended for home defence could simultaneously be used for combined operations such as the seizure of an advanced base.¹²⁷ Ultimately, while Hankey and Churchill may have intended to support the development of combined operations here, their decisions ensured the subsequent prioritization of sending the Army to France. Yet even this prioritization and the apparent victory of the "continentalists" was complicated by the politics of the era. Specifically, the Asquith government's desire for compromise and the infighting between the services ensured that "beyond the diplomatic imperative to support France, the

¹²⁴ Morgan-Owen, "Wilson," 884-9 and 903-6.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 874-5.

¹²⁶ Morgan-Owen, *Invasion*, 207-212; Seligmann, "Special Service," 732-34.

¹²⁷ Morgan-Owen, *Invasion*, 220-1; Seligmann, "Special Service," 725.

government had no concrete conception of how to fight a war against Germany and had made no serious endeavour to prepare the Army to confront a European foe.”¹²⁸ Thus, military’s strongest asset, the Navy, was transformed into a purely defensive implement and the Army, while seemingly vindicated, was not prepared for what was to come and therefore fell short when war began in 1914.

Beyond the strategic consequences of the government’s laxity on defence, Asquith’s decisions also had institutional consequences. One of the most consequential of these political decisions was Asquith’s political strategy of dangling membership in the CID as a political reward for the Radicals to placate them.¹²⁹ For Asquith this decision had few real consequences because he never placed much stock in the CID to begin with, and as a direct result the system did not undergo any real reform to ready it for a modern and total war. Instead, Asquith happily presided over the further entrenchment of a *status quo* predicated in part on an outmoded military strategy with Napoleonic origins and the continuation of an informal and highly devolved system of governance. This attitude was fully on display during the Prime Minister’s brief intervention in the Army-Navy rivalry when Churchill proposed to create “a ‘Naval War Circle,’ which would combine the functions necessary for all the departments of state in war planning under his own leadership.”¹³⁰ Asquith viewed Churchill’s schemes as dangerous to the *status quo* in Cabinet and intervened, “telling Churchill that ‘his Circle was still-born.’”¹³¹ Inevitably, Asquith’s lack of interest in defence, combined with his willingness to intervene only

¹²⁸ Morgan-Owen, *Invasion*, 226.

¹²⁹ “Haldane complained to Esher that Asquith had so enlarged the C.I.D. that he suspected him of adding extraneous ministers simply to please them, without regard for the best interests of the C.I.D.” D’Ombrain, *Machinery* 270.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 262.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 263.

when politically expedient, created a void within the British defence establishment that was exploited by more involved parties – often to the detriment of the CID and the cause of defence reform more generally.

The CID's major advocates (Hankey, Esher, and Ottley) were well-aware that prime ministerial support was necessary to revive the CID, but they were also more than aware that the Prime Minister was ambivalent about their work.¹³² Hankey and Ottley differed on how to rectify this problem. Ottley's solution was not to waste his energies on Asquith, instead focusing on more involved parties; Hankey by contrast still regarded a relationship with Asquith as the best means to advance the CID and as such pursued a relationship with him. From here on the histories diverge on how successful Hankey had been in acquiring a pre-war relationship with Asquith. According to Roskill, Hankey and the Asquiths were:

Soon on very cordial and confidential terms, and in old age [Mrs. Asquith] recalled with nostalgia her happy memories of the days before and during World War One when Hankey had lunched or dined with them several times a week in intimate privacy.¹³³

By presenting this rosy portrait of events, Roskill ensures that Hankey's reputation remains unblemished and is in fact enhanced by exaggerating Hankey's importance to Asquith during the pre-war years. However, there is no evidence that Hankey and Asquith's relationship ever exceeded beyond a polite, but distant and professional one prior to the war. To begin with, Hankey's dinners with Asquith were a professional courtesy on the Asquiths' part to a busy subordinate, who was under the formal

¹³² "Esher continued to try and prod [Ottley] into a more continuous and forceful contact with the Prime Minister. But to the end Ottley regarded his relationship with the man he was responsible as merely 'occasional' ... [O]n occasion he let the mask slip, complaining, for example, of Asquith's disinterest and his own inadequate relationship with the Prime Minister." *Ibid.*, 244-245.

¹³³ Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:118.

obligation of updating his uninterested chief on the activities of the CID and who met the necessary social qualifications required to dine with them. Furthermore, while Roskill gives evidence that Hankey was present at official social functions that the Asquiths also attended during this period, there is no evidence Hankey was ever invited with their close friends to any Asquith retreats (the hallmark of their inner circle).¹³⁴ Likewise, Hankey is not referenced in the Prime Minister's voluminous (and very candid) letters to his lover, Venetia Stanley, until after the war began. Furthermore, Margot Asquith, H.H. Asquith's wife, makes no reference to Hankey in her diary until May 1915.¹³⁵ When all this information is combined with the lack of favour Asquith bestowed on either Hankey or the CID during this period – in sharp contrast with his habit of interfering on behalf of friends and allies – and Hankey's constant attempts to win Asquith's favour, it becomes obvious that Roskill was embellishing the nature of their relationship.¹³⁶

For the present project, the repercussions of Asquith's distant relationship with the British defence establishment were all the result of his insulated career in the British domestic establishment and his Victorian values. The historian James Joll argued that all people, including major decision-makers, are heavily influenced by several unspoken assumptions borne from their upbringing, social background, education, and using this

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Asquith to Stanley, 30 July 1914, *Letters*, 134; Margot Asquith, 21 May 1915, ed. Michael and Eleanor Brock, *Margot Asquith's Great War Diary, 1914-1916: The View from Downing Street* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 136.

¹³⁶ Despite Roskill's attempts to present Hankey as being on close terms with Asquith after 1912, by using Hankey's letters to his wife, Adeline, it becomes abundantly clear that Hankey's attempts were more akin to a desperate courtier trying to gain his chief's favour. For instance, on a government trip to the Scottish bases Hankey described how "I gave the P.M. a private and personal lecture on the subject of the Forth defences, and completely won him and Winston to my point of view ... This trip has been most valuable to me." Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:125. Moreover, the elderly Margot Asquith's 'testimony' is clouded by her age and according to the Brocks it was known "even prior to the First World War that her health and nerves were not good ... [and] She became ... prey to constant nervous illnesses." Michael and Eleanor Brock, "Master of the Commons" in *H.H. Asquith: Letters to Venetia Stanley*, ed. Michael and Eleanor Brock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 9.

theory, Joll demonstrated how nineteenth century ideals of honour influenced European decision-makers during the July Crisis.¹³⁷ By reapplying Joll's theories to a subject like Asquith, it can be determined that while Asquith had Liberal Imperialist sympathies - as illustrated by their promotion within the defence establishment - he had little real interest in curtailing the worst excesses of the informal system. Rather, Asquith had learned to maintain his grip on power and the Liberal Party's unity through the political benefits offered by the informal system and therefore sought to perpetuate it *via* a traditional stratagem. In the realm of defence planning this meant that Asquith was willing to use the extremely fluid and ill-defined defence committees to mollify opposing factions through political patronage and lip service at the expense of efficiency. Asquith's predilection for exploiting the system's informality further carried over into how he formulated policy. His pre-war premiership for instance established that he preferred to formulate high policy with the aid of a select group of friendly and generally like-minded compatriots, who happened to be military minded. These like-minded compatriots in return for their political support and friendship, were guaranteed a great deal of autonomy at the defence-oriented ministries to which they were appointed. In peacetime this autonomy posed few problems to the Prime Minister, who capitalized on the often-overlapping duties of ministers to act as an arbitrator during disputes. Naturally, arbitration often favoured the *status quo* and thereby reinforced his position as prime minister. However, while Asquith's leadership style often proved a boon during the pre-war period, it proved to be a serious disadvantage in wartime. His methods and leadership style were incompatible with that of a war leader (as we shall see below); his favouritism, traditionalism, lack of

¹³⁷ James Joll, *1914: The Unspoken Assumptions: An Inaugural Lecture* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968).

prior defence experience and informal preferences did nothing to overcome the culture of intrigue within government. Nor did it streamline government decision making or encourage a modern decision-making approach to the coming conflict. Ironically, however, while Asquith's leadership style directly undermined the cause of reformers during the pre-war period, it would offer an avenue for less traditional figures to enter the beating heart of decision making. This avenue became available in 1914 once crisis gripped the world and then Britain, which in synergy with other factors, finally propelled Hankey into the decision-making curve.

Chapter 3: “The Lights Go Out Across Europe”

The summer of 1914 was the turning point in Maurice Hankey’s career. He began the year as the marginalized secretary of an embattled committee, but Britain’s declaration of war on 4 August propelled him into the prime minister’s orbit as a military advisor. For the present project this change in fortunes stemmed from a variety of personal and systemic factors, which ultimately fed on each other. It shall be argued below that on a systemic level, the failure of the British government to formalize its decision-making processes resulted in the significant strain on the Victorian system due to the concurrent July Crisis in Europe and Curragh Crisis in Ireland. The systemic strain was particularly felt within Cabinet, which was (with some exceptions) paralyzed by its inability to understand the July Crisis due to many of its members’ disinclination towards military affairs. This problem particularly manifested in Asquith, whose own disinclination for military affairs and obsession with preventing a schism in the Liberal Party ensured he was out of his depth throughout the crisis. Thankfully, Asquith recognized this fact and by falling back on his pre-war experiences, the Prime Minister began relying on the two men in Cabinet he believed best understood the situation: First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill and Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey. Churchill’s growing influence over the Prime Minister in turn coincided with Hankey’s own elevation to Asquith’s side in no small part thanks to the First Lord, who had been taking advice from the future Cabinet Secretary. Due to Asquith’s conflicting duties, Hankey (thanks to his

encyclopedic knowledge of government machinery) was promoted to serve as Asquith's *de facto* deputy at the War Office. There, Hankey's talents deeply impressed Asquith, who proceeded, as the crisis finally gave way to war, to promote Hankey to the future War Council and more importantly his "Inner Cabinet." However, Hankey was not the sole benefactor of the Asquith government's trial. He was joined by a new Secretary of State for War, Field Marshal Lord Kitchener. Together, alongside Churchill, these two men would become the most influential of Asquith's wartime councillors, eclipsing the Foreign Secretary and quietly dominating the decision-making process until their resignation, death, and the downfall of the Liberal government. Nonetheless the process was complicated by the nature of Asquith's leadership and the way the Prime Minister manipulated the emerging machinery of wartime decision making.

Asquith and Hankey: A Tale of Two Crises

When news reached London that Archduke Franz Ferdinand had been assassinated in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, both Hankey and Asquith were far too busy with other problems to pay much attention. For Hankey that problem was the revision of Britain's War Book, a task made even more difficult by the lack of support he received from the Prime Minister, who was more focused on the growing crisis in Ireland.¹³⁸ By 1914 the Liberals' commitment to Irish Home Rule resulted in the imminent danger of a civil war, until eclipsed by the July Crisis. Yet, despite Asquith's subsequent assertion that the July

¹³⁸ "On March 26, 1914, a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence under Asquith's chairmanship was holding its final meeting ... There were two points on which the sub-committee could not reach agreement. I myself and various other members ... tried our hands at drafting, but we could not bring everyone into line, and the Committee was on the verge of a complete deadlock. Suddenly, the door opened and Balfour's tall, loose-limbed figure sauntered in and sat down beside the Prime Minister. Almost immediately he grasped the points at issue, and there and then ... he drafted paragraphs which brought the whole committee together." Hankey, *Command*, 1:151.

Crisis was “the most dangerous situation of the last 40 years,” the Prime Minister’s attention was not solely fixed on Europe in July 1914. While national attention might have drifted towards the continent, it is clear to this project and other historians that Ireland still weighed heavily on Asquith throughout July.¹³⁹ Asquith’s preoccupation with domestic affairs, to the point they clouded his judgment on the July Crisis, is particularly evident for the present project in the PM’s letters to his mistress, Venetia Stanley. Within them, Asquith revealed himself to be fraught with worry over a crisis he did not understand, amid another crisis that, though now relegated to the background, still could demolish his government. The pressure these crises placed on the erudite and peaceable Asquith in turn forced the Prime Minister to seek out fresh counsel. And according to historians Michael and Eleanor Brock, the first counsellor Asquith sought was his mistress. In Stanley, Asquith, who was unsuited to the demands of international crisis and warfare, laid bare his anxieties, and frequently sought her advice about everything from speeches to military policy.¹⁴⁰

Beyond relying upon Stanley for morale, Asquith also took practical steps to ease his burdens during this period of crisis, the most important being his decision to assume direct responsibility for the War Office after his former minister’s resignation. However, instead of alleviating Asquith’s burdens, as he had originally hoped, they subsequently multiplied because Asquith was ill-suited to the post and that the War Office’s responsibilities weighed too heavily on him. Even Hankey, who wrote a very charitable assessment of Asquith, admitted that:

¹³⁹ Cassar, *Asquith*, 12-13.

¹⁴⁰ Michael and Eleanor Brock, “The Admired War Leader.” In *H.H. Asquith: Letters to Venetia Stanley*, ed. Michael and Eleanor Brock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 118.

Though Asquith ... had a general knowledge of the War Book, he had naturally no detailed knowledge of the machinery nor what responsibility in the Government's policy was assigned to the War Office. Living and working at Downing Street, he was not, during the [July Crisis], in that constant touch with the officials and the General Staff at the War Office which would ensure his possessing the knowledge.¹⁴¹

Asquith's lack of real familiarity with the machinery of the War Office in turn ensured that once the July Crisis began, the department was thrown into chaos by the Prime Minister's ignorance, that even Asquith himself subtly admitted in a letter to Stanley. On 29 July he wrote, "I just finished an Army Council ... Rather interesting because it enables one to realise what are the first steps in an actual war."¹⁴² Further compounding Asquith's problems was his belief that "energy under the guise of lethargy ... which is more effective in the long run," was his best quality as a leader.¹⁴³ While this may have served him well in peacetime, historians agree it did nothing to improve the crises surrounding him; despite the praise lavished upon him by the press, which gushed "'If you want a tonic ... have a look at the prime minister."¹⁴⁴ Interestingly, this praise is not confined to the press alone. Hankey wrote that:

During these events I was for the first time in close personal touch with Asquith, and I was very impressed by his clear orderly mind, his coolness, courage and decision, and his amazing power of seizing essentials. He inspired me, as indeed he had impressed me in less strenuous days, with confidence and as one singularly fitted to hold the highest office in the State in these troublous times.¹⁴⁵

How does one negotiate the divide between all this opposing evidence? The answer, for the present project, is that Asquith's political experience ensured he learnt the first lesson most politicians learn, that confidence and mystique breed admiration, whereas doubt

¹⁴¹ Hankey, *Command*, 1:155.

¹⁴² Asquith to Stanley, 29 July 1914, *Letters*, 133.

¹⁴³ Asquith, SCENE- The Infernal Tribunal, *Letters*, 470.

¹⁴⁴ *Nation*, 30 November 1914 in Cassar, *Asquith*, 31.

¹⁴⁵ Hankey, *Command*, 1:159-160.

only breeds contempt. As such, Hankey and others only saw the Asquith that Asquith himself wanted them to see. This then leads us to a polar opposite image of Asquith compared to what Hankey described above, an image that is found throughout this project and others of an insecure politician, who was deeply unsettled by the war and who actively clung to the old Victorian ways for the sake of personal comfort over national efficiency. In this state of mind, the unsure Asquith at first reached out for emotional counsel from Venetia Stanley, but as the crisis intensified and the need for more professional advice became obvious, he turned to the men in his government. Initially these counsellors were drawn from the ranks of his pre-war inner circle and intimates, who included Lord High Chancellor Haldane, the Secretary of State for India Lord Crewe, former First Lord and then Home Secretary Reginald McKenna and, most prominently, the current First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, and Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey.¹⁴⁶ Ultimately, while each of these men held some sway over Asquith, it was Grey and Churchill who dominated Asquith's decision-making process during the July Crisis. Grey and Churchill's political ascendance during the July Crisis at the expense of men more in line with Asquith's line of thinking, as will be demonstrated in detail below, not only owed everything to Asquith's trust, but also the positions they held and their relative popularity compared to Haldane, who was politically poisonous.

For this project, Hankey's ascent cannot be explained without exploring the meteoric rise of Winston Churchill's influence during the July Crisis. In Churchill and Hankey's case their deeply entangled political ascendance can be traced back to 28 July, following Austria's declaration of war against Serbia. On that day both men had arrived

¹⁴⁶ Cassar, *Asquith*, 36-37

at 10 Downing Street with the intention of convincing a cloistered Asquith that the time had come for Britain to take a proactive stance towards Germany. And to that end, when Churchill arrived, he impressed upon the Prime Minister the need for the First Fleet to proceed to its war station at Scapa Flow and be ready to fight. In response, Asquith simply “‘looked at [Churchill] and gave a sort of grunt [of approval],”” and according to Churchill, “‘I did not require anything else.”¹⁴⁷ Alternatively, when Hankey arrived he found a prime minister, who “‘was reluctant to take any steps which might be interpreted as warlike, and spoke of the strong feelings of the miners against the war and the vital importance of carrying public opinion.”¹⁴⁸ Asquith’s tepid response to Hankey and his support for Churchill’s decisions may seem odd, given that if the Prime Minister was willing to condone one precautionary action it is unclear why he would not condone another. Upon reviewing the sources, however, Asquith’s decision to back Churchill and not Hankey on 28 July was rooted in the Prime Minister once more falling back on his political instincts. After all, Asquith trusted Churchill and was therefore willing to give him more leeway, as opposed to Hankey with whom the Prime Minister had, up until this point, only enjoyed a purely professional relationship.

Hankey at the War Office

Despite Asquith’s tepid response to activating the Precautionary Measures of the War Book, Hankey was unwilling to let the issue lie. After all, while Hankey lacked Churchill’s enthusiasm for war, he nonetheless believed that no chances should be

¹⁴⁷ John W. Young, “‘By God I will make them fight:’ Winston Churchill and Britain’s decision for war in 1914.” In *Winston Churchill: At War and Thinking of War Before 1939*, ed. B.J.C. McKercher and Antoine Capet (London: Routledge, 2019), 83

¹⁴⁸ Hankey, *Command*, 1:154.

taken.¹⁴⁹ In many regards, then, Hankey's view that a peaceful solution (however slim a chance) might be achievable hardly diverged from the opinions of his superiors.

However, at the same time, Hankey was a realist and more interestingly, as attested by his own memoirs, he was eager to see his contributions to the War Book finally bear fruit.

In fact, when reflecting on 4 August 1914, the day Britain declared war on Germany, Hankey admitted:

My mind was full of the War Book. For years we had been patiently building it up, as a boy slowly winds the propeller of a toy aeroplane. In a few minutes the catch would be released, and, like the boy's aeroplane, it would be beyond control.¹⁵⁰

Here, the anticipation Hankey expresses effectively confirms what political scientist, Graham Allison long suspected, that political position inevitably influences perceptions and actions. In Hankey's case his service at the CID had all been leading up to that moment when the War Book was finally activated and therefore it was an inevitability that he would push for such an action. Furthermore, it should not be doubted that Hankey was simultaneously motivated by the realisation that the successful implementation of the War Book in this crisis might – whether war was declared or not - vindicate the CID and thereby garner it greater influence. Therefore, with all these factors weighing on him, Hankey acted swiftly to shore up support for releasing the War Book by first securing the support of the two most important keys to his future success: Grey's Foreign Office and Churchill's Navy. Recalling that hectic day, Hankey informs us:

I wrote to Nicholson [Permanent Undersecretary of the Foreign Office] to urge that there was danger in further delay, in the hope that he would advise Grey to ask the Cabinet to sanction the putting in operation of the Precautionary Stage. As

¹⁴⁹ Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:136.

¹⁵⁰ Hankey, *Command*, 1:162.

a double precaution I saw Churchill and made representations to the same effect.¹⁵¹

Ultimately, while it is debatable how much impact Hankey's indirect appeals to Grey had on the Cabinet meeting of 29 July, it is obvious that Hankey's meeting with Churchill bore fruit. Unlike the Foreign Office, Churchill immediately seized upon Hankey's arguments that the time had come for Britain to activate the War Book. In fact, Hankey informs us, Churchill was so taken with his proposals that, "Just before 11:30 am on the next day, 29 July, I received a telephone message from [Churchill] asking me to send a copy of the War Book to meet him at 10 Downing Street, at once."¹⁵² Furthermore, during the Cabinet meeting, "it was not Grey, as is laid down in the War Book, but Churchill, the First Lord, who had, in response to my suggestion, taken the initiative in the Cabinet," to activate the Precautionary Measures.¹⁵³ Shortly thereafter, Hankey, who remained in close proximity to Downing Street in the expectation his policy would carry through,

Was called to the telephone by the Prime Minister's private secretary who told [him] that the Cabinet had decided to put the Precautionary Measures into force, but no one had the slightest clue how to start the ball rolling!"¹⁵⁴

Once Hankey arrived at Number 10 to give the Asquith government guidance with the War Book it quickly became clear that he would not be leaving Asquith's side. In a letter addressed to his wife on 29 July, Hankey reported that "The P.M. has asked me to keep within reach, so I doubt if I can get away. It is all very interesting being behind the scenes."¹⁵⁵ This sudden increase in contact between Hankey and Asquith would prove

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1:154.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 1:154.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1:156; Harcourt diary, 29 September 1914, Harcourt Papers, Bodleian Library

¹⁵⁴ Hankey, *Command.*, 1:155.

¹⁵⁵ Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:136.

invaluable to both men. For Hankey it provided ample opportunity to impress the Prime Minister while also being at the centre of the decision-making process, whereas for Asquith it created a welcome respite from his more taxing duties at the War Office. In fact, based on the duties Hankey performed during these days, Hankey effectively emerged as Asquith's *de facto* deputy at the War Office between 29 July and 4 August.

Although some historians have argued it was Haldane rather than Hankey who acted as Asquith's deputy at the War Office during those hectic days, inspired in no small part by Asquith's own letters, their argument overlooks several crucial details.¹⁵⁶ Firstly, they ignore that Haldane did not enter the War Office until 3 August and that same day Asquith informed Stanley that only "after tomorrow [4 August] Haldane is going to help me every day at the W[ar] O[ffice]."¹⁵⁷ In the meantime, it was largely Hankey who carried out Asquith's will at the War Office as his real deputy and executed his duties there, the most important involved the implementation of the War Book, a task that required Asquith to grant Hankey broad, but ultimately ill-defined oversight authority over the War Office and other key departments. This would allow Asquith to fulfill his more pressing duties as premier. While this decision was designed to leave the increasingly important, but complex responsibilities of the War Office in the hands of the martially inclined Hankey, Asquith's decision also came with several caveats. To begin with, Asquith never officially promoted Hankey, meaning that Hankey was still operating

¹⁵⁶ "While remaining Lord Chancellor, Haldane would deputize for Asquith at the War Office and set in motion the military machine he had created and understood better than anyone else. Haldane undoubtedly hoped that this might be the prelude to a permanent arrangement." Cassar, *Asquith*, 39; "Other papers were stimulated ... by the news that Haldane had been installed at the War Office as Asquith's deputy." Brock, Michael and Eleanor, "The First Days of the War" in *Asquith: Letters to Venetia Stanley*, ed. Michael and Eleanor Brock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 152.

¹⁵⁷ Asquith to Stanley, 3 August 1914, *Letters*, 148; The Brocks' own footnotes also attest that "Asquith wrote out the authority to mobilize the army in the small hours of 3 Aug. and Haldane brought this to the War Office at 11.0 am on that day." Eleanor and Michael Brock, "Letter 114", 149 n. 6.

as Secretary to the CID, despite acting as Asquith's *de facto* deputy at the War Office. And as such, Hankey's authority could and in fact would be questioned by ministers and other bureaucrats due to the CID's lack of standing, a problem that became apparent as the crisis dragged on. Moreover, Asquith at times directly interfered with Hankey's activities at the War Office in ways that risked undermining Britain's war-preparedness. In fact, this issue came to a head on 29 July, in an incident related by Hankey, during which:

I gave Asquith a detailed account of what was involved in the Precautionary Measures. Drummond ... the liaison officer with the Foreign Office, was also present, and was seriously concerned to learn that ... the Territorial Force would be called out automatically for certain guard duties. He feared that this step might prejudice the faint remaining hope of a settlement ... Grey, who was communicated with, shared this view, and neither he nor the Prime Minister had realized this step was involved. The War Office was communicated with, but the reply came that it was too late. Action had already been taken.¹⁵⁸

In response to this revelation, Asquith ordered Hankey to take a new, but highly disruptive course of action to recall the Territorials. However, the government machinery was incapable of carrying out the order, so they resorted to publishing it in the press, creating needless confusion.¹⁵⁹ Thankfully, when the armed forces began mobilizing between 4-5 August there were no embarrassments despite the confusion that broke out on 29 July. This was not the last incident that revealed the shortcomings of the British government during the July Crisis. In another incident not long afterwards, Hankey recalled how a minister misunderstood the cabinet's decision and told his department that the War Book's precautionary measures would not be initiated till the following Monday.

¹⁵⁸ Hankey, *Command*, 1;157.

¹⁵⁹ "After reference to the Admiralty and War Office, the following notice was inserted into the Press by the War Office: 'It is officially announced that no measures have been taken by the military authorities, which are of the nature of mobilization. The only orders that have been given are purely precautionary and of a defensive character. The naval measures are also precautionary, and no mobilization has been ordered.'" *Ibid.*

However, when Hankey and the War Office tried to correct the mistake, the department in question refused to carry out the order until they received direct confirmation from their minister, who had left London.¹⁶⁰ For Hankey, problems such as these were systemic in nature, brought on by “the weakness of a system which provides for no authoritative record of the Cabinet’s proceedings,” and the lack of a Cabinet Secretary.¹⁶¹ Nonetheless, while these experiences undoubtedly impacted Hankey’s future ambitions, for the time being any long-term reformist goals of his were put aside as both the crisis and the demand for his skills intensified. This growing demand, despite Hankey’s private misgivings about certain incidents, stemmed from the successes Hankey enjoyed when he implemented the War Book and acted as Asquith’s deputy at the War Office. Chief amongst these successes was Hankey’s role in mobilising the armed forces; the prevention of a panic induced rise in prices and thereby the maintenance of commerce even through wartime; and preparing the departments for the outbreak of hostilities per the War Book’s instructions.¹⁶² Thereafter, Hankey was deeply impressed by how,

The completeness of the War Book relieved their [the Ministers’] minds of masses of detail and enabled Ministers to devote themselves to the difficult international and Parliamentary situation, comparatively free from other preoccupations.¹⁶³

The vindication of this success came to Hankey in the form of congratulatory letters from various ministers, including the influential Haldane, who lauded him for his successful enactment of the War Book and his actions at the War Office. However, the greatest praise came from Asquith after the declaration of war on 4 August, when, according to Hankey’s memoirs, Asquith refused to part from Hankey and informally (and later

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:156.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1:158.

¹⁶² Hankey, *Command*, 1:147-161

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 1:160.

officially) promoted him to the position of Secretary of the newborn War Council and eventually allowed Hankey to join the entity Hankey described as Asquith's "Inner Cabinet."¹⁶⁴ From then on, Hankey served as the most important bureaucrat in Britain, with exclusive access to Asquith, who entrusted Hankey with greater responsibilities as the war progressed as Asquith's other confidantes died or were disgraced.¹⁶⁵

In the aftermath of the July Crisis, the development of Asquith's wartime "Inner Cabinet" and his War Council were predicated on the Prime Minister's experiences throughout the crisis and his own personal prejudices. By 5 August 1914, the date he summoned his initial council of war (a piecemeal predecessor of the War Council), Asquith had experienced what he believed was the lowest point of his career. After all, he had been pressed into a war he had not wanted, by a crisis he had been unable to control and, moreover, he had been forced to seek new counsel. All this left Asquith grasping for stability. To that end, while those blessed with hindsight would have recognized the source of these failings could be traced to systemic forces and Asquith himself, the Prime Minister sought solutions elsewhere. Specifically, he decided that what he and the government required in wartime was familiarity and therefore "the war did not bring any change to Asquith's leadership style."¹⁶⁶ According to Asquith's biographer, Cassar, his decision to stand by the existing decision-making process stemmed from how:

Asquith was a pragmatist and showed no interest in abstract ideas. He clung only to concepts that could be given practical effect ... He lacked a sense of adventure and was attracted more by established practice than by innovation. As long as cabinet business preceded along lines which he set, he was content to regulate input and, if necessary, arbitrate between council members ... In handling contentious issues he preferred to bide his time, to keep conflicting parties talking

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:167-169.

¹⁶⁵ T.G. Otte, *Statesman of Europe: A Life of Sir Edward Grey* (Dublin: Allen Lane, 2020), 586.

¹⁶⁶ Cassar, *Asquith*, 32.

and to allow them to blow off steam and cool, while he kept the atmosphere as dispassionate as possible.¹⁶⁷

In many regards this slow, deliberative and style of leadership was put on full display by the Prime Minister between August and November 1914. During this time Asquith, like many members of his government, believed the time had come to implement their original vision of how that war would be waged and controlled. Asquith desired to manage the war exactly as before *via* the peacetime machinery bodies, the nascent wartime “Inner Cabinet,” the full Cabinet, and a Council of War (soon to be replaced by the War Council proper).

While the two former bodies had their roots in Asquith’s peacetime experiences, the Council of War was an *ad hoc* creation, made up of key cabinet ministers, senior officers and Hankey acting as secretary, which was first summoned on 5 August.¹⁶⁸

Though this body was responsible for activating the original measures of Britain’s pre-war strategy, in fact most of the Council’s decisions had to be ratified by the Cabinet.¹⁶⁹

The Cabinet’s own role in the early system, meanwhile, was to act as both a deliberative body for the war effort, which enjoyed the collective responsibility to approve official government policy, and as a political sounding board for Asquith. This last function was hardly surprising, given that Asquith remained vigilant for threats to his leadership and therefore preferred to see where the political winds were blowing by monitoring the Cabinet. While the Cabinet acted as Asquith’s sounding board and deliberative body, however, it was Asquith’s trusted service ministers (Churchill and Kitchener) who ran the

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ “During the morning Asquith had decided to summon a Council of War, to which the heads of the Foreign Office, the Admiralty, and War Office and all our leading generals were invited ... I was present as secretary.” Hankey, *Command*, 1:169.

¹⁶⁹ “[Asquith] conveyed Kitchener’s views, as well as his own, to the Cabinet which met in the morning to consider the recommendations of the Council of War.” Cassar, *Asquith*, 40.

day-to-day operations of the war.¹⁷⁰ However, while their position alone ensured that both men enjoyed a great deal of influence, in no small part due to the lack of real oversight by the cabinet, their power was further amplified by their membership in Asquith's "Inner Cabinet."

The "Inner Cabinet" itself was a reflection not only of Asquith's subservience to familiarity, but also a monument to his other less attractive qualities, namely his arrogance and his desire to behave as a lazy dictator.¹⁷¹ With regards to Asquith's attachment to familiarity, this body drew inspiration from Asquith's peacetime 'Inner Cabinet' which had actively advised him on the most important of policies (often with regards to high policy). On the surface the goal of the wartime "Inner Cabinet" remained largely the same, only it now advised the Prime Minister on wartime strategy and policy, but in truth its influence went far beyond that purview. Specifically, Kitchener, Churchill, and eventually Hankey, each desired to advance their own agendas and they were aided by their newfound positions. In Churchill and Kitchener's cases they were ministers, who thanks in no small part to Asquith's devotion to the old system, were able to "[give] a misleading picture to their colleagues ... and attempted to manipulate it to [their] advantage."¹⁷² Hankey was hardly any different, but whereas the others wielded their control over whole departments to achieve their ends, he relied on his near exclusive access to Asquith, to whom he became *de facto* military advisor and wartime chief of staff. While arrangement could and did in fact result in coherent policy, created by individuals who were almost certainly "in the loop" (as opposed to the Cabinet or future

¹⁷⁰ Bell, *Dardanelles*, 16.

¹⁷¹ Brock, Michael and Eleanor. "Introduction" in *Margot Asquith's Great War Diary*, ed. Michael and Eleanor Brock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), xxxvii.

¹⁷² Bell, *Dardanelles*, 7; Cassar, *Asquith*, 41.

War Council), it also encouraged infighting between this body's members, particularly Kitchener and Churchill. Inevitably this infighting allowed Asquith to intervene and impose his dominance on them as arbiter and premier, a skill he had mastered during peacetime. This dominance, however, not only reined in his counsellors, but also had the unfortunate effect of stifling real advancements due to the PM's commitment to the more politically convenient war strategy that he and his Cabinet favoured. Likewise, it cannot be ignored that while Asquith could impose his will *via* this system, it also came with several serious risks that brought down the early system and resulted in the creation of the War Council. Specifically, the system posed the risk of creating military blunders to poor communications, a risk which did in fact come to pass and forced Asquith to 'reform' the decision-making body by forming a new body to replace the Council of War and Cabinet: The War Council. Unfortunately, though as we shall see shortly, this hardly "reformed" the system and in fact simply perpetuated many of the same mistakes and resulted in even greater blunders as the perfect storm of factors came together under Asquith, the "Inner Cabinet," and the War Council.

Chapter 4: Hankey and Asquith at War

As peace gave way to war with the dawn of 5 August 1914, it appeared the Asquith government had run the gauntlet of the July Crisis and emerged the better for it. Whereas a week earlier the Liberals were seemingly on the brink of a national crisis, now:

The cry of ‘Civil war! Civil war!’ to which The Times and the Tories treated us every day has been stilled ... and now we read in tears a silenced Press, with the sounds of real war waving like wireless telegraphy round our heads.¹⁷³

As the nation rallied around the once embattled government, Asquith and his subordinates were effectively given a free hand to fight the war as they saw fit. The only issue now was how would they wage it? Would Britain pursue a “continental” or “maritime” strategy? It was this question that a hastily assembled *ad hoc* council of war was designed to adjudicate. And while it may have seemed plausible that the deliberations would reopen the old rivalries between the services and their patrons, in fact no fracas came to pass. Rather, the results of the council were anti-climactic and even the council itself proved impermanent, as Asquith transferred the conflict’s management to his cabinet. For four months between August and November of 1914, “the war did not bring any change to Asquith’s leadership style.”¹⁷⁴

In Hankey’s own estimation, the subsequent early shortcomings of British strategy could be traced to the institutional effects of Asquith’s informal and traditional

¹⁷³ Margot Asquith diary, 4 August 1914, *Margot Asquith’s Great War Diary*, ed. Michael and Eleanor Brock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 13-14.

¹⁷⁴ Cassar, *Asquith*, 32.

approach to decision-making. Specifically, Hankey and other historians since have recognized that Asquith's initial decision to rely upon the twenty-one-member cabinet to oversee the day-to-day management of the conflict was misguided. Not only was the body too unwieldy and the bulk of its members uneducated in warfare, but on a formal level the absence of any regular meetings, written records, or clear communications apparatus by which the decision-makers could coordinate the execution of policy by departments, ensured that decision-making was slow and haphazard at best. Indeed, this recognition subsequently caused Hankey to believe that the war effort did not stumble earlier because at this stage the war was effectively on auto-pilot due to what pre-war planning did exist.¹⁷⁵ However, while Hankey was cognizant of these flaws and desired to effect changes to the decision-making apparatus, he was unable to achieve any meaningful reform in late summer and fall 1914. Instead, after his hopes for the Council of War and CID were shot down by an ever-obstinate Asquith, Hankey carried on in his duties until he was called upon by his superiors again and new opportunities presented themselves. These opportunities took the form of strategic initiatives and grew out of Hankey's ability to manipulate the very system he wanted to reform. In turn, while Hankey successfully persuaded disparate actors to unite behind him and his plans, ultimately these same plans fell apart due to the defects in the system he was dealing with. It was Asquith's sudden awareness of these defects, when the government's reputation was suffering and the war turned to stalemate, that ironically stimulated the slow adoption of Hankey's institutional reforms.

¹⁷⁵ Hankey, *Command*, 1:177-178; Bell, *Dardanelles*, 7; Naylor, *Institution*, 11; Cassar, *Asquith*, 42-3, 235.

Despite Hankey's claims that Britain could choose from a multitude of strategies at the outset of the First World War and that it was the lack of a formal system of governance that sabotaged Britain's early maneuvers, the proceedings of the informal council of war on 5-6 August and Britain's subsequent behaviour contradict this argument. Rather, it becomes increasingly apparent that while Hankey and the other members of the British defence establishment produced numerous war plans, this did not equate to the existence of a coherent grand strategy. Pre-war disagreements both within and between the Admiralty and War Office, when combined with the ineffectiveness of the CID and the Liberals' abdication of responsibility for strategic questions ensured that when Asquith summoned the informal council that several strategic topics needed to be addressed. To that end, the council Asquith summoned included himself, and his favourite ministers, Grey, Haldane, and Churchill, as well as senior military staff, Prince Louis of Battenberg (the First Sea Lord), Lord Roberts, Kitchener, General Sir Ian Hamilton, General Sir John French, and General Douglas Haig, with Hankey present as secretary.¹⁷⁶

During those two days of deliberation, no coherent and well thought out grand strategy emerged. Rather, the British government agreed to pursue a strategy of 'business as usual' whereby,

Britain would only provide a token contribution to the land war ... its major contribution to the war would be in the shape of the Royal Navy. It would keep Britain's sea-lanes open and blockade Germany ... The enemy would be defeated by a combination of British gold and French and Russian soldiers.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Asquith to Stanley, 5 August 1914, *Letters*, 157.

¹⁷⁷ French, *Strategy*, 15.

The strategy was palatable to the Liberals because “‘business as usual’ would also minimize the potential disruption that the war would cause,” and therefore their economic planning “did not plan to pursue a policy of *laissez-faire* but nor did they plan to establish a command economy.”¹⁷⁸ However, while “business as usual” seemingly offered the Liberals a strategy premised on the pre-existing “British way” of warfare that would not upset the domestic political equilibrium, the strategy (if it can be called a strategy) was inherently flawed. The chief flaw of “business as usual” was, according to Seligmann that the British decision-makers merely agreed upon a set of previously discussed operational means towards achieving a battlefield end. The chief operational means were the utilization of British naval power per “business as usual” to conduct a flawed blockade designed to apply economic pressure and, ultimately, force the German fleet into battle. Continuing in this vein of “business as usual” and in accordance with pre-existing war plans, it was agreed that British naval power would also be used to seize German colonies, again to force battle at sea. Just as the Navy lacked a coherent strategy at sea and instead relied upon pre-existing war plans to stake out a series of objectives they desired to achieve, the Army possessed no clear strategy on land. While Britain’s “continental commitment” had been popularized because of pre-war planning, the undertaking of said commitment was only agreed to at the council. Thereafter, the British army leadership possessed only a scheme to land the expeditionary force on the continent, with no clear strategy how to beat the German army, and heatedly debated whether it ought to be deployed to northern France or Antwerp.¹⁷⁹ Ultimately, in accordance with the tenets of “business as usual,” it was agreed that “the whole British

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Seligmann, “Prepare,” 435-6; Cassar, *Kitchener*, 227-8; Hankey, *Command*, 1:172

Army should be sent at once to France, according to ... the Haldane Plan,” while the navy “would provide for [the expeditionary force’s] transportation and for the security of the island in their absence.”¹⁸⁰ Thus, main burden of the conflict would fall unto Britain’s allies, while the empire provided support. What little dissension occurred during the meeting came not from the Secretary to the CID nor the First Lord of the Admiralty, but from the soon-to-be Secretary of State for War, Kitchener.

Long an outsider, Kitchener, now admitted into the decision-making circle, bluntly informed his colleagues that the war would last at least three years, and more scandalously, he proposed the creation of a new mass army that would rival the continental powers.¹⁸¹ Contrary to his newfound colleagues, who would see Britain act as banker and navy to her continental allies, Kitchener “never believed that ‘business as usual’ and the Russian and French armies would be enough to win the war.”¹⁸² Instead, Kitchener was conscious of the threat posed by an empowered France and Russia after Germany’s defeat to British dominance and as such Kitchener believed Britain’s future rested with the creation of a mass army on par with the continental powers. The result of Kitchener’s ambition to rival the continental powers on land, the New Armies, were therefore intended to swoop in after Britain’s current “allies” and enemies alike were exhausted and allow Britain to dictate terms to the other powers. Naturally, these efforts contradicted the very spirit of “business as usual” but Kitchener cared little, and his colleagues recognized that if they opposed him that his resignation would result in the downfall of the Liberal government. This threat, when combined with their own fears

¹⁸⁰ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1911-1914* (London: Thornton-Butterworth, 1923), 231-2.

¹⁸¹ Cassar, *Kitchener*, 196; French, *Strategy*, 24-5.

¹⁸² French, *Strategy*, 25.

about the Franco-Russian threat and ineptitude in military affairs, resulted in Kitchener receiving a blank cheque from the cabinet in the management of the War Office.¹⁸³ Once Kitchener was firmly ensconced in the War Office he capitalized on these circumstances by undertaking to raise 100,000 new regulars on his first day in office, thereby laying the foundations for the New Army.¹⁸⁴ Ultimately, this was the first nail in the coffin for “business as usual,” as the very creation of the New Armies would precipitate their involvement on the continent and moreover ensure the adoption of a real “continental” strategy by 1915-6.

While Kitchener threw himself into the business of undermining “business as usual,” the traditional upholders of a “maritime” strategy, the CID and Navy, under Hankey and Churchill, respectively, took advantage of the lull in activity to undergo a period of adjustment. Despite their mutual interest and specialization in military affairs, neither were battle-tested strategists like Kitchener. Unlike Grey “who did not have it in him to reinvent himself ... into an amateur strategist,” both Hankey and Churchill possessed the temperament to do so.¹⁸⁵ The early days of the war posed the perfect opportunity for such an adjustment as strategy effectively ran on autopilot, allowing both men to edify themselves and concentrate on local, departmental matters. Specifically, Hankey sought the creation of the most efficient wartime machinery of government possible by employing his pre-war tactics. For example, during the war's earliest days Hankey oversaw the proliferation of numerous wartime committees thereby further

¹⁸³ French, *Strategy*, 24-5.

¹⁸⁴ Asquith to Stanley, 6 August 1914, *Letters*, 158.

¹⁸⁵ Otte, *Statesman*, 544

insinuating himself into the decision-making machinery.¹⁸⁶ One such committee, which exemplified both Hankey's commitment to a "maritime" strategy and the long-term success of Hankey's "Defence by Committee" approach, was the Joint Committee of the CID, which "[submitted] to Cabinet proposals for combined expeditions which would ... consider the best means of dealing with the German colonies."¹⁸⁷ The sub-committee's findings elicited great enthusiasm from the cabinet, which, in Asquith's words, "looked more like a gang of Elizabethan buccaneers than a meek collection of black-coated Liberal Ministers."¹⁸⁸ The initial enthusiasm for war and ministers' desire for easy glory against the German colonies, allowed Hankey, the CID, and Navy to gain support for the combined operations.

On an institutional basis, the very summoning of a council of war, despite its negligible impact, has been considered the first of many victories for the reform movement. Yet, this assertion is suspect for a variety of reasons. Already, the Brocks in their analysis of the council's successor body, the War Council proper, argued that even that body "never became the body for daily planning and coordination which was needed," and it is clear that the council of war was no different.¹⁸⁹ Instead, while the council of war briefly revived a blueprint for what wartime machinery could have been, ultimately it was an *ad hoc* body that was never allowed or supposed to reach its true potential as a wartime body. Naturally this stirred Hankey's hopes that the war council

¹⁸⁶ "There were more than 22 committees (as of September 1914); but the number proliferated greatly as the war progressed, and in March of 1915 Hankey reported the total as 38." Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:145.

¹⁸⁷ Hankey, *Command I*: 168; Committee of Imperial Defence, "Proceedings of a Joint Naval and Military Sub-Committee for the consolidation of Combined Operations in Foreign Territory," October 6, 1914, TNA: CAB 38/28/45.

¹⁸⁸ Asquith to Stanley, 6 August 1914, *Letters*, 158.

¹⁸⁹ Brock, "Directing the War Effort: 'a united and most efficient cabinet'" in *Letters to Venetia Stanley*, 184

could become a real strategic nerve-centre, akin to what the CID might have been, and he informed his readers that, “when Asquith summoned the Council of War I had supposed that he intended to follow [the council] up by frequent and regular meetings of a similar kind.”¹⁹⁰ However, any hopes Hankey had for the immediate establishment of a council where “the Ministers who had already familiarized themselves with the problems of war would concert their policy in consultation with technical advisers,” never came to pass.¹⁹¹ Instead, Asquith, who disparaged the council of war as a “motley gathering” in his letters to Stanley, preferred to use the peace time cabinet as the formal decision-making apparatus.¹⁹²

Asquith’s decision to summon the Council of War as an *ad hoc* invention was premised on experience and timely necessity. Specifically, Asquith desired the swift adoption of a grand strategy and was therefore unwilling to place the onus upon his cabinet colleagues for several reasons. The most obvious of these was that Asquith would have exposed Britain’s military strategy to the same deadlock and controversy that the question of intervention had experienced mere days ago. Moreover, Asquith had already recognized when he sought out a replacement at the War Office that the bulk of his colleagues lacked the military experience necessary for such deliberations.¹⁹³ Asquith therefore opted to keep the formulation of grand strategy out of the cabinet’s initial purview and instead placed it in the hands of *ad hoc* groups like the Council of War and Joint Operations Sub-Committee. In turn, the committees produced orthodox and

¹⁹⁰ Hankey, *Command*, 1:176.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Asquith to Stanley, 5 August 1914, *Letters*, 157.

¹⁹³ In a letter to Venetia Stanley, Asquith wrote “There was none of my colleagues I could put in my place: impeccable, sweethearts, trays &c all very well each in his own kennel, or in pursuit of his own quarry, but it is important to avoid a repetition of the Arch-Colonel fiasco.” *Ibid.*

politically palatable solutions for the Cabinet's consumption when the Prime Minister brought them forward for approval.

For Asquith this was the perfect system, one wherein the Cabinet acted as both a deliberative body for the war effort, which enjoyed the collective responsibility to approve official government policy, and as a political sounding board for Asquith. Indeed, the July Crisis had provoked Asquith to imagine the aftermath of his removal from the political scene and he concluded that there would be:

Lots of stuff in the press – a nine days' wonder in the country: violent speculation as who was to succeed me ... after a week or 10 days ... the world going on as tho' nothing had happened: ... a few ripples, even, if you like a bit of a splash in the pool – but little or nothing more.¹⁹⁴

Yet, despite or perhaps even because of this self-effacing reflection, Asquith remained determined to hold onto power. Asquith may have despised the war, but he nonetheless loved the premiership and looked forward to leading a post-war Britain once the conflict ended. Therefore, the Cabinet's continuing prominence and the lack of a formalized hierarchy went a long way – at least superficially – to furthering this goal. In peacetime, Asquith had cultivated an unassailable reputation as both first amongst equals and respected arbiter; and war only entrenched these roles further. Specifically, the confusion wrought by the war on the informal system, with its lack of communication and often overlapping responsibilities, ensured that subordinates were forced (for the most part) to seek Asquith's arbitration. Such was the case when a dispute developed between Kitchener and Sir John French, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), which only ended when:

¹⁹⁴ Roy Jenkins, *Asquith: Portrait of a Man and an Era* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1966), 332.

Kitchener took Sir John along with him and laid the whole issue before the Prime Minister. Presented with the arguments for both sides Asquith very naturally declined the unanimous opinion of the General Staffs.¹⁹⁵

Beyond securing personal vindication or absolution, Jenkins argues that Asquith's subordinates had another cause to seek out his arbitration: fear. Specifically, Jenkins successfully illustrated the Liberal ministers had a very real fear of the unknowns that awaited them and the Party if the popular Asquith was removed from the premiership by their scandals.¹⁹⁶ Consequently, the slow and deliberative style of governance Asquith and his colleagues exercised during the early days of the war hardly diverged from peacetime. Confiding in his diary, Postmaster General Charles Hobhouse described how meetings were now consumed by "questions of detail, financial or military or social, and the measures decided were taken handed over to Committees for management."¹⁹⁷ For the first weeks of the war, the Cabinet's major preoccupations included prewar holdouts like Home Rule; last minute strategic questions; and the how the Entente should win new allies to its cause. In the bulk of these matters, Asquith encountered few worries. Yet, the initial calm within the Liberal government was quickly undermined by challenges bred by a lack of strategy, the shortcomings of the system Asquith continued to place his faith in, and the realities on the ground.

As the days progressed into weeks, and the weeks into months, it slowly dawned on the government that Kitchener's Cassandra-like predictions were becoming true. By the end of August, Brussels had fallen; France's offensive plans were, in Asquith's words, "badly bungled"; and likewise at sea, the blockade was undermined by the

¹⁹⁵ Cassar, *Kitchener*, 231.

¹⁹⁶ Jenkins, *Asquith*, 333.

¹⁹⁷ Charles Hobhouse, *Inside Asquith's Cabinet: From the Diaries of Charles Hobhouse*, ed. Edward David (London: John Murray, 1977), 180-1.

neutrality of key ports through which Germany could acquire supplies.¹⁹⁸ For both Kitchener at the War Office and Churchill at the Admiralty, the lack of clear success was unacceptable. Thereafter, they both swiftly capitalized on the free rein over the day to day affairs of the conflict, which their colleagues allowed them, to advance their own agendas.¹⁹⁹ Kitchener subsequently redoubled his efforts to expand the ascent New Armies by 24 August, when he “outlined at the Cabinet ... his plans, which if they come off will give us some 600,000 or 700,000 men by April next year.”²⁰⁰ Concurrent with this burst of activity at the War Office was Churchill’s own manic drive for some grand success at sea. Not content with the initial accolades he was awarded for the navy’s swift deployment during the July Crisis, or the ‘distant blockade’ Britain had imposed during those early months, Churchill instead sought out more aggressive action.²⁰¹ Specifically, Churchill sought to the initiative in the North Sea by implementing schemes for offensive operations along the German coast. Chief amongst these schemes was his often maligned plan to seize an island (either Dutch or German) to better control the North Sea.²⁰² Churchill’s efforts, however, were blocked by his advisers at the Admiralty and in the Grand Fleet.²⁰³ While he was unable to pursue his North Sea ambitions, Churchill continued to obtain naval hegemony *via* the destruction of those German ships outside the safety of their home ports, such as the German battle-cruiser *Goeben*. Events took a dramatic turn, however, when the *Goeben* and her companion, the light cruiser *Breslau*, avoided destruction by

¹⁹⁸ Oliver Brett, ed. *Journals and Letters of Reginald Viscount Esher* (4 vols, London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1938), 4:178-9

¹⁹⁹ Bell, *Dardanelles*, 16.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 191.

²⁰¹ “With inshore operations along the enemy coast becoming prohibitively dangerous naval opinion shifted to the idea of establishing a ‘distant blockade’ of Germany, the strategy Britain implemented in 1914 ... Churchill was among those at the Admiralty who chafed at conceding so much of the initiative to the enemy.” Bell, *Dardanelles*, 19-20.

²⁰² “W. was full of a scheme which is what he chiefly wanted to talk to H. about for seizing a Dutch port, & using it as a base for destroyers to [sic] their small craft.” Richmond Diary, 9 August 1914, Richmond Papers, National Maritime Museum, RIC 1/16; Bell, *Dardanelles*, 20-5.

²⁰³ Bell, *Churchill*, 20-5.

sailing to Constantinople and transferring themselves into Ottoman service.²⁰⁴ At the highest levels of government, this latest setback did little to help the increasingly sour mood round the Cabinet table. In a letter to Stanley dated 21 August, Asquith wrote:

The real centre of interest (political; not military) at the moment is Turkey - & the two darkest horses in the European stable: Italy & Roumania. The different points of view of different people are amusing Winston violently anti-Turk, Kitchener strong that Roumania is the real pivot of the situation ... I very much against any aggressive action *vis-à-vis* Turkey ... Ll. George keen for Balkan confederation, Grey judicious & critical all round, Haldane misty & imprecise, Simon precise & uninspiring, Hobhouse assertive & irrelevant ... and the Beagles & Bobtails silent & bewildered. There's a picture for you of a united & most efficient cabinet.²⁰⁵

Meetings of the whole Cabinet became fewer and fewer as the war went on and instead "there had been developed a tendency for a small group of Cabinet Ministers to meet and take decisions without waiting for the full Cabinet to be summoned. Again and again we find Asquith, Grey, Kitchener and Churchill, sometime other Ministers, coming together quite informally and taking some decision."²⁰⁶ Most often these informal gatherings included Asquith's most trusted allies: Churchill, Kitchener, Grey, and increasingly as the war progressed, Hankey. Yet, while this more functional group did much to streamline the decision-making process, what Asquith and his Cabinet needed most at this point was a win, one that could both rally the Cabinet and moreover deliver a success story to the public from its increasingly criticized leadership. It was at this point that, when news of the increasingly tenuous Belgian position reached the ears of the Cabinet, a new voice rose to offer a fresh solution to the situation.

²⁰⁴ Hobhouse diary, 21 August 1914, *Inside*, 183; Asquith to Stanley, 12 August 1914, *Letters*, 168.

²⁰⁵ Asquith to Stanley, 21 August 1914, *Letters*, 186.

²⁰⁶ Hankey, *Command*, 1:209.

Chapter 5: Ostend and Antwerp

Silently watching the chaos unfold round the Cabinet table and at the front, Hankey re-emerged from the shadows in late August 1914. Never far from Asquith's side, Hankey enjoyed greater access to the Prime Minister than cabinet ministers and military officers, because Asquith refused to part with the militarily knowledgeable Hankey, and Asquith lacked a sufficient replacement.²⁰⁷ Originally, Hankey had hoped to capitalize on his access to the Prime Minister by securing the CID's position as the primary nerve centre of British war planning. However, this never came to pass. Instead, to borrow from Roskill, "the Asquith government [put] the C.I.D. into a state of suspended animation."²⁰⁸ And so, Hankey's role became ill-defined and nebulous. Officially, he was simply the Secretary to the CID, but the CID was all but shuttered. Unofficially, however, he had become part of the Prime Minister's staff as Asquith's *de facto* chief of staff and military adviser, while he simultaneously acted as the Cabinet's unofficial secretary. As a result, Hankey acquired *ad hoc* powers *via* Asquith's executive authority and yet the exact nature of these powers and the ends to which he wielded them in 1914 remain largely obscure. What is known is that one of the first unofficial duties Hankey acquired was "to assist the liaison between the Admiralty, the War Office and the Prime Minister," which

²⁰⁷ "Asquith would not hear of my leaving him, and both then and later refused every application I made to go on active service, except on occasional missions on behalf of the Cabinet or War Committee." Hankey, *Command*, 1:167.

²⁰⁸ Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:140.

thereby allowed him, “to visit the staffs of both departments once or twice a day.”²⁰⁹

While on the surface this may appear to have been a monotonous duty, in actuality, it was a massive boon for Hankey because it offered him ample opportunities to gather information. Hankey wrote that because of his duties:

Kitchener gave me permission to see all War Office telegrams ... Often Kitchener himself would see me or Callwell [the Director of Military Operations] would do so. On arrival at my own office I would find for me a complete set of the important telegrams received at or sent by the Foreign Office, Colonial Office, and India Office ... I usually saw the Prime Minister two or three times a day in order to report developments. By these means I did what I could to keep the Prime Minister abreast of all developments and to supplement the considerable stream of information which he, as yet alone of the Cabinet Ministers, received direct from his colleagues.²¹⁰

This unparalleled access and control over the flow of information, in such a closed and archaic system, did much to further Hankey’s position within the supreme command and both his strategic and institutional agendas. Hankey’s initial attempts to pursue his institutional agenda simultaneously with his strategic one was undercut by Asquith’s unwillingness to part with the old system. Hankey’s efforts during this time became more and more preoccupied with the advancement of his strategic agenda, which advocated for strategies premised on the joint application of land and sea power. The by-product of these strategies’ eventual adoption by the supreme command was that Hankey’s own sway over the supreme command likewise increased thereby allowing him to further both his institutional and strategic agendas. Yet, while Hankey’s access was a useful means of accomplishing this, ultimately it was the shifting realities on the continent that realized Hankey’s ambitions.

²⁰⁹ Hankey, *Command*, 1:193.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:231-232.

On 23 August 1914, ominous news crossed the channel and shattered the uneasy quiet of Whitehall from General French that the French army was in full retreat and the strategic fortress at Namur had fallen, thereby forcing the BEF to pull back.²¹¹ Shock and dismay now shrouded London like a miasma as the British leaders feared that the war had turned against them. Yet, while most of the British leaderships' minds looked towards Paris in horror, Churchill and other actors realized that the Allies' failure to halt the German advance could result in the fall of the channel ports, thereby endangering Britain's link to France and precipitating a threat to the British home isles.²¹² However, while Churchill and most his colleagues' attentions shifted towards stabilizing the main French front, Hankey realized that even if the main French line was held the German's still posed a threat to the ports if the besieged Belgian city of Antwerp fell.²¹³ Hankey's determination that immediate action was required at Antwerp was further piqued by his acknowledgment that unlike the defensible fortresses at Liège and Namur, which had already fallen, that the vulnerable city only survived till this point because the Germans were focused on Paris.²¹⁴ As such, Hankey "had no illusions on the matter and before the end of August was agitating for some action to be taken," not only with regards to the city's defence, but also the destruction of the German merchant ships interned at Antwerp.²¹⁵ Hankey subsequently approached Churchill on 24 August, with plans for a combined operation spearheaded by the Royal Marines at Ostend, which would

²¹¹ Churchill, *Crisis*, 268.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 269.

²¹³ Hankey, *Command*, 1:193.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:199.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

simultaneously threaten the German lines of communication and alleviate German pressure on Antwerp.²¹⁶

Being a close associate of Churchill during their pre-war careers, Hankey was undoubtedly aware of Churchill's own concerns about the Channel ports including Antwerp. Already, Churchill had established his thinking as being in line with Hankey's by circulating a memorandum on 7 September, advocating for the allocation of greater resources to the beleaguered fortress city of Antwerp.²¹⁷ While this proposal no doubt indicated Churchill's support for Antwerp to Hankey, the future Cabinet Secretary clearly remained aware that greater action was required. To that end, Hankey knew how to convince the First Lord. As the naval war with Germany stagnated into stalemate, Churchill increasingly became consumed by the "urge to involve his service directly in the opening battles of France and Belgium whenever possible."²¹⁸ Hankey, like the rest of the Admiralty and Cabinet, was aware of this and undoubtedly knew that his plan to deploy the Marines would have satisfied Churchill's urge to control troops on land. Moreover, the successful performance of the Marines would have simultaneously justified Churchill's latest project: the Naval Brigades. According to the Richmond diaries, written by then Captain Herbert Richmond (Assistant Director of Operations to the Admiralty's Naval Staff) and his wife, Florence Elsa, it was known that:

[Churchill] is now organising an army of his own. With Kitchener at the War Office he no longer has a chance of meddling with the real army, so he is creating one for himself. He is taking Naval Reserve men & reserve marines & drilling

²¹⁶ According to his memoirs, Hankey first "On August 24th ... suggested to Churchill that, if Kitchener agreed, a brigade of Marines should be sent to Ostend," Hankey, *Command*, 1:195.

²¹⁷ Churchill to Asquith, Grey and Kitchener, 7 September 1914, in Martin Gilbert, *The Churchill Documents* [cited hereafter as *WSC*] (6 vols, Hillsdale: Hillsdale College Press, 2006-2019) 6: 97-8.

²¹⁸ Bell, *Dardanelles*, 27.

them, & the Oxfordshire yeomanry of which he is Colonel or something is to be the Cavalry wing.²¹⁹

Within the Admiralty itself, the Naval Brigades were being derided by some of its members as a vanity project. This attitude is exemplified by Captain Richmond, who concluded that the First Lord's interest in the Naval Brigades testified to Churchill's insanity.²²⁰ For some historians, reflections such as this painted a portrait of Churchill as a reckless leader, who ignored his more expert subordinates within the Admiralty.²²¹ In actuality, however, while Churchill could be bullish, it has been demonstrated that "if the admirals were determined to oppose him, and ... maintained a united front, he would almost invariably back down."²²² And naturally this was an obstacle to the Ostend mission which Hankey needed to overcome. Hankey himself was most likely well-informed of the divisions within the Admiralty, not only *via* his meetings with the naval staff, but also his regular teatime with its chief, Rear Admiral Frederick Charles Doveton Sturdee (with whom he traded information).²²³ Subsequently selling the operation to the Naval Staff was made easier by Sturdee's own concerns about the Channel Ports and those members of the Admiralty who supported the pursuit of combined operations.²²⁴ Likewise, despite their apparent dissatisfaction with Churchill's ambitions, the nay-sayers within the Admiralty proved more tractable than some imagine. The Richmond diaries indicates that Captain Richmond and likeminded officers believed that the tradeoff for

²¹⁹ Lady Richmond Diary, 18 August 1914. RIC 1/16.

²²⁰ Lady Richmond Diary. 20 August 1914. RIC 1/16.

²²¹ Andrew Lambert, *The British Way of Warfare: Julian Corbett and the Battle for a National Strategy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 318; Cassar, *Asquith*, 38.

²²² Bell, *Dardanelles*, 15.

²²³ "I had a standing engagement to take tea with Sturdee, the Chief of the Naval War Staff." Hankey, *Command*, 1:193; "In the afternoon I nearly always managed to call at about tea-time on Sturdee, who gave me the naval news in exchange for my news from other sources." *Ibid.*, 1:231-2.

²²⁴ Seligmann, "Special", 715-736.

allowing Churchill's "Little Army" (as the RND was nicknamed) was "that the Dutch scheme is really dead."²²⁵ This belief that their support killed any potential for a combined operation to seize a Dutch isle, in tandem with the safety offered to the operation by the ability to re-embark the troops if it proved unfeasible, likely cemented the acceptability of Hankey's plan.

Having won over Churchill and Admiralty, Hankey now approached the indomitable Kitchener at the War Office with his plan that same day. Unlike Churchill, Kitchener successfully circumvented the opposition by virtue of his overawing rank, prestige, and personality. Indeed, when summoned to testify before the Dardanelles Commission, Lt. General Sir James Wolfe-Murray, who served as Chief of the Imperial General Staff at the outset of the war, revealed that he had been thoroughly marginalized by Kitchener, who, according to Cassar regarded him as a mediocrity and subsequently "treated him as an office clerk and did not bother to include him in the Army Council."²²⁶ This high handed attitude, however, was not restricted to Wolfe-Murray. Even competent officers like Major-General Charles Callwell, the DMO (Director of Military Operations) found it difficult to work with Kitchener because he refused to fully trust his subordinates even when he called upon their talents.²²⁷ In the context of the Ostend operation, however, this seemingly simplified Hankey's overtures to the War Office, as it allowed

²²⁵ Lady Richmond diary. 18 August 1914. RIC 1/16.

²²⁶ Lieutenant-General Sir James Wolfe-Murray, the former CIGS, could offer no insight at all. He maintained that he had not been 'intimately acquainted' with Kitchener's views and had barely been consulted about the Dardanelles." Bell, *Dardanelles*, 270; Cassar, *Kitchener*, 185.

²²⁷ We can draw these conclusions, based on the evidence Callwell submitted to the Dardanelles Commission in 1916, herein he wrote: "I knew very little at the time that the decision was being made to attempt the forcing of the straits ... I have no recollection of Lord Kitchener ever discussing the matter with me then, and only heard about it gradually and more or less casually ... I was not so much in his (Kitchener's) confidence as I was later." Callwell, Summary of Proposed Evidence of Major-General Callwell, TNA: CAB 19/29.

him to focus on wooing Kitchener himself, a task that the young bureaucrat obviously succeeded at. What occurred at the War Office that day was undocumented, but we know that Kitchener ultimately locked arms with Churchill and Hankey to advance the Ostend scheme. Kitchener's motivations were undoubtedly rooted in the benefits it offered him. According to Esher, "Lord Kitchener used to say that if he was in command of the German armies, his strategy would not exclude an attempt at invasion," an intuition which the worsening situation in France only confirmed in Kitchener's mind.²²⁸ The most reasonable recourse to any German invasion, therefore was the disruption of German operations aimed at the strategic Channel Ports. The sole issue which aggravated Kitchener, prior to being approached by Hankey and Churchill, was that in his mind there were no troops available for such a check against Germany. Already the bulk of the British regular army had been committed to France as the BEF, and what remained were the still materializing New Armies and the Territorials. It was the quality of the Territorials which most concerned Kitchener, and despite his colleagues' urgings to deploy them, "Kitchener was unconvinced and obdurate."²²⁹ Hankey's proposal presented Kitchener with an opportunity to further his goals without compromising his own rigid views.

With one deft stratagem, Hankey seemingly satisfied the needs of Asquith's service ministers and thereafter Hankey only required the approval of the Prime Minister himself and his other confidante, Sir Edward Grey, for the operation. Evidently both

²²⁸ Reginald Balliol Brett, Viscount Esher, *The Tragedy of Lord Kitchener* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, Ltd., 1934), 74.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

men's support was forthcoming because in another letter to Stanley, Asquith confirmed that:

I had a long visit from Winston & Kitchener, and we summoned Edward Grey into our counsels. They were bitten by an idea of Hankey's: to despatch a brigade of marines (about 3000) conveyed & escorted in battleships to Ostend, to land there, & take possession of the town, & scout about in the neighbourhood ... Grey & I consented.²³⁰

The exact reasons why Asquith and Grey lent their support to Hankey's plan are further provided by Asquith himself, who wrote that such an operation, "wd. Please the Belgians, and annoy & harass the Germans, who would certainly take it to be the pioneer force of a larger force: and would further be quite a safe operation."²³¹ Having satisfied the necessary stakeholders, Hankey could now watch as his combined operation slowly unfolded in the coming days. Prior to their departure to Antwerp, Churchill informed the Marines' commander (and a close friend of Hankey's), General Sir George Aston that:

The objective of this movement is to create a diversion, favourable to the Belgians, who are advancing from Antwerp and to threaten the western flank of the southward German advance ... The object in view would be fully attained if a considerable force of the enemy were attracted to the coast. You will be re-embarked as soon as this objective is accomplished.²³²

What followed at Ostend was an unremarkable military operation. The 3,000 marines sailed across the channel and successfully landed on 28 August meeting no resistance. Thereafter, the Marines occupied the area until the 31 August, when they began their departure, which was catalyzed by the failure of the Belgian counter-offensive against the Germans and the Admiralty's fears about the Marines' survival if directly confronted by the Germans.²³³

²³⁰ Asquith to Stanley, 26 August 1914, *Letters*, 197.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² Churchill to Aston, 25 August 1914, *WSC*, 6:54-55.

²³³ Hankey, *Command*, 1:196.

Unsurprisingly, given the mission's uncertain results, the Ostend operation has been the subject of criticism by contemporaries and historians alike. Echoing previous critics, Michael and Eleanor Brock wrote that the Royal Marines' deployment to Ostend "apart from giving rise to rumours which alarmed German Headquarters they effected nothing."²³⁴ By contrast, both Hankey and the eminent military historian Basil Liddell Hart concluded that the operation succeeded in distracting the German High Command, while disrupting their lines of communications, moreover, Liddell Hart concluded that the operation shifted the battle of the Marne in the Entente's favour.²³⁵ Continuing in this vein, Hankey proceeded to argue that any operational shortcomings were, "an illustration of the inadequacy of the governmental machinery for the exercise of the Supreme Command at the beginning of the war."²³⁶ And yet, despite this assertion by Hankey, the question must be asked: what did the Ostend operation really achieve? Moreover: how did it possibly further Hankey's ambitions for an operation at Antwerp? In his reflections on Ostend, Hankey hints at his original intentions, when he remarks:

Who knows what the result might have been on the Belgian sortie from Antwerp on September 9th, or even on the main German armies if the Ostend bluff had been developed sufficiently to compel the Germans to detach divisions to deal with it? But the ruse de guerre was never our strong point, and we had not studied history sufficiently to use sea-power to its fullest effect.²³⁷

Here we can see Hankey's continuing pursuit of his pre-existing strategic agenda.

Hankey recognized the opportunity to improve upon Britain's capabilities to enact peripheral operations against the enemy. Moreover, while the operation might not have

²³⁴ Michael and Eleanor Brock, 27 Aug 1914, *Asquith Letters*, 198, n. 1

²³⁵ "Short as the whole enterprise had been it was not wholly ineffective. It prevented the occupation of the port by mere patrols and as a diversion it helped bring confusion to the enemy High Command then in a state of considerable perplexity." Hankey, *Command*, 1:196; Basil Liddell Hart, *The Military Strategist*, 165-7.

²³⁶ Hankey, *Command*, 1:196.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

ensured the success of the Belgian advance, it did achieve the political goals of the men who approved it and thereby deepened their reliance on Hankey. The Marines' deployment had demonstrated Britain's commitment to Belgium for Grey and Asquith. And while the operation scored no clear success, it could not be considered an outright failure, which pleased Asquith after weeks of bad news. Likewise, the results served the service ministers, who now had evidence that they could use Churchill's naval brigades in the interim until the New Armies were ready for deployment. Moreover, for Hankey himself, Ostend had showcased his abilities as a strategist and the successful conclusion of the operation lent his future advice greater credibility with Asquith.

The success of the combined operation at Ostend helped affirm the feasibility of future combined operations in the European theatre for Asquith's subordinates, an affirmation that became more pertinent in the days following the Battle of the Marne. Thereafter, the inability of Germany or the Allies to launch frontal attacks resulted in both armies attempting to outflank the other, effectively beginning the so called "Race to the Sea." Whereas the Allies' attention had been firmly fixed on the German advance towards Paris, now that said threat was stalled, all sides scrambled to seize or protect the valuable channel ports, including Antwerp. Until this point Antwerp had been an island of Belgian defiance in a restless German sea, which the Belgians had transformed into a fortress-city for both their fugitive government and army. Allied decision makers had some awareness of the city's vulnerability, but for the most part they remained preoccupied until late September and October with the Channel Ports themselves. Still, Antwerp was not wholly forgotten: Hankey and Churchill continued to advocate for an operation in that sector despite the reluctance of Asquith and the Cabinet. Nonetheless

these proposals found a cool reception at Number 10, which shared the Cabinet's view that the French front was of greater importance, to say nothing of his lingering reservations about the Naval Brigade's abilities.²³⁸ Ultimately, however, the realities of war ebbed away at Asquith and the Cabinet's intractability over the coming days before finally their opposition gave way.

In the aftermath of the Marne, there was an overwhelming desire at the highest echelons of the western Entente militaries to follow up on their success with a bold countermove. And while the Cabinet preferred to drag its feet, ultimately it was forced to support this desire on 19 September, when it received an urgent request from the French Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Joseph Joffre, for "a diversion on the N. coast of France to frighten the Germans as the lines of their communication."²³⁹ This request was delivered by Kitchener and Churchill, both of whom vouched for the plan, and shortly thereafter Asquith revealed to Stanley:

(This is *very secret*): so Winston has sent there (the N. coast) to reinforce his aeroplanes & armed motor-cars, his Marine Brigade (about 3,000 men) ... [Churchill also] had despatched the Oxfordshire Yeomanry!²⁴⁰

Pressed by Britain's military obligations, Asquith and the cabinet had little recourse but to bow to the pressures around them and support a combined operation on the northern coast of France. The RND was to be the centerpiece of this operation, which was deployed to Dunkirk, and amongst their number was to be none other than the First Lord's younger brother, John. It is through Winston's correspondence with John that we further learn on 14 September that:

²³⁸ "I have been talking to Winston today about his 'little' army: I am not all comfortable as to its prospects, having little faith in the fighting or staying power of the Oxfordsh[ire] Yeomanry." Asquith to Stanley, 21 September 1914, *WSC*, 6:126.

²³⁹ Asquith to Stanley, 19 September 1914, *Letters*, 247.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

It is intended only as a demonstration on the enemy's flank: & I expected that the armed motor cars wd do the work: you being merely a support & to enable the infantry to move. But now it seems that the German cavalry in g[rea]t force has come over this area. You will be kept in close relation to the perimeter of the fortress wh[ich] is extensive & well-fortified - as I know from personal inspection.²⁴¹

However, there is something very unusual about the Churchill correspondence. Namely, that the letter Winston sent to John is dated 14 September! This was a whole five days before Joffre's request reached Asquith. How is this possible? For the present project the answer to that questions rests with Hankey, who recalled in his own memoirs that:

On or about September 15th I had suggested that another opportunity presented itself for a minor operation with the object of worrying the Germans about their communications. The General Staff passed the idea on to Joffre who ... asked that all available British troops might be sent to Calais and Dunkirk to act against the enemy's communications.²⁴²

This is a titanic claim, one that is attested by Hankey's memoirs and his biographer Roskill, both of whom we have already established must be scrutinized.²⁴³ And yet there is evidence which lends it credence. First and foremost, we have already established that Hankey not only possessed the desire to advance such an operation, but also the necessary access (*via* his position as Asquith's liaison with the services) to the military staffs of both services. Access which would have easily allowed him, given his good relations with members from both staffs, to forward the proposal for a combined operation to Joffre. Moreover, it would not be out of character for Hankey to bypass the proper chain of command to promote his own strategic initiatives. This much has been made clear by his actions prior to and during Ostend, the July Crisis, and will be further attested to in the pages to come. Furthermore, there is the correspondence prior to 19

²⁴¹ Churchill to John Churchill, 14 September 1914, *WSC*, 6:117.

²⁴² Hankey, *Command*, 1:197.

²⁴³ "It was again at Hankey's suggestion that Aston's Marines and a scratch force of soldiers were sent to Dunkirk." Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:144.

September 1914, which shall be discussed in greater detail below, indicating that Hankey recruited a diverse troop of actors to further his plans. But why? Surely there was more to Hankey's scheme than simply deploying the Royal Marines to Dunkirk for a sequel to Ostend. What was the goal of Hankey's intrigues in September 1914?

Shortly after Hankey proposed his "minor operation" to Dunkirk, and barely a few days after the RND arrived in Northern France for Joffre's "diversion", Asquith was forwarded a plan from Sir John French. Per this plan, French proposed that he be allowed to:

"Disengage" as they call it i.e. to unlock his troops from their present position and to make with his whole force a great outflanking march via Amiens, Arras, Douai, Tournay, to the line across Belgium from Brussels to Cologne. He thinks he could do it in a week or nine days ... It would relieve Antwerp ... take the Germans in their flank & rear, break up their communications, & if successful put an end to the invasion of France.²⁴⁴

It was an audacious strategy, one that could achieve the goals of several decision makers including Hankey if it was successfully carried out. Yet, while Asquith's letters to Stanley establish the plan's origins, Churchill's memoirs put a wrinkle in that narrative. According to Churchill, the real originator of French's "great outflanking march" was none other than himself. The First Lord alleges that during a tour of the front lines he visited French and:

I ([Churchill]?) opened with Sir John French the principal business I had to discuss, namely, the advantages of disengaging the British Army from its position on the Aisne and its transportation to its natural position on the sea flank in contact with the Navy. I found the Field Marshal in complete accord and I undertook to lay his views before Lord Kitchener and the Prime Minister.²⁴⁵

Is this accurate? Not according to Michael and Eleanor Brock, who counter Churchill's claim by arguing that Churchill was not made aware of the plan until 27 September

²⁴⁴ Asquith to Stanley, 29 September 1914, *Letters*, 256.

²⁴⁵ Churchill, *Crisis*, 281.

1914.²⁴⁶ For the present project, however, there is another plausible theory behind the circumstances of French's offensive. Specifically, it shall be illustrated below that, while Hankey preferred to distance himself from these two figures later, he was likely as much a driving force for the operation as Churchill and French. Building on this assertion, while it is impossible to discern which came first, Hankey's minor operation or French's offensive, it should be noted that around 16 September, Hankey, and Churchill - who were formulating a combined operation - must have recruited French into their confidence, pooled their resources and ultimately worked towards actualizing their shared objective, an objective that Hankey's minor operation was intimately a part of.

In review, sometime following Asquith and the Cabinet's initial refusal of Churchill and Hankey's petitions for another combined operation, the two began intriguing together to achieve this goal. Based on Churchill's correspondence with his brother, this began around 14 September, the same time Hankey proposed his "minor operation" to the General Staff and by extension Marshal Joffre. Around this same time, Churchill crossed the Channel and visited French, beginning a partnership designed to advance their shared strategic initiatives that is attested by both Churchill's later claims and existing correspondence with French. It is evident that communications between them relied on Churchill's now staple visits to the Channel ports and front, both of which allowed him to either visit French directly, or with his intermediary, Colonel J.E.B. Seely, the former Secretary of State for War, now an officer on French's staff. Churchill and Seely's reintroduction occurred under the auspices of Hankey, who had kept in close

²⁴⁶ Brock, "Letter 168" in *H.H. Asquith Letters to Venetia Stanley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 257 n. 2.

contact with Seely despite his removal from office following the Curragh Affair, a decision that likely stemmed from the fact that Seely served Sir John French as “a roving intelligence officer, and in liaison duties with the French and Belgian armies,” which even led him to Antwerp.²⁴⁷ Thereafter Seely began working as a mule and possible agitator in favor of such an operation, as evidenced by the following letter between him and Churchill:

I gave your letter to the C and C last night, and your messages this morning. He is writing to you to say that he hopes you may be able to come out here to discuss matters with him – I am quite certain it is really important that you should do this if you can possibly get away.²⁴⁸

Because of Churchill’s initial meeting with French, and thanks in no small part to Seely’s service as a middleman, these parties formed an alliance with the aim of actualizing a massive offensive against the Germans in Belgium. The only question now was how to achieve this aim. French himself indicated in his proposal to Asquith on 29 September that the larger offensive not only required Joffre’s assent, but also would only be actionable, “if Joffre can spare enough men to fill the gap.”²⁴⁹ In this regard, Hankey’s original proposal to Joffre that the RND be redeployed to Dunkirk as a diversionary force makes greater sense, given that the RND could easily be reformed into a rear guard for the advancing British Army to assist Joffre. Indeed, the dual purpose of the RND as both a distraction and garrison force is clearly evident in its subsequent duties at Dunkirk. Yet, if the deployment of the RND to Dunkirk was going to be achieved, Churchill, Hankey, and French, required further allies.

²⁴⁷ “I was glad to hear from Captain Hankey some account of y[ou]r exploits.” Churchill to Seely, 20 September 1914, *WSC*, 6:125 n. 1.

²⁴⁸ Seely to Churchill, 24 September 1914, *WSC*, 6:134.

²⁴⁹ Asquith to Stanley, 29 September 1914, *Letters*, 256.

Fortunately for Hankey's little cohort there were many other likeminded individuals in positions of authority or influence who could and would be won over to their scheme. Chief amongst these potential allies was none other than Hankey's longstanding friend and mentor: Lord Esher. Ever at the center of his vast web of influence, Esher had not passed the war idly; rather, he had "quickly attached himself to Kitchener, who 'glanced around the War Office for help, but could find none.'"²⁵⁰ Likely aided by his relationship with the royal family, amongst others, Esher won some level of trust from Kitchener, as evidenced by his appointment as a go-between with the French government and role as Kitchener's adviser.²⁵¹ And while the extent of Esher's influence over Kitchener is debatable, it can be inferred that it was significant enough to warrant his involvement in what came next. Following his recruitment into the scheme, Esher revealed that on 17 September:

I had lunch with Callwell today, and we talked a great deal about the availability of a landing, as soon as possible, Churchill's Sea-dogs [the "Little Army" or RND], a Territorial Division, and the Canadians at Dunkirk, or on the coast. If this move were not delayed, it would be most effective. I think that he is most strongly in favour of it and it turns upon whether the idea can be insinuated into Lord K's mind.

Based on Esher's journal, it is evident that the group intended to recruit Callwell, a well-regarded authority on combined operations, to further insinuate the feasibility of such an operation in Kitchener's mind.²⁵² Indeed this is an intriguing revelation because it raises several other questions. Were other officers on Kitchener's staff recruited towards this end? And had this method been similarly employed when Hankey wanted Kitchener's support for the Ostend operation? After all, Esher shared Hankey's concerns over the

²⁵⁰ Fraser, *Esher*, 262.

²⁵¹ Cassar, *Kitchener*, 291; Fraser, *Esher*, 262-267.

²⁵² Seligmann, "Special", 716.

Channel Ports, Belgium, and moreover was a keen supporter of combined operations.²⁵³

Unfortunately we cannot know the answer. However, what can be determined is that a coordinated effort was underway by supporters of combined operations to enact another Ostend-style operation in mid-September 1914. And ultimately it must have succeeded in winning over Kitchener given that the proposal reached Joffre through the General Staff, which was firmly under Kitchener's thumb.

After recruiting Esher, Callwell, and Kitchener into their scheme, the plan rapidly progressed. On 19 September, a mere two days following Esher's meeting with Callwell, Joffre's request for a diversionary attack reached London and the Cabinet was forced to assent or risk breaching their military obligations to the French. The RND was transferred to Dunkirk, where in the cabinet's mind it satisfied their obligations to the French and simultaneously addressed growing concerns about the Channel Ports' defence. Indeed, Asquith no doubt echoed the majority of his colleagues' expectations for the operation when he informed Stanley that, "Like the little jaunt to Ostend ... they will follow the example of the 'good old Duke of York', who 'led his men to the top of a hill,' and led 'led them down again'."²⁵⁴ And yet, it quickly became evident that the operation at Dunkirk was not going to be another Ostend. Shortly after the RND's arrival its duties began to outstrip the expectations of the Cabinet. First on 21 September, General Aston received a request from the French for:

²⁵³ "Like Hankey, Esher was concerned for the safety of the Channel ports." Fraser, Esher, 262; "Looking at this war dispassionately the results so far seem wholly favourable to Germany. The German Emperor has now got Belgium under his heel, and has established a naval base within reach of England." Esher, Journals, 192; "The threat of a landing of 150,000 men at some unknown point on German soil is bound to exercise a moral effect, and a military diversion that might well be the turning point in a campaign. By the precipitate alignment of our army to that of the French, we forgo the advantages of sea power." Esher, Journals, 192, 175.

²⁵⁴ Asquith to Stanley, 19 September 1914, *Letters*, 247.

Commander Samson, his colleagues [the Royal Marines] and five cars to be put under his orders to work tomorrow from Douai where he promises to send 1,000 territorial infantry in support. Samson with five armed cars and explosives and French Engineers proceeding thence to blow up railway bridge over river between Cambrai and Valenciennes.²⁵⁵

Aston forwarded the French request for British assistance in severing the German communication lines to Churchill, adding that “In view of strength in which these important bridges must be held a considerable risk project.”²⁵⁶ Unsurprisingly, Churchill assented to the Royal Marines participating in the raid and thereafter they embarked on this goal in conjunction with the French Territorials.²⁵⁷

Apparently neither Asquith nor the Cabinet learned of these developments until the Cabinet meeting on 23 September, just as the Marines were deploying to Douai. Yet their response to Churchill’s machinations was a mixture of silence and muted anger. For while the Cabinet and even the Prime Minister nursed private doubts about the effectiveness of the RND, there was little to be done. The request for support had come from the French and Asquith was determined to maintain good relations with them. Both Asquith and the Cabinet warily accepted the risks and, despite the latter’s growing resentment towards Churchill, they had little reason to believe that the raid at Douai was part of a wider operation. Indeed, even when the ministers learnt about Churchill’s meeting with Seely (which the First Lord presented as purely accidental), only Charles Hobhouse voiced his opinion that Churchill had “run across to Dunkirk and there met Seely who had come up from Gen. Sir J. French to arrange this foolish adventure.”²⁵⁸ Still, despite this inkling, Hobhouse failed to follow up on his suspicions and never

²⁵⁵ Aston to Churchill, 21 September 1914, *WSC*, 6:125.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ Churchill to Aston, 21 September 1914, *WSC*, 126.

²⁵⁸ Hobhouse diary, 24 September 1914, *Inside*, 193.

deduced the existence of a larger plan or the possibility that the Dunkirk “adventure” was part of it. And even if he had learned the truth, there was likely little Hobhouse or any of his colleagues could have done about it. For while Asquith’s faith in the RND was shaky, his faith in the Cabinet had plummeted to the point that, “After Wednesday [23 September 1914], we shall give up for the present the daily Cabinet.”²⁵⁹ As such, while the Cabinet continued to meet, ultimately its function as the premier decision-making body was being transferred to the impromptu gatherings of Asquith’s “Inner Cabinet.”

Without any real pushback from either the Cabinet or the Prime Minister, the Dunkirk mission’s evolution into something more than a *ruse de guerre* and garrison duties went into overdrive. For although the RND upheld Asquith’s expectations to “render such assistance as is safe & practicable,” ultimately the Douai raid paled in size to what came next.²⁶⁰ After gaining Kitchener’s permission, Churchill crossed the Channel to confer with French for the final time on 27 September.²⁶¹ Shortly thereafter, Asquith informed Stanley that French had presented his plan for a combined operation and Asquith admitted to her that “it is a great scheme,” and that it was “heartily approved by Kitchener,” as well.²⁶² The official sanction for the operation could not have come sooner. A day prior on 28 September, the German Army had redoubled its commitment to taking by city by strengthening the besiegers with “a large force of heavy artillery including in the final stages 160 heavy and 13 super-heavy guns.”²⁶³ The urgent need for immediate action was further strengthened by reconnaissance carried out by the RND’s

²⁵⁹ Asquith to Stanley, 24 September 1914, *Letters*, 251.

²⁶⁰ Asquith to George V, 23 September 1914, *WSC*, 6: 133.

²⁶¹ Churchill to Kitchener, 26 September 1914, *WSC*, 6:140-1.

²⁶² Asquith to Stanley, 29 September 1914, *Letters*, 256.

²⁶³ Hankey, *Command*, 1:200.

new commander, Major-General Archibald Paris. Thankfully, while Asquith fretted over whether Joffre would approve of French's plan, the groundwork for an offensive had all but been laid by the clique with the RND as its instrument. Per Hankey's theory of Littoral Warfare, the elastic RND had secured a valuable advanced base (Dunkirk) and subsequent staging area (Dunkirk, Douai, Lille, and Cassel) for the arrival of the British Army and Navy. Moreover, they had gained valuable expertise in key areas of combined warfare as both a vanguard and rearguard force, which proved invaluable in the days ahead. But, while these plans appeared wonderful on paper, the realities on the ground were changing and as a result the old saying "No battle plan survives first contact with the enemy," rang true.

On 30 September, the same day that Churchill and his allies received Paris' intelligence report, Colonel Dallas of the General Staff and Rear-Admiral Henry Oliver of the Naval Staff slipped across the Channel to Antwerp.²⁶⁴ Officially theirs was a fact-finding mission to determine how long the fortress-city could hold out against the German onslaught, while the French and British negotiated sending a combined force to aid the defenders. Unofficially, Oliver had orders from to investigate the interned German merchant fleet and (per Hankey's advice) ultimately "was to sink or destroy them."²⁶⁵ Upon their arrival, both men determined the situation to be grim and relayed this to their superiors, who were equally disturbed by the news. Alas, while the government now hurriedly redoubled its efforts to save the city, these efforts were bogged down by logistical issues regarding the redeployment of certain units and the opinions of some

²⁶⁴ Oliver unpublished memoirs, Oliver papers, National Maritime Museum, OLV/12; Hankey, *Command*, 1:201.

²⁶⁵ Oliver unpublished memoirs, OLV/12, 103; Churchill to Oliver, 30 September 1914, *WSC*, 6:145; Hankey, *Command*, 1:205-6.

decision makers that available units (including both the Territorials and RND) were unfit for such an operation.²⁶⁶ Finally, after several days of heavy bombardment and as the noose tightened around the city:

The Belgian government, notwithstanding that we were sending them heavy guns, and trying hard to get together troops to raise the siege of Antwerp, resolved yesterday to throw up the sponge & to leave to-day for Ostend, the King with his field army withdrawing in the direction of Ghent.²⁶⁷

Naturally the British reaction to this news was one of shock and dismay. And in Asquith's absence, an informal collective was summoned to Kitchener's house, where Churchill, "found shortly before midnight besides Lord Kitchener, Sir Edward Grey, the First Sea Lord, and Sir William Tyrell of the Foreign Office."²⁶⁸ Caught off-guard by Asquith's absence, ultimately their shared dread of "the 'pistol pointed at the heart of England,' as Hankey described Antwerp," forced the ministers to take matters into their own hands.²⁶⁹ Shortly thereafter, telegrams were relayed to Antwerp and the Belgian armed forces, which demanded the city hold out until the RND (who were the only available or for that matter acceptable force) arrived to strengthen the Belgian position. Moreover, Churchill himself was dispatched to Antwerp, where Asquith, upon learning what had transpired in his absence, informed Venetia, "He will go ... & beard the King and & his Ministers, and try to infuse into their backbones the necessary quantity of

²⁶⁶ "They (the Belgians) have asked us to send 1 Division and we have agreed, if the French will also send 1 Div. of regular troops, they want to send only territorial troops," Hobhouse diary, 2 October 1914, *Inside*, 193; "Be careful not to raise the hopes of the British and French forces arriving quickly to Antwerp. The matter has not been decided, as the territorial division offered by France in ten days' time would, in my opinion, be quite incapable of doing anything towards changing the situation at Antwerp. I have represented this. Unless a change is made, I consider it would be useless to put our little force against the very superior German forces in the field army surrounding Antwerp" Kitchener to Colonel Dallas, 2 October 1914, *WSC*, 6:153.

²⁶⁷ Asquith to Stanley, 3 October 1914, *Letters*, 259-260.

²⁶⁸ Churchill, *Crisis*, 338.

²⁶⁹ Hankey, *Command*, 1:204.

starch.”²⁷⁰ Finally, a proposal was sent to and agreed upon by the French whereby a joint force would be deployed to relieve the city numbering 53,000 men (including the RND which had already been sent).²⁷¹ Despite Hankey, French, and Churchill’s carefully laid plans for a counteroffensive to save Antwerp, those plans came to naught. Despite the First Lord’s arrival in the city alongside the RND, their spirited defense came to naught when the expected French aid never materialized, and the German attack intensified.

Once the dust settled and Antwerp languished beneath the Teutonic yoke, the question was inevitably asked: “What was it all for?” In the immediate aftermath of Antwerp two arguments inevitably emerged to satisfy that question with wildly opposing viewpoints. Within the government, Hankey offered an optimistic assessment of the siege to his superiors by arguing that “this last week – which has delayed the fall of Antwerp by at least 7 days, and prevented the Germans from linking up their forces – has not been thrown away, and may with Sir John French all the time coming round have been of vital value.”²⁷² Hankey’s rosy interpretation of the siege’s outcome was undoubtedly aided by his earlier pessimism about Antwerp’s ability to hold out against the German army even though the superior fortresses at Namur and Liege had previously fallen. Despite facing superior numbers and firepower, Hankey’s prized RND had outstripped his expectations by frustrating wider German efforts and granting Oliver enough time to destroy the

²⁷⁰ Asquith to Stanley, 3 October 1914, *Letters*, 260.

²⁷¹ “French force- Territorial division General Roy 15,000 men, proper complement of guns, and two squadrons, to arrive in Ostend 6th to 9th October/ Fusiliers marine brigade under Rear-Ronarch 8,000 men. British Force- 7th division, under General Capper 18,000 men, 63 guns; cavalry division, under General Byng 4,000 men, 12 guns, to arrive at Zeebrugge 6th and 7th October. Naval detachment, under General Paris 8,000 men, already there, also naval and military guns and detachments already sent ... Grand total, 53,000 men.” Grey to Bertie: telegram, 4 October 1914, *WSC*, 6:162.

²⁷² “We (Churchill and Asquith) both agreed with Hankey (who is a good opinion) that this last week – which has delayed the fall of Antwerp by at least 7 days and has prevented the Germans from linking up their forces – has not been thrown away and may with Sir J. French all the time coming round have been of vital value.” Asquith to Stanley, 10 October 1914, *Letters*, 271.

German merchant fleet and in doing so effectively blockade Antwerp harbour with their ruined hulls. Hankey's confidence was shared by Asquith who over the course of the operation had come to regard Hankey as a "good opinion," thereby signifying the deepening of their relationship and Asquith's growing reliance on Hankey's advice as a military adviser. While Hankey's opinions were given greater credence by Asquith, thereby precipitating the growth of his influence in the coming days, Hankey's comments also shaped later historiography. Like Asquith, Churchill latched onto Hankey's views and asserted that if Antwerp had fallen earlier on 3-4 October the British "victory" at Ypres would never have come to pass and the "Race to the Sea" would have ended in German victory.²⁷³ This assessment has since been defended by Basil Liddell Hart, who argued that the RND's adventures at Ostend, Calais, and Antwerp crucially undermined German military operations. Specifically, he argued that the combined operations at Ostend and Calais influenced the Battle of the Marne causing the German high command to waver in committing all its forces to the crucial battle lest "its rear was significantly menaced."²⁷⁴ Moreover, while Antwerp failed to establish an advanced base for the Entente, "the heroic defence of Ypres ... succeeded by so narrow a margin that the Antwerp expedition must be adjudged the saving factor."²⁷⁵ Finally, both the Brocks and Cassar concur that "every day on which Antwerp held out gave more time for the defence of the Channel Ports," and, "though it failed, [the attempt] proved an invaluable advantage in the 'Race to the Sea.'"²⁷⁶

²⁷³ Churchill, *Crisis*, 362-4.

²⁷⁴ Basil Liddell Hart, *The Military Strategist*, 165-6.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

²⁷⁶ Michael and Eleanor Brock, "Letter 179" in *Letters*, 272 n. 5.

In contrast to the rosier perspective offered by Hankey, the arch-conservative editor of *The Morning Post*, Howell Arthur Gwynne, argued on 13 October that the operation was actually ““a costly blunder for which Mr. Winston Churchill must be held responsible.””²⁷⁷ Motivated purely by a desire to discredit and remove Churchill, Gwynne argued that the expedition sent ““old men and youths, men who had never fired a rifle in their whole lives, officers who had not been trained and just come from the Officers’ Training Corps,”” into a “perfect slaughter” where, according to his unnamed informants some 8,000-9,000 British servicemen perished.²⁷⁸ Ultimately, while these numbers were grossly inflated (only 60 were killed, 138 wounded, 900 captured, and 1,479 interned for crossing the Dutch border) and the bulk of the RND were raw recruits, Churchill’s inability to defend himself without breaking secrecy laws ensured that the response to these allegations was nothing short of fiery.²⁷⁹ Moreover, although the public pressure did not cause Asquith to reject either Churchill or Hankey, for a brief moment his political instincts and lack of surety on military affairs caused him refer to the whole operation as “wicked folly.”²⁸⁰ This perspective, has since muddied the historiographical waters more because of Churchill or the lingering influence of the “Easterner” versus “Westerner” debate.

Ultimately, focusing on Hankey’s role in the early days of British strategy and Britain’s early attempts at combined operations, makes it clear that the future Cabinet Secretary played a larger role in these events than previously imagined. Despite Hankey’s

²⁷⁷ Bell, *Dardanelles*, 34.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 35-7.

²⁸⁰ Asquith to Stanley, 13 October 1914, Letters, 275; George Riddell diary, 10 October 1914, Lord Riddell Papers, British Library, Add MS 62974.

attempts to create some distance between himself and what occurred at Antwerp, there is sufficient evidence to argue he played a large role in the operation's conception and execution. Like Churchill, his intentions behind such an operation were simultaneously noble and self-serving, and yet while they had come close to achieving their aims, ultimately "events on the Western Front had simply moved faster than the Allies anticipated."²⁸¹ While events had outpaced Hankey and his allies' machinations, it cannot be denied that they had come close to achieving their goals. This feat was nearly accomplished *via* the skillful manipulation of the very informal system, which Hankey ironically had set out to reform in 1914. More ironic, however, is the fact that in this failure Hankey found success, because:

If the Antwerp expedition damaged Churchill's reputation in the eyes of the Prime Minister, it also brought out the serious flaws in the structure of supreme command ... Until there existed a permanent body ... such hasty improvisation as had been made in prolonging the defence of Antwerp were bound to be repeated.²⁸²

The superficial failure at Antwerp ensured that the War Council came into being and for the first time since the beginning of the war, Hankey's bureaucratic ambitions were coming to fruition. This would become something of a pattern for Hankey's strategic initiatives. Because while many were often well thought out and designed to shift the balance of the war, they usually fell victim to the very machinery that was designed to implement them. Hankey himself was cognizant of this and while he distanced himself from the operation, he nonetheless argued that it could have succeeded. As Hankey

²⁸¹ Cassar, *Kitchener*, 248.

²⁸² Cassar, *Asquith*, 54.

explained, “the statesmen were ... handicapped by the weakness of the old cabinet system under which the affairs of the nation were conducted.”²⁸³

What Hankey omitted from his critique of the old system is the fact he himself was as complicit as his superiors in manipulating the old system for his own ends. Whenever he was unable to achieve his goals through direct means he simply used the same methods as his superiors to advance his own strategic vision and due to the pressures of the conflict on the Liberal government he was often successful. Moreover, while this had mixed results, the “failure” of Antwerp did nothing to stifle either Hankey’s ambitions for future combined operations, contrary to Cassar’s assertions.²⁸⁴ Hankey’s commitment to pursuing future combined operations would only intensify in the coming months as French’s coastal offensive ground to a halt and stalemate set in across Europe. In this regard Hankey was aided by Asquith’s continuing intransigence, for while he was willing to make incremental changes in favour of reform, that was the extent of his adventurism. As such, while Hankey believed ardently in the cause of reform, he nonetheless continued to manipulate the informal system to achieve his strategic ends.

²⁸³ Hankey, *Command*, 1:209.

²⁸⁴ Cassar, *Asquith*, 54-5

Chapter 6: “The Most Useful Man in Europe.”

Hankey’s and Asquith’s relationship rapidly evolved between the fall of Antwerp and the Dardanelles campaign, to the point that the Prime Minister could praise the Secretary as “the most useful man in Europe ... he has never been wrong.”²⁸⁵ The primary catalysts for Asquith’s growing faith in Hankey were the breakdown of the informal system of government and the First World War’s devolution into a war of attrition. Asquith’s imperfect understanding of complex military affairs subsequently ensured that he depended on the members of his “Inner Cabinet,” most notably his service ministers, to oversee the day-to-day management of the war. However, his leading ministers’ preoccupation with their own departmental responsibilities ensured that Asquith could not wholly rely on either Churchill or Kitchener for military advice. Asquith trusted these two ministers, but the perceived debacle at Antwerp and both ministers’ difficult relations with their colleagues ensured that while Asquith remained protective of them, he was hardly blind to their flaws.²⁸⁶ His other options for the position of a full-time military advisor were few and far in between. David Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, lacked the necessary experience and his brilliance was undermined by his

²⁸⁵ Lady Scott Diary, “26 July 1916” in Cassar, *Asquith*, 54.

²⁸⁶ “Asquith never saw Kitchener as an infallible demi-god. He quickly identified some of the Field Marshal’s shortcomings but his early impressions of him were quite favourable. At times he found him slow to grasp a new point and unnecessarily inflexible in cabinet discussions. Asquith thought that the Field Marshal was too obsessed about security leaks and that the Field Marshal was wrong to withhold classified information from his fellow ministers.” Cassar, *Asquith*, 41; Asquith to Stanley, 3 October 1914, *Letters*, 275.

inability to grasp the practical, so much so in Asquith's mind, that the Prime Minister joked that he once found Lloyd George "searching for Gallipoli on a map of Spain."²⁸⁷ Alternatively, those ministers who had previously been part of Asquith's peacetime "Inner Cabinet" and were judged superior to both Kitchener and Churchill, were not well-versed in military affairs, or were undermined by ill-health.²⁸⁸ Another candidate, the former Conservative Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour, while knowledgeable about military matters and temperamentally suited to the role of war manager, nonetheless hailed from the opposition. The remaining high-ranking military officers in London, who might have filled the void, were "elderly 'dug-outs,'" such as the CIGS Wolfe-Murray, who along with more capable officers such as the DMO, Callwell, Master General of the Ordnance Stanley von Donop, and Quartermaster-General Jack Cowans were fully occupied assisting Kitchener at the War Office.²⁸⁹ Similarly, a substitute from the Navy was unlikely because the most qualified candidates, the two former First Sea Lords, Fisher and Wilson, were preoccupied at the Admiralty and disparaged by Asquith as being "2 'well-plucked chickens,'" on account of their age - to say nothing of Fisher's notorious reputation as an intriguer.²⁹⁰ Furthermore, Asquith's choice had to be respected by both the services and political elites, who were increasingly at odds as the war progressed. This criterion subsequently led Asquith to realize that there was only one worthy and available candidate for the position: Hankey.

Since the conflict's beginning, Hankey had proven his worth to Asquith time and again, first as an expert on the War Book and later as both a military advisor and prime

²⁸⁷ Cassar, *Asquith*, 37.

²⁸⁸ Asquith to Stanley, 26 February 1915, *Letters*, 452; Cassar, *Asquith*, 36-7.

²⁸⁹ Cassar, *Kitchener*, 185.

²⁹⁰ Asquith to Stanley, 27 and 28 October 1914, *Letters*, 287 and 290.

ministerial interlocutor by the time of Antwerp. Thereafter, Asquith respected Hankey for his cool-headedness and pronounced that “he has the best head of the soldiers & sailors.”²⁹¹ This good opinion played a major role in Asquith’s decision to rely increasingly on Hankey as his *de facto* military advisor and grant him further informal responsibilities that made him akin to a wartime chief of staff. Besides providing Asquith with military advice, Hankey’s responsibilities included serving as prime ministerial interlocutor between the services and departments; organizing formal and informal investigations of military matters, which Hankey reported back to Asquith; and most critically, gatekeeping the Prime Minister. Hankey’s acquisition of these responsibilities was by no means an organized process; rather, the acquisition of each duty was premised on an individual failure of the informal system, which Asquith sought to rectify by having Hankey fill the void, thereby allowing Hankey to amass enormous influence.²⁹²

Asquith’s frustration with the ineptitude of the full Cabinet as a wartime decision-making body and its inability to meet the challenges posed by a sudden emergency like Antwerp, resulted in his decision to separate the day-to-day management of the country from the war effort by forming the War Council in November 1914. Rather than rely upon twenty-one ministerial colleagues for strategic advice, Asquith would now rely on a handful of trusted ministers: Kitchener, Lloyd George, Grey, and Churchill. Likewise, two of Hankey’s pre-war patrons, Balfour, and the new First Sea Lord, Fisher, joined the sheepish CIGS, Wolfe-Murray, at the War Council due to their expertise, while Hankey

²⁹¹ Asquith to Stanley, 5 December 1914, *Letters*, 326; “Hankey has just been here for a talk: he has the best head of the soldiers & sailors. He was very strong about the necessity of giving French’s troops a rest – which can only be done if the French are willing to take their place for a time.” Asquith to Stanley, 7 November 1915, *Letters*, 313.

²⁹² Bell, *Dardanelles*, 77, 136-7, 142; Cassar, *Asquith*, 44-5, 91-3.

acted as secretary. These experts ““were there ... to give the lay members the benefit of their advice.””²⁹³ The most prominent of these lay members was Asquith himself, who although intelligent enough to comprehend the broad strokes of British strategy was nonetheless overwhelmed by the *minutiae* of more complicated affairs. Rather than rely on the unsolicited, haphazard, and uninformed opinion of the full cabinet in strategic matters, Asquith could rely on the advice of individuals he trusted. However, while Hankey and other participants hoped that the War Council would become Britain’s strategic nerve center, this was quickly dashed by Asquith.

The War Council was compromised within four months of its inception by the expansion of its membership under political pressure and Asquith’s refusal to utilize the council as an executive, rather than advisory, body on war-related matters. Instead, Asquith’s informal managerial style resulted in him relying upon the service ministers – who were responsible for the execution of the day-to-day management of the war - and the informal group of ministers Hankey termed the “Inner Cabinet,” which increasingly usurped the War Council’s duties as Asquith called upon the original body less and less. Asquith’s continuing reliance upon informal groups, rather than the War Council was partly because the War Council’s “status ... was never precisely defined.”²⁹⁴ Bereft of any real authority and summoned only when Asquith saw fit (usually amidst a crisis), the War Council’s shortcomings were further compounded by a lack of communication between it and the rest of the government. Specifically, while the council’s conclusions and proceedings were recorded by Hankey, they were only forwarded to those ministers whose departments were concerned and occasionally relayed to the King or Cabinet in

²⁹³ Cassar, *Kitchener*, 260.

²⁹⁴ Hankey, *Command*, 1:238; Dardanelles Commission, Hankey testimony, 27 September 1916, Q. 184.

oral, rather than written form. At the Dardanelles Commission, Hankey noted that the information provided to the War Council was entirely dependent on the service ministers' and their departments' willingness to share information.²⁹⁵ This egregious communications breakdown carried over to the War Council's relationship with the military services, with whom "Asquith neglected to set up a mechanism to coordinate the military and naval planning."²⁹⁶ Instead, the Admiralty and War Office received few memoranda directly from the War Council and again relied upon their respective ministers to orally communicate the council's conclusions, thereby ensuring that departments framed their war plans independently of the other.²⁹⁷ Deprived of any chance to become a proper executive body, the War Council was unable to effectively meet the challenges posed by the war and therefore was doomed to the role of "a supplement to the Cabinet," which now rarely met, "for exploring some of the larger questions of policy."²⁹⁸

Although Hankey formally acted as secretary to the newly formed War Council in conjunction to his continuing duties as Secretary to the CID, it was increasingly evident that he was not merely "an official recorder of what happened," or that military details "were not really my province at all," as he claimed to the Dardanelles Commission in 1916.²⁹⁹ Rather, in his dual roles as *de facto* military advisor and prime ministerial interlocutor, Hankey increasingly utilized his unique position within the informal system to quietly exert influence in the lead-up to 1915. Immediately following the siege of

²⁹⁵ Dardanelles Commission, 27 September 1916, Q. 201.

²⁹⁶ Cassar, *Asquith*, 55.

²⁹⁷ Hankey, *Command*, 1:238; Dardanelles Commission, Hankey Testimony, 27 September 1916, Q. 205.

²⁹⁸ Hankey, *Command*, 1: 238-9.

²⁹⁹ Hankey, *Command*, 1:238.

Antwerp, when rumour and Kitchener's paranoia concerning the prospect of a sea-borne German invasion of Britain ran rampant, much to Churchill's consternation, Asquith called upon Hankey to investigate the matter.³⁰⁰ Hankey's subsequent investigation of home defence acknowledged the need for improving Britain's defensive preparations, but nonetheless dismissed the prospect of an invasion in a series of memoranda. Which were followed up on by Asquith, who entrusted Hankey with the chairmanship of the Home Ports Defence Committee and secretaryship of the Samuel Committee to resolve any outstanding matters of home defence.³⁰¹ Hankey enjoyed a working relationship with McKenna and the Home Office, and by 5 December 1914, Hankey emerged as an advocate of interning enemy aliens. While Asquith did not support Hankey's heavy-handed proposals for interning enemy aliens, he did back Hankey's technological interests, most notably his ideas about producing "Greek fire," to destroy enemy ports.³⁰² However, while Asquith was intrigued by Hankey's technological interests and admired his cool headedness, he was most impressed by Hankey's response to Britain's most pressing strategic problem: stalemate on the Western Front.

The military situation following Antwerp and the first Battle of Ypres was, on the strategic level, a quagmire. On the western front the "Race to the Sea" ended abruptly

³⁰⁰ "We had an interesting discussion on home defence & the possibility of a German invasion, which pre-occupies the mind of Kitchener. His view is that the Army is doing all it can both at home & abroad, and that some of the big ships ought to be brought into the home ports. Winston made a very good defence of his policy, which is ... that the function of the Grand Fleet is not to prevent the landing of an invading force ... but to strike at & destroy the enemy's covering fleet." Asquith to Stanley, 21 October 1914, *Letters*, 281; Hobhouse diary, 21 October 1914, *Inside*, 200; Harcourt diary, 13 October 1914.

³⁰¹ Hankey, *Command*, 1:212-21; Hankey, Attack on the British Isles Oversea, 14 September 1914, TNA: CAB 38/28/40; Committee of Imperial Defence, Instructions to Local Authorities in the Event of Belligerent Operations in the United Kingdom, 6 October 1914, TNA: CAB 38/28/46; Hankey, Invasion, 15 October 1914, TNA: CAB 38/28/48.

³⁰² Asquith to Stanley, 5 December 1914, *Letters*, 326; Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:148-9; Committee of Imperial Defence, Experiments with Burning Oil, 11 December 1914, TNA: CAB 38/28/54.

and thereafter the war, previously defined by desperate outflanking maneuvers, was transformed into a static war of attrition, where trench warfare reigned supreme. Hankey and his superiors subsequently recognized that Britain needed a new strategy if it ever hoped to break the deadlock and achieve victory. To that end, Hankey circulated the famous Boxing Day Memorandum on 28 December 1914, wherein he offered his solutions to the “remarkable deadlock which has occurred in the western theatre.”³⁰³ Within the memorandum, Hankey, ever the historical enthusiast, analyzed the deadlock of trench warfare and concluded that:

Two methods have usually been employed for circumventing an *impasse* of this kind. Either a special material has been provided for overcoming it, or an attack has been delivered elsewhere, which has compelled the enemy to weaken his forces that an advance becomes possible.³⁰⁴

With these possibilities in mind, Hankey provided his take on the first possibility (a “special material”) by revealing his many technological experiments designed to help overcome the difficulties of trench warfare, which ranged from modern day siege weapons to his Greek fire experiment.³⁰⁵ In response to these novel solutions, Asquith himself remarked, “it will be strange if we are driven back to Mediaeval practices.”³⁰⁶ However, while Hankey’s first solution was inherently tactical by nature, his second was strategic: “the mounting of a diversion elsewhere.”³⁰⁷ To that end, Hankey first proposed the application of intensive and sustained warfare in the form of combined operations against Germany *via* seizing her remaining overseas colonies and landing British forces at Schleswig-Holstein in concert with the application of his tactical proposals on the

³⁰³ Hankey Memorandum, 28 December 1914, *WSC*, 6:337.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 6:338.

³⁰⁵ Hankey, *Command*, 1:229.

³⁰⁶ Asquith to Stanley, 30 December 1914 [i], *Letters*, 346.

³⁰⁷ Hankey Memorandum, 28 December 1914, *WSC*, 6:340.

western front. The idea of a northern strategy was by no means novel by this stage of the conflict. Rather, Churchill and Wilson had recently revived the pre-war idea of seizing German islands in the North Sea, with the intention to conduct inshore operations there and subsequently expand British naval dominance into the Baltic. The goal of plan, according to Fisher, was to force the German fleet into a decisive battle, sever German trade in the Baltic, and land Entente forces in Schleswig-Holstein or by the Elbe for a march on Berlin. However, while the idea of a northern offensive was tempting, Hankey concluded based on his own military knowledge and his experience with Fisher - despite Fisher's later claims to the contrary:

The whole plan was a chimera from the very beginning. If we have never been able to knock out from the sea the defences of Ostend and Zeebrugge ... how could we have hoped to knock out carefully fortified places such as Borkum and Sylt, or much less penetrate through the narrow passage of Skager-Rack, Cattegat, and the great Belt, into the heavily mined seas of the Western Baltic.³⁰⁸

Moreover, contrary to Fisher's and his supporters' claims that Fisher intended for the Baltic scheme to become a pillar of British strategy, Mackay reaches the more logical conclusion that Fisher merely used it as a talking point "useful for warding off Churchill's most dangerous and unpromising projects," and lionizing his own reputation as an offensive strategist.³⁰⁹ Hankey was only serious about operations against German colonies, because his pre-war experiences informed him a successful attack on Schleswig-Holstein could only have been performed at the war's outset, or with the active support of Denmark and Holland.

³⁰⁸ CAB 21/5, file entitled 'The Baltic Project' reproduced in Ruddock Mackay, "Hankey on Fisher's Baltic 'Chimera,'" *Mariner's Mirror* 82:2 (May 1996), 212.

³⁰⁹ Mackay, *Fisher*, 464-75.

After dismissing the possibility of a northern peripheral operation, Hankey advanced two strategic alternatives: economic pressure and other peripheral operations. Hankey recognized that “if our main military effort against German territory is unattainable, for the present, the principal weapon remaining is economic pressure, and this ... is the greatest asset we have in the war.”³¹⁰ The revisionist historian, Nicholas Lambert, has misinterpreted this to be evidence of Hankey’s disbelief in “any army solution to victory,” and that Hankey believed military operations “were a mere ‘supplement [to] the tremendous asset of sea power and its resultant economic pressure, wherewith to ensure favorable terms of peace when the enemy has had enough of the war.’”³¹¹ However, Lambert’s argument is premised on a misinterpretation of the Boxing Day Memorandum. While Hankey recognized that economic warfare was a potent tool, he was also cognizant that “economic pressure, however, appears to be breaking down to a certain extent owing to [Germany’s] enormous trade with Holland and Denmark, and at the best is a slow weapon in operation.”³¹² Hankey shared the view that economic warfare was an imperfect strategy, with other British decision makers including Fisher, Churchill, Asquith, and Harcourt. The only real means of rectifying the many holes in the blockade was the contravention of international law and possibly war with neutral nations. None of these were palatable options for Hankey or other decision-makers, given that they did not want to add further pressure on the already strained war effort.³¹³

³¹⁰ Hankey Memorandum, 28 December 1914, *WSC*, 6:341.

³¹¹ Nicholas Lambert, *The War Lords and the Gallipoli Disaster, Kindle Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 108; Lambert, *Armageddon*, 305.

³¹² Hankey Memorandum, 28 December 1914, *WSC*, 6:341.

³¹³ “Difficulties with neutrals and adherence to an absolute international law based on the conditions of a century ago, and quite inapplicable to technical developments of modern warfare have alone prevented us from declaring an actual blockade.” Fisher Memorandum, 25 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:454.

Hankey reminded his audience, “in the meantime there is every reason to for using our sea power and our growing military strength to attack Germany and her allies in other quarters.”³¹⁴ Specifically, Hankey argued “Germany can perhaps be struck most effectively through her allies, and particularly through Turkey.”³¹⁵ Continuing in this vein, Hankey proposed cobbling together a Balkan alliance that could combine with the Entente powers to launch an offensive aimed at Constantinople. Thereafter, “if Russia, contenting herself with holding the German forces on an entrenched line, could simultaneously combine with Servia and Roumania in an advance into Hungary, the complete downfall of Austria-Hungary could simultaneously be assured.”³¹⁶ The end goal of this operation would be nothing less than the destruction of Germany’s two allies to bring about a swift victory through Hankey’s preferred means: combined and peripheral operations.

Hankey was not the only official who concluded that a new strategy was required to break the deadlock of the western front. Within the span of a few days, Churchill and Lloyd George also forwarded memoranda to Asquith emphasizing the hopelessness of the western front and advocating those British resources be redeployed to new theatres to break the deadlock. However, while all the proposals Asquith received agreed that a new strategy was required, they did not concur on which theatre was best to pursue said operations. Churchill advocated a northern campaign designed to utilize joint British land and sea power to seize islands in the North Sea in preparation for a larger campaign aimed at Schleswig-Holstein and a joint Anglo-Russian venture against Berlin itself once

³¹⁴ Hankey Memorandum, 28 December 1914, *WSC*, 6:341.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6:341.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6:342.

the Baltic was secured, or to lure out the German fleet for a decisive battle.³¹⁷ In contrast to Churchill's ambitious northern strategy, Lloyd George proposed two independent operations, one to attack Austria *via* a combined operation at Salonika or Dalmatia, with the aid of local Balkan states, and a second operation aimed at the Turks *via* Syria.³¹⁸ Thereafter, contrary to Asquith's fears, no breach emerged amongst his subordinates over the primacy of one scheme. Rather, Hankey and Churchill met privately and Churchill reassured Asquith that he and Hankey, "are substantially in agreement and our conclusions are not incompatible. I wanted Gallipoli attacked on the Turkish declaration of war."³¹⁹ Likewise, there was no real cause for a breach between Hankey and Lloyd George because they offered similar solutions, and this was reflected when Lloyd George supported Hankey's proposal at the War Council. However, while the prime movers of an alternative strategy seemingly reached an understanding, their proposals did not go unchallenged.

Although, the quagmire on the western front prompted Hankey to advance his own alternative strategy, his proposal, and others like it were not universally accepted and some actors, namely Kitchener and French, balked at the prospect of shifting resources away from the main theatre. French wrote to Kitchener that to engage in peripheral operations was "to play the German game, and to bring about the end which Germany had in mind when she induced Turkey to join the war – namely to draw off troops from the decisive spot, which is Germany herself."³²⁰ Historians have subsequently simplified the motivations of these debates by separating British decision

³¹⁷ Churchill to Asquith, 29 December 1914, *WSC*, 6:343-5.

³¹⁸ Lloyd George Memorandum, 29 December 1914, *WSC*, 6:350-6.

³¹⁹ Churchill to Asquith, 31 December 1914, *WSC*, 6:346.

³²⁰ Cassar, *Kitchener*, 270-1.

makers into various schools of thought, which they claim dominated the decision-making process. The oldest and most prominent of these theories has been the oversimplification of the decision-makers into the two neat and self-explanatory strategic schools of “Easterners” and “Westerners.” Whereas the “Westerners” argued in favour of the total commitment of British military resources to the Western Front, “Easterners” such as Hankey, Lloyd George, and Churchill “maintained they had discovered a cheaper and quicker road to victory in the East.”³²¹ Ultimately, however, this is an oversimplification, and it is more accurate to argue that Hankey continued to be a staunch proponent of a “maritime” strategy.³²² However, while Hankey and Churchill found themselves aligned on principles of “maritime” strategy, the subsequent efforts to make their preferred northern or southern strategies a reality brought them into conflict with each other.

Despite Churchill’s and Hankey’s initial agreement that operations in their perspective theatres did not preclude the possibility of subsidiary operations in the others’ preferred theatre, ultimately this understanding could not last.³²³ Throughout January 1915, both men sought to achieve their preferred strategy, with the other’s plans being at best subordinated. To that end, both men sought political support within the War Council and services necessary to gain the necessary material for both proposals. Immediately following the release of the Boxing Day Memorandum and Hankey’s meeting with Churchill, Hankey received the first hints of endorsement for his strategic aims beyond Churchill and Asquith. Balfour was the first to respond and while he found himself in

³²¹ French, *Strategy*, ix-x.

³²² Roskill, *Hankey*, 1:152-3.

³²³ This conclusion mirrors Bell’s argument that “in Churchill’s view ... major operations in the North Sea and Baltic did not preclude the possibility of subsidiary operations in the Middle East” Bell, *Dardanelles*, 48. However, whereas Churchill looked primarily northward, Hankey looked south, and while both men regarded the other’s preferred area of peripheral operations to be a plausible alternative, they nonetheless favoured their own.

agreement with Hankey, Balfour nonetheless cautioned Hankey about his proposed combined operation against Constantinople:

The questions involved are, I fear, so difficult that months of preliminary negotiation would be required to allay the passions due to events in the past, and to arrange such a division of the spoils as would satisfy these jealous little States.³²⁴

Continuing in this vein, Balfour further pondered which of these “jealous little States” would receive Constantinople, whose cultural and strategic importance could not be overstated. Yet, while Balfour stressed to Hankey the importance of these considerations, he nonetheless added his interest in applying the same operational principle to Montenegro and concluded his letter by remarking, “These are very casual observations, and you must not take them too seriously.”³²⁵

Whereas, Balfour offered a cautiously optimistic appraisal of Hankey’s work, Fisher was positively effusive in his praise of Hankey’s proposed eastern venture. After communicating with Hankey, Fisher sent Churchill a letter on 3 January, wherein he exclaimed: “I CONSIDER THE ATTACK ON TURKEY HOLDS THE FIELD! – but ONLY if it’s IMMEDIATE!”³²⁶ Carrying on in this melodramatic style, Fisher was not only dismissive of the Council’s abilities to arrive at a solution, but also offered his own modified rendition of Hankey’s “Turkey plan” to Churchill. According to Fisher’s “Turkey Plan” not only would the Balkan states march on Constantinople and the Danube, but also a 75,000 strong force would be landed in Syria, and moreover “*Sturdee forces the Dardanelles at the same time with Majestic class & Canopus class!*”³²⁷ Under closer examination this plan appears to have been a barebones amalgamation of Hankey’s

³²⁴ Balfour to Hankey, 2 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:363.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6:364.

³²⁶ Fisher to Churchill, 3 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:367.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6:368.

original scheme with several previously rejected proposals (which originated with Churchill) to strike at the Dardanelles. Fisher's motivations for backing Hankey's scheme here, although obscure, were not simply born out of a need to reciprocate the *quid pro quo* relationship which the two increasingly engaged in. Rather, Fisher's interest in such an operation can be detected as early as 25 November 1914, when Fisher had "asked whether Greece might not perhaps undertake an attack on Gallipoli on behalf of the Allies," at the War Council.³²⁸ Likewise, as evidenced by his subsequent campaigning for Hankey, the First Sea Lord despite or perhaps because of his belief that naval policy should be underpinned by material superiority over Germany, saw an opportunity in the Dardanelles. Fisher sought to secure a massive strategic advantage *via* the defeat of an inherently inferior foe; but also likely recognized the opportunities to remove the possibility of a northern operation, while simultaneously burnishing his reputation as an offensively-minded admiral and utilizing the increasingly outdated ships at the Admiralty's disposal.³²⁹ Ultimately, however, Fisher's initial attempt to woo Churchill into his and Hankey's corner was unsuccessful. Churchill was by now fixated on the North Sea and was therefore reluctant to advance a scheme that could divert resources from his own, because while "I w[oul]d not grudge 100,000 men because of the great political effects in the Balkan peninsula: but Germany is the foe, & it is a bad war to seek cheaper victories and easier antagonists."³³⁰

³²⁸ War Council Meeting, 8 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:393.

³²⁹ "If the Greeks land 100,000 men on the Gallipoli Peninsula in concert with a British naval attack on the Dardanelles I think we could count on an easy and quick arrival at Constantinople." Foreign Office Papers 800/107 in *WSC*, 6:407 n. 1; Mackay, *Fisher*, 476-81.

³³⁰ Churchill to Fisher, 4 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:371.

Churchill's rejection of the Hankey-Fisher proposal signalled the repudiation of his understanding with Hankey; however, it was by no means the death knell of Hankey's southern strategy. Rather, Hankey and Fisher continued covertly canvassing support for the scheme within the War Council prior to its first meeting in 1915. On the same day that he sent his effusive letter to Churchill, Fisher also wrote to Balfour to explain "the purpose of my letter, which was solely begun to urge on you the peculiar merit of Hankey's Turkey plan. *I do hope you give it all your support.*"³³¹ Hankey, while more measured in his correspondence to Balfour, was likewise optimistic because:

I find there is a very general feeling that we must find some new plan of hitting Germany. You have already received my ideas on the subject. The First Lord has already written a paper or a letter to the P.M. pressing his own favourite plan with some important extensions. Mr. Lloyd George has also written to the P.M. urging developments – rather on my lines I gather.³³²

Moreover, although Churchill favoured a northern operation, others within the Admiralty expressed their support for Hankey's proposed eastern ventures. Most notably, Captain Richmond, who was dismissive of Churchill's northern plans, decided to oppose the First Lord by "going to talk to Hankey about it & try & get him to see the Prime Minister," and moreover expressed interest in "[taking] the 4000 marines off to Syria where they would really do some good."³³³ The increasing interest in Hankey's alternative strategy, was likely aided by Hankey's advantageous position within the British hierarchy, which he seemingly leveraged to gain political support in exchange for access to the Prime Minister, other senior members of the hierarchy, or information.³³⁴

³³¹ Fisher to Balfour, 4 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:370.

³³² Hankey to Balfour, 4 January 1915, *WSC*, 6: 370.

³³³ 4 Jan 1915. Lady Richmond diary, RIC/1/17

³³⁴ An excellent example of this behaviour can be detected in Hankey's own diary. Therein, he described how between May and June 1915, he leveraged his access to the Prime Minister with Kitchener and Balfour (the new First Lord of the Admiralty) to gain their support for his decision to send greater

Hankey's primary means of influencing Asquith was through the latter's trust in him. However, while Hankey was able to employ his influence with Asquith to advance his preferred strategy at the Dardanelles, his plans were initially undermined by one variable: the Balkan states. Despite Hankey's vision of uniting the Balkans against the Ottomans, he learned that negotiations were stalled, as Balfour had predicted, by the fickleness of the Balkan states. For Hankey, however, the greatest disappointment to arise from these off and on negotiations was the momentary coolness of the Greeks, with whom he deeply sympathized and considered key to his strategic calculations. The situation was improved when Kitchener demonstrated interest in Hankey's peripheral operation. Reconsidering the diversion of resources from the western front, Kitchener indicated at the War Council meeting on 8 January, that:

The Dardanelles appeared to be the most suitable objective, as an attack here could be made in co-operation with the Fleet. If successful, it would re-establish communication with Russia; settle the Near Eastern question; draw in Greece, and perhaps, Bulgaria and Roumania.³³⁵

Building on Kitchener's support, Hankey "pointed out that [the operation] would give us the Danube as a line of communication for an army penetrating into the heart of Austria and bring our sea power to bear in the middle of Europe."³³⁶ On this point too, Kitchener added that "no less than 150,000 men would be sufficient for the capture of the Dardanelles."³³⁷ Kitchener's sudden support for an eastern venture, although unexpected was nonetheless welcomed by supporters of peripheral operations in the south such as Lloyd George and Fisher. Moreover, it is arguable, given their past working relationship,

resources to Gallipoli (see: Hankey diary, 29 May 1915, HNKY 1/1; Hankey diary, 2 and 7 June 1915, HNKY 1/1).

³³⁵ War Council, 8 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:393.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ War Council, 8 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:394.

that Kitchener was amongst the individuals Hankey had canvassed for support before the meeting.

Kitchener's still undented reputation as a military authority lent Hankey's scheme much-needed credibility, which ensured that many ears were bent in favour of the operation. Foremost amongst those moved by Kitchener's suggestion that the operation was feasible was none other than Churchill. Although he remained determined to pursue a northern operation, Fisher and Kitchener's sudden support for Hankey's proposal introduced a new element to the equation. According to Bell's analysis:

Churchill had hitherto assumed that it would be necessary to take the Gallipoli peninsula before ships could force a passage through the Dardanelles before ships could force a passage through the Straits into the Sea of Marmara, but the First Sea Lord had raised the possibility that pre-dreadnought battleships could force a passage through the Dardanelles on their own. Churchill was also probably impressed by Fisher's enthusiasm for Hankey's proposal, and by his note of urgency.³³⁸

After months of struggling to unite his naval advisors and Kitchener behind an offensive scheme, the First Lord refused to let the opportunity for a "eastern diversion" slip by while it had Kitchener's support, which all but assured the War Council's support too. To that end Churchill asked Vice-Admiral Sir Sackville Carden, commander of the Eastern Mediterranean Squadron, "Do you consider the forcing of the Dardanelles by ships alone a practicable operation?"³³⁹ In response, Carden presented Churchill with a proposal for a purely naval effort to force the Dardanelles, which the First Lord jumped on and formally presented on 13 January to the War Council.³⁴⁰ Per Churchill's scheme, rather than acting in coordination with allied troops, the navy alone would force the straits.³⁴¹ This force,

³³⁸ Bell, *Dardanelles*, 53-4.

³³⁹ Churchill to Carden, 3 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:367.

³⁴⁰ Carden to Churchill, 11 January 1915, *WSC*, 405; War Council, 13 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:409-411.

³⁴¹ War Council, 13 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:409-10.

composed mostly of disposable older vessels, would “demolish the forts one by one” and effectively pave the way for an eventual (but as yet unspoken) offensive that would open the Sea of Marmara and seize Constantinople, thereby unravelling the precarious Ottoman Empire. Specifically, Churchill successfully argued that the endangerment of Constantinople by the fleet or its occupation by a subsequent army would spark a revolution in the unstable empire. Moreover, the Turks’ weakness would incentivize the other neutral Balkan powers to enter the conflict on the side of the entente so that they could partition the “sick man of Europe.” Finally, and most crucially - even if the plan failed - Churchill informed the War Council that the fleet could be easily withdrawn and any potential damage to Britain’s prestige could be warded off by asserting that the operation was purely a “demonstration.”³⁴² According to Hankey, when Churchill revealed his plan “the idea caught on at once,” and “the whole atmosphere changed. Fatigue was forgotten. The War Council turned eagerly from the dreary vistas of a ‘slogging match’ on the Western Front to brighter prospects ... in the Mediterranean.”³⁴³ At the 13 January meeting’s conclusion, Hankey recorded that the decision had been reached “that the Admiralty should also prepare for a naval position in February to bombard and take the Gallipoli peninsula, with Constantinople as its objective.”³⁴⁴ Moreover, it was agreed that “if the position in the Western theatre becomes in spring one of stalemate, British troops should be despatched to another theatre and objective.” That objective was the Balkans, where it was expected that the successful forcing of the

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ Hankey, *Command*, 1:266.

³⁴⁴ War Council, 13 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:411.

Dardanelles would drive the neutral states into the Entente camp and open the third front against the Central Powers.³⁴⁵

While the other members of the War Council rejoiced at Churchill's plan, Hankey regarded it as little more than a bastardization of his previous scheme that was strategically unsound. His opposition to the plan stemmed from his pre-war view that the Dardanelles could not be forced by ships alone and his awareness of the difficulties in recruiting the Balkan states to provide the necessary land forces. With these problems in mind, Hankey immediately campaigned behind the scenes against the plan, later writing:

Personally, on the first day the proposal was made I warned the P.M., Lord K[itcheener], Chief of Staff, L[loyd] George [and] Balfour, that fleet could not effect proposal without troops & that naval officers thought so. I also begged Churchill to have troops cooperate, but he wouldn't listen insisting navy could do it alone.³⁴⁶

Nicholas Lambert, however, is dismissive of the idea that Hankey enjoyed a position of influence because of his military expertise. Rather, when he examined one incident, wherein Hankey spoke on behalf of the services, here, Lambert argued "it defies credulity to suggest that Hankey, a mere Lieutenant Colonel in the Royal Marines, would have presumed to represent professional naval opinion if two admirals had still been present."³⁴⁷ Yet, Lambert's argument is premised on advancing his own dubious theories about British decision-making and strategy, which ignore or misinterpret evidence. This much is evident from Hankey's subsequent dealings with the same admirals Lambert claims would not have stooped to relying on Hankey to express their opinion. While many at the War Council did not initially heed Hankey's warnings, he did find a useful

³⁴⁵ "Here then, was a seemingly low risk venture that might produce far-reaching results." Bell, *Dardanelles*, 70-1.

³⁴⁶ Hankey diary, 19 March 1915, HNKY 1/1.

³⁴⁷ Lambert, *War Lords*, 162.

ally in Fisher and, with time, other dissatisfied elements within both the services. Subsequently, throughout the remainder of January and beyond, Hankey and his network of allies began a concerted campaign to undermine Churchill's rendition of the Dardanelles scheme and replace it with a combined operation. The first rumblings of dissent within the hierarchy occurred in the weeks after the War Council approved Churchill's scheme, when Fisher "talked big" behind closed doors about his opposition to the plan, until finally this talk reached Asquith on 20 January, when:

Hankey came to me ... to say - very privately -that Fisher, who is an old friend of his, had come to him in a very unhappy frame of mind. He likes Winston personally, but he complains that on purely technical naval matters he is frequently over-ruled ('he out-argues me'!) and he is not by any means at ease about either the present disposition of the fleets, or their future movements.³⁴⁸

Although Fisher presented his actions as little more than those of a frustrated friend seeking to vent, Hankey revealed that "Fisher knew I invariably reported our conversations to Asquith, and I was the means of arranging at least one interview between them."³⁴⁹ However, if Fisher thought he alone profited from Hankey's kindness, then he was mistaken. Rather, Hankey planned to use Fisher's position as a respected expert and talents as an intriguer to advance his own agenda, while leveraging his own access to the Prime Minister. Subsequently, it was to Hankey's benefit alone that Asquith walked away from his discussion with Fisher under the impression that, although Fisher was unbalanced, "I fear there is some truth in what he says; and I am revolving in my mind whether I can do anything, & if anything what?"³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ Asquith to Stanley, 21 January 1915 [ii], *Letters*, 389.

³⁴⁹ Hankey, *Command*, 1:313.

³⁵⁰ Asquith to Stanley, 20 January 1915 [i], *Letters*, 388.

Asquith was not the only decision-maker to whom Fisher revealed his views on the Dardanelles. Between 13-21 January, Fisher directly, indirectly, or with Hankey's aid revealed that he had reservations about the scheme to Balfour, Lloyd George, Admiral John Jellicoe of the Grand Fleet, and Kitchener.³⁵¹ The effect of these actions was that Hankey raised awareness of Fisher's disdain for the Dardanelles plan and the risks associated with Churchill's naval offensive. Yet, despite this increased awareness it is, as we shall illustrate below, questionable how successful this tactic initially was. Moreover, beyond utilizing his position with Asquith to provide the Prime Minister to open a channel for views opposing Churchill's own, Hankey took even more direct action by writing memoranda for the opposing camp.

On 23 January, Fisher circulated "A Memorandum by the First Sea Lord on the Position of the British Fleet and its Policy of Steady Pressure," which was in fact written by Hankey and Corbett, wherein it was argued that Britain must "be content to remain in possession of our command of the sea, husbanding our strength until the gradual pressure of sea power compels the enemy's fleet to make an effort to attack us at a disadvantage."³⁵² Furthermore, the memorandum warned against attacking continental Germany and instead urged joint operations between the Army and Navy, such as the Dardanelles, to draw out the enemy.³⁵³ While the memorandum reflects Hankey's own wider strategic vision, it is clear that its chief intention was to undercut Churchill's naval operation and expose the extent of Fisher's opposition to the plan. To that end, after

³⁵¹ Bell, *Dardanelles*, 77-8; "Fisher, I find frequently disagrees with statements made by the First Lord at our War Council. I wish he would speak up ..." Hankey to Balfour, 21 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:77; Dardanelles Commission, Fisher testimony, 11 October 1916, Q. 3088, CAB 19/3; Stevenson diary, 21 January 1915, *Lloyd George: A Diary by Frances Stevenson*, ed. A.J.P. Taylor (London: Hutchinson, 1971), 23.

³⁵² Fisher Memorandum, 25 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:452-3.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 6:454.

Fisher released his memorandum, Hankey decided to directly interfere in the discussions by circulating more memoranda. On 24 January, Hankey circulated an old memorandum from 1906 to the War Council, wherein they concluded that while the operation was not without risks, ultimately:

A mere naval raid, therefore, into the Sea of Marmara being at once such a dangerous and ineffective operation, it must be taken for granted that, if ever an attempt was taken to force the Dardanelles is made the work will have to be undertaken by a Joint Naval and Military Expedition having for its objective the capture of the Gallipoli Peninsula ... The complete occupation of this peninsula, coupled with the passage of the Dardanelles by the British fleet, would no doubt be a death blow to the Sultan's power.³⁵⁴

The results of this concerted campaign by Fisher and Hankey were felt shortly thereafter when Fisher threatened to resign if his advice was not heeded. Hankey thereby effectively capitalized on his position as secretary to both the CID and War Council to circulate memoranda with the intention of using the good opinion the War Council had of him to shift opinion against the Dardanelles scheme.

Ultimately, while Hankey's labours sowed the seeds of doubt amongst the War Council towards Churchill's plan, Hankey's choice of an ally proved detrimental to the cause. On 28 January, after several weeks of intriguing, the circulation of several critical memoranda, and "talking big" behind Churchill's back, the threat of Fisher's resignation and division in the Admiralty forced Churchill and Asquith to hold a meeting with Fisher.³⁵⁵ While Hankey may have hoped that Fisher would succinctly present their case against the Dardanelles operation as it was, instead when the three arrived at the War Council, he was horrified to watch Asquith and the Council give their approval to the

³⁵⁴ Committee of Imperial Defence, *The Possibility of a Joint Naval and Military Attack on the Dardanelles*, 6 December 1906, TNA: CAB 38/12/60.

³⁵⁵ Bell, *Churchill*, 78-84; Lady Richmond Diary, 9 January 1915. RIC 1/16.

operation, while Fisher – after a futile protest - sat in silence.³⁵⁶ Despite Hankey's best efforts he had failed to convince either the PM or the War Council *via* Fisher that the naval operation should be transformed into a combined one. This failure owed much to Fisher's shortcomings; to Asquith's faith in Churchill; and to a general desire amongst the War Council members for an operation that might bring them either an easy victory, or from which they could easily extricate themselves at the first sign of trouble.³⁵⁷

However, this was hardly the end of Hankey's campaign to convince the War Council that it was not too late for a combined operation at the Dardanelles. On the same day that Hankey and Fisher were seemingly defeated, a subcommittee of the War Council had agreed to dispatch troops to Salonika with the intention of supporting Serbia and possibly drawing other Balkan powers into the war.³⁵⁸ This decision would give new life to Hankey's proposal for a combined operation.

³⁵⁶ Bell, *Dardanelles*, 83-7; subcommittee of the War Council, 28 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:469-71.

³⁵⁷ Bell, *Dardanelles*, 86-7.

³⁵⁸ Sub-Committee of War Council, 28 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:465-8.

Chapter 7: Hankey's Scylla

Although the War Council remained dazzled by the possibilities of Churchill's scheme, Hankey remained opposed to the plan as it was. He was fully aware of the dangers posed by a combined operation but remained convinced that if they carried out a joint attack on the Dardanelles. Whereas, if the Navy tempted fate by attempting to force the Dardanelles alone, serious losses might be inflicted by the hazards lurking within the Narrows. The Allies' chances of victory over the Ottomans grew exponentially if they carried out a joint attack on the Dardanelles. Fortunately for Hankey, while he had been busy sowing the seeds of doubt with Fisher, an alternative means of re-inventing the plan per his own design had emerged. By late January it appeared to Asquith and the rest of the Allied leadership that Serbia was on the brink of collapse. Such a collapse was disastrous to the Allied war effort because "If [Serbia] is allowed to go down, things will look very black for us, and the prestige of the Allies with the wavering & hesitating States will be seriously if not mortally, impaired."³⁵⁹ Asquith and his leading ministers, including Churchill, were eager to rectify the situation. To that end Lloyd George proposed the deployment of Entente forces to Serbia *via* Salonika in Greece. However, this proposal was not universally agreed upon and Kitchener argued that the plan was

³⁵⁹ Asquith to Stanley, 21 January 1915, *Letters*, 388-9.

unsound. Hankey, in his capacity as Asquith's unofficial military advisor, was inevitably drawn into these discussions and helped Asquith navigate his ministers' conflicting advice. On 22 January, during a meeting with Grey, Lloyd George, and Hankey, Asquith wrote that:

Hankey calculates that it would take at least 6 weeks from to-day to get there. Plans may have to be worked out at the W[ar] O[ffice], the actual transport by sea takes at the least a fortnight, stores have to be accumulated, & a large margin allowed for unforeseen delays & accidents.³⁶⁰

Hankey's advice subsequently proved a deciding factor behind Asquith's decision-making, as evidenced by the CID's decision to select Salonika as a landing zone over an alternative on the Adriatic coast, and British efforts to recruit the French for the forthcoming operation.³⁶¹ Moreover, Asquith's decision to rely upon Hankey rather than the proper authorities from the War Office and Navy attests to the Prime Minister's confidence in Hankey's military advice and the convenience of turning to Hankey rather than the proper authorities. Subsequently, when a subcommittee of the War Council was summoned to discuss the matter, Hankey found himself not only in lockstep with Lloyd George, but also Churchill. It appears that despite Churchill's continuing pre-occupation with the northern theatre and preference for a naval solution at the Dardanelles, he was not completely averse to deploying troops to the region. Churchill not only supported deploying a veteran 5,000-man corps to Salonika, but also supported the allocation of twelve river monitors for use on the Danube.³⁶² For Hankey, this realignment was fortuitous in that it not only allowed him to advance the Salonika scheme relatively

³⁶⁰ Asquith to Stanley, 22 January 1915 [i], *Letters*, 390.

³⁶¹ Asquith to Stanley, 22 January 1915 [ii], *Letters*, 391

³⁶² Sub-Committee of the War Council, 28 January 1915, *WSC*, 6:466-70.

unhindered, but simultaneously opened an avenue to transform said scheme into something grander than what its proponents originally envisioned.

On 2 February, shortly after the War Council approved both the Dardanelles and Salonika schemes, Hankey circulated a new memorandum entitled “An Attack on the Dardanelles.” Hankey commenced the document by telling his audience that he was “immensely impressed with the cumulative effect of the arguments presented in favour of military action in the Dardanelles at the earliest possible date.”³⁶³ Thereafter, Hankey synthesized the arguments he had spoon-fed to Fisher with other pressing strategic questions, which he had been made aware of in his capacities as military advisor, prime ministerial interlocutor, and secretary, to present the case in favour of a combined operation at the Dardanelles, which Fisher could not. Specifically, Hankey argued that military action at the Dardanelles was necessary because, “as pointed out by the First Lord,” but not seized upon by Fisher, “the navy can open the Dardanelles and Bosphorus to warships, which are more or less impervious to field gun and rifle fire, but they cannot open these channels to merchant ships so long as the enemy is in possession of the shore.”³⁶⁴ To further drive this point home, Hankey circulated a second memorandum by Corbett two days later, stressing the historic difficulties of forcing the Dardanelles without troops.³⁶⁵ This was a pressing concern given that, as Hankey pointed out in the first memorandum, the operation was intended to not only eliminate the Turkish threat and draw in the Balkan powers, but also was designed to open a secure line of communications and supply between Russia and the Entente. A goal, which would be

³⁶³ Hankey, Attack on the Dardanelles, 2 February 1915, TNA: CAB 24/1/8.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ Letter from Corbett to Hankey, 4 February 1915 (circulated as The Dardanelles, 5 February 1915), TNA: CAB 42/1/32.

placed in serious jeopardy if the Turks retained control of the shore and could threaten the flow of grain and other necessary supplies between the Allies. Moreover, Hankey hinted that the goals of the Salonika and Dardanelles schemes were not mutually exclusive. Rather, Hankey's memorandum and his letters to Esher reveal that he desired to tie their fates together. Specifically, Hankey envisioned that the troops intended for the Salonika scheme should be used as part of an elaborate *ruse de guerre* against the Turks in the Balkans and Syria, until a "comparatively moderate force," as Hankey termed it, arrived at the Dardanelles "striking like a bolt from the blue." This force he explained would land after the naval bombardment eliminated the outer forts and capture the plateau overlooking the forts in the Narrow's by a *coup-de-main*.³⁶⁶

Following the release of these memoranda, Hankey persisted in his efforts to convince the War Council and other members of the hierarchy that the present Dardanelles operation was flawed and that troops were required if success was to be attained. The extent of Hankey's fervour and intrigues is hinted at in a letter to Balfour on 10 February, wherein Hankey wrote:

I am convinced that an attack on the Dardanelles is the only extraneous operation worth trying. From Lord Fisher downwards every naval officer in the Admiralty who is in the secret believes the Navy cannot take the Dardanelles position without troops. The First Lord still professes to believe that they can do it with ships, but I have told the Prime Minister that we cannot trust this.³⁶⁷

The success of Hankey's behind the scenes efforts were not immediately felt until 13-16 February, when the shifting geopolitical sands laid bare Hankey's criticisms for the hierarchy. Despite the Foreign Office's best efforts, the Greeks, and other Balkan powers

³⁶⁶ Hankey, *The War: Attack on the Dardanelles*, 2 February 1915, TNA: CAB 24/1/8; Hankey to Esher, 15 March 1915, WSC, 6: 700-1.

³⁶⁷ Hankey to Balfour, 10 February 1915, WSC, 6:500.

remained skittish of entering the conflict. Worse, the Salonika scheme was dropped because of Greek reluctance. With the troops once intended for Salonika now free, Hankey approached Asquith, and after “having a talk with Hankey, whose views are always worth hearing,” the Prime Minister confided to Stanley that:

[Hankey] thinks very strongly that the naval operations [the Dardanelles] ... should be supported by landing a strong military force. I have been for some time coming to the same opinion, and I think we ought to ... scrape together from Egypt, Malta & elsewhere a sufficiently strong contingent.³⁶⁸

Through the sustained and subtle pressure afforded to Hankey by his myriad roles and unhindered access to the Prime Minister, he began to steadily shift opinion in his favour. Yet, as hinted above this was not the end of his efforts to persuade the hierarchy that a combined, rather than naval operation was required to force the Dardanelles. To that end, based on Hankey’s letter to Balfour and subsequent actions, it is plausible that Hankey had formed alliances with key naysayers within the Admiralty: Richmond and Admiral Sir Henry Jackson, Director of the Operations Division of the Admiralty’s War Staff. The roots of these alliances can be traced to Hankey’s role as prime ministerial interlocutor and gatekeeper, which gave him the necessary access to the Admiralty and subsequently allowed him to capitalize on their existing doubts with the plan and influence the naval staff in favour of a combined operation. Hankey’s subsequent alliances with Richmond and Jackson were not simply premised on a mutual opposition to the plan as it stood, but also resulted from Hankey’s ability to leverage his access to the Prime Minister by promising to advance the two men’s agendas, if they produced memoranda that supported his arguments about the Dardanelles. To that end, on 13 February, Jackson circulated a memorandum, wherein he argued “the naval bombardment is not recommended as a

³⁶⁸ Asquith to Stanley, 13 February 1915, *Letters*, 429.

sound military operation unless a strong military force is ready to assist in the operation, or at least follow it up immediately after the forts are silenced.”³⁶⁹ In turn, Jackson’s reward for this memorandum beyond Hankey’s circulation of it, was likely the secretary’s revelation to Asquith that Fisher was not the sole dissenter within the Admiralty.³⁷⁰ Similarly, on 14 February, Hankey’s old ally Richmond circulated a memorandum that asserted even if the naval bombardment of the Dardanelles was successful it would amount to ““nothing but a local success, which without an army to carry it on can have no further effect.””³⁷¹ In turn, Hankey, who Richmond had previously asked to relay his complaints to the Prime Minister, cunningly told Richmond that he was forwarding the memorandum to Fisher and hinted that the situation was moving in their favour because ““things are going better than you think.””³⁷² This remark by Hankey undoubtedly hinted at Asquith’s changing opinion on the Dardanelles, which had been achieved through the Prime Minister’s trust in Hankey and the latter’s skillful usage of memoranda.

The growing chorus of dissent was music to Hankey’s ears, and it subsequently became too loud for the War Council to ignore. On 16 February, Asquith held a series of informal meetings with his ministers to discuss the forthcoming Dardanelles operation. No minutes were taken of the discussions between Asquith and six of the ten members of his War Council, including: Grey, Lloyd George, Churchill, Kitchener, and Fisher. However, the impact of Hankey’s criticism were profoundly felt because after the

³⁶⁹ Jackson Memorandum, 13 February 1915, *WSC*, 6:512; This memorandum was later dispatched to the prospective naval commander of the forthcoming expedition on 15 February 1915 (see: Bell, *Dardanelles*, 100-1; Jackson Memorandum, 13 February 1915, *WSC*, 6:506 n. 1.).

³⁷⁰ Hankey diary, 19 March 1915, HNKY 1/1.

³⁷¹ Richmond diary, 14 February 1915, *WSC*, 6:513 n. 2.

³⁷² 16 February 1915, Lady Richmond diary, RIC/1/17.

meeting Asquith told Hankey that despite the absence of nearly half its membership, the group agreed to redeploy Britain's XXIXth division and later ANZAC troops to join the Royal Marines already dispatched at Lemnos, "if required," for the forthcoming operation.³⁷³ The decision to deploy troops to the Dardanelles in anticipation of following up the initial naval assault was conducted in a highly slapdash manner, typical of Asquith and the informal system he upheld. Interestingly, by this stage of the operation, Churchill became a proponent of utilizing troops, even going so far as to tell Kitchener on 18 February that an army of "50,000 men sh[oul]d be within reach ... to seize the Gallipoli peninsula when it has been evacuated, or to occupy C[onstanti]nople if a revolution takes place."³⁷⁴ Kitchener subsequently agreed to the request and it appeared that Hankey, Churchill, and Kitchener were realigned. However, any perceived realignment between the three was still superficial. Whereas Kitchener and Churchill envisioned the operation unfolding in two distinct stages whereby the Navy forced the Dardanelles followed by the Army consolidating this victory, Hankey remained committed to a joint assault by the Navy and Army. Yet, while Churchill and Hankey were divided on the nature of the assault against the Dardanelles, they were simultaneously reunited in their opposition to Kitchener's subsequent decision to withhold the XXIXth division. The board was now set for a three-way confrontation between Kitchener, Churchill, and Hankey over the direction of the Dardanelles scheme as it began.

When the naval assault began on 19 February another War Council meeting was summoned to discuss the assault and recent developments that could affect its course. Most notably, Kitchener announced his decision, considering the recent Russian defeat in

³⁷³ War Council Conclusions, 16 February 1915, *WSC*, 6:516; Bell, *Dardanelles*, 102.

³⁷⁴ Churchill to Kitchener, 18 February 1915, *WSC*, 6:519.

East Prussia to keep the XXIXth division on standby should the Germans redirect troops westwards for a renewed offensive. Clearly this was neither good news for Churchill nor Hankey, who, although divided over the enactment of the Dardanelles assault, were united in the need for troops to be present. A bitter dispute began within the Council between Churchill and Kitchener, with other attendees occasionally interjecting in favour of one side or the other. Asquith then interrupted the debate to share an old memorandum brought to his attention by Hankey, entitled “The Possibility of a Joint Naval and Military Attack upon the Dardanelles.” Therein, the General Staff and Director of Naval Intelligence discarded the idea of launching a purely naval attack and argued the only course of action was a joint operation, though the memorandum warned the cost would be high. The memorandum’s conclusions made a strong impression on Asquith, who used it to “to show that military co-operation was essential to success.”³⁷⁵ Lending his voice to Asquith’s own, Hankey added that the memorandum’s findings were worth while to examine in the context of the current operation and he also brought the conclusions reached at the 92nd meeting of the CID on 28 February 1907 to his superiors’ attention. At that meeting the CID, including Fisher, Grey, and Hankey, concluded that a joint attack on the Dardanelles carried great risks and should not be undertaken unless necessary.³⁷⁶ Hankey’s decision to raise these findings is interesting, because it seems to run counter to his desire for a joint assault, however, in truth it reflects Hankey’s nascent opinion that the operation should have been delayed until the proper preparations were in

³⁷⁵ War Council, 19 February 1915, *WSC*, 6: 532; Committee of Imperial Defence, *The Possibility of a Joint naval and Military Attack upon the Dardanelles*, 20 December 1906, TNA: CAB 38/12/60.

³⁷⁶ War Council, 19 February 1915, *WSC*, 6: 532 n. 2.

place. However, for now, Hankey's main concern was securing the XXIXth Division in anticipation of the shift from a naval assault to a joint one.

Hankey heavily participated in the subsequent War Council meetings designed to adjudicate the remaining questions that stalked the ongoing Dardanelles operation. Most notably, the fate of the XXIXth Division had taken on the wider dimension, as the operation proceeded and Carden became uncertain how to use the land units reserved for the operation in concert with his own objectives. Churchill had moved away from the opinion that a small force would suffice to occupy Constantinople and he now advocated for the assembly of a 100,000-man strong force by the end of March. Churchill's intention was to use this force for "some local military operation" should the fleet require assistance and in anticipation of wider British operations in the Balkans that he now envisioned.³⁷⁷ Churchill's changing attitude surprised the War Council and Hankey, who all felt that his sudden commitment of troops and his decision to make a detailed press statement about the Dardanelles signalled their commitment to an operation that was designed with the aim of being easily self-extricable should it prove unfavourable. Moreover, there was a growing sense that these commitments ensured that British prestige would be damaged by any withdrawal and Hankey grumbled to Esher that Churchill should have told the press that the operation was merely a "demonstration." Now, Hankey realized they were committed and worse, due to Kitchener's intransigence, the troops necessary for the joint operation Hankey desired were further away than the two-day maximum he originally desired.³⁷⁸ However, Hankey refused to let the operation's success slip through his fingers, therefore he used his influence on the War

³⁷⁷ Bell, *Dardanelles*; 107.

³⁷⁸ Hankey to Esher, 15 March 1915, *WSC*, 6:700-1; Bell, *Dardanelles*, 107-9.

Council to actively shape the discussion so that its conclusions would favour the objectives he set out in the Boxing Day Memorandum. For example, at the meeting on 24 February, Hankey pounced on Churchill's increasing efforts to draw the army into the Dardanelles and worked to frustrate Kitchener's attempts to shift resources to Mesopotamia by aligning with Churchill and Lloyd George in favour of the Dardanelles.³⁷⁹ At the subsequent meeting on 26 February, Hankey again supported Churchill, while advancing his own agenda by urging the landing of British troops at Gallipoli and Bulair to capture the shore and thereby "open the Dardanelles and Bosphorus to all classes of ships."³⁸⁰ Ultimately, however, Kitchener's opposition ensured that the fate of the XXIXth Division remained in limbo and while Churchill increasingly began to favour the utilization of troops, the First Lord remained committed to the continuation of a purely naval assault until problems emerged. Although Hankey retained his doubts about the success of the ongoing naval assault, by 1 March he and other elements of the hierarchy admitted that the plan was increasingly going well. The outer forts had been demolished and given the ease with which the outer defences fell many hoped the inner defences would be just as easy to destroy. However, while Hankey remained committed to the southern strategy he originally envisioned, his superiors began devising new schemes that would siphon British resources away from the Dardanelles and Balkans. Among the many fanciful ideas his superiors raised during this period of optimism was the usually silent Kitchener's proposed strategy of redeploying many of the troops intended for the Dardanelles to the West.³⁸¹ Churchill still looked towards the

³⁷⁹ War Council, 24 February 1915, *WSC*, 6:557.

³⁸⁰ War Council, 26 February 1915, *WSC*, 6: 570.

³⁸¹ War Council, *WSC*, 6: 569.

North Sea, where he felt the successful completion of the Dardanelles project would vindicate the undertaking of an operation there.³⁸² These discussions, of which Hankey was aware *via* his position in the hierarchy, did not sit well with the Secretary. Rather, Hankey, as the prime mover of the combined strategy, sought to maintain the course established by his Boxing Day memorandum, and therefore decided to nudge the discussion by circulating a memorandum on 1 March, entitled: “After the Dardanelles: The Next Steps.” Therein, Hankey reminded his superiors that the Dardanelles operation was intended “to open the way for military operations against Austria, in which the British army will, it is hoped, co-operate with the armies of Roumania, Servia, and perhaps Greece.”³⁸³ To that end, Hankey supported Lloyd George and Balfour’s suggestion that an emissary (Grey) be dispatched to bind the Balkan states to the Entente once the operation was completed. While said emissary accomplished this goal, Hankey revived his previously suggested project of dispatching a flotilla down the Danube in conjunction with a series of offensives aimed at the heart of Austria-Hungary.³⁸⁴ The most important of these offensives, however, was to be spearheaded by British and Romanian forces with the aim of linking up with the Russians in the Carpathians and in order to encircle the Austrian armies now in Russia.³⁸⁵ Finally, although Hankey recognized the need to focus on the larger post-Dardanelles strategic picture, he nonetheless continued to use the memorandum to expound on the ongoing military

³⁸² “Mr. Churchill said that we ought not to make the main line of advance up the Danube. We ought not to employ more troops in this theatre of war than are absolutely essential in order to induce the Balkan States to march. He was still of the opinion that our proper line of strategy was an advance in the north through Holland and the Baltic. This might become feasible later on when our new monitors were completed. The operation in the East should be regarded merely as an interlude.” War Council, 3 March 1915, *WSC*, 6:617-8; Bell, *Dardanelles*, 118-19.

³⁸³ Maurice Hankey, *After the Dardanelles: The Next Steps*, 1 March 1915, TNA: CAB-24-1-10, 2.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

situation and the direction it could go. Hankey utilized a series of “hypothetical scenarios” to remind his superiors that there were several problems still facing the operations. Should the operation succeed and Constantinople (and by extension the Ottoman Empire as a whole) surrender, the Allies would face the enormous problems of demobilizing the Ottomans and enacting a “*final* solution of the difficult Turkish problem.”³⁸⁶ Yet, Hankey himself appears to have been uncertain that an instantaneous surrender would follow the successfully forcing of the Dardanelles. Rather, Hankey dwelt a great deal on the remaining, but still formidable, defences of Constantinople and the possibility of that British forces would be forced to engage in a protracted siege of the city.³⁸⁷

The influence of Hankey’s proposal can be detected at the next meeting of the War Council on 3 March, two days later. The bulk of the discussions focused on the topics outlined by Hankey, and it appears that Hankey’s forewarnings about a siege had not gone unheard. For, while the War Council remained optimistic, several members, including Balfour and Asquith, dwelt on Hankey’s warnings about the defensibility of Constantinople. For example, “the Prime Minister expressed the view that the Turks and their German masters would not give in easily,” and followed up on Hankey’s warnings about the Turks’ intractability by raising the possibility that they would pursue a scorched earth policy to deny key facilities for any coming Allied offensive.³⁸⁸ Beyond successfully seeding the War Council’s minds with the possibility of greater Turkish resistance, Hankey also convinced key members of the War Council, most notably Lloyd

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-7.

³⁸⁸ War Council, 3 March 1915, *WSC*, 6:616.

George, Balfour, and Asquith, about the necessity of a Danube operation, albeit with the exception of Churchill who remained committed to following up the Dardanelles with a northern operation – much to Hankey’s consternation.

Concurrent with these discussions, the War Council faced another problem: the fate of Constantinople. Russia had repeatedly made it clear that she desired nothing less than total control of the strategic and culturally significant city and its European environs.³⁸⁹ In light of Russia’s designs on Constantinople, Hankey’s superiors envisioned securing Britain’s dominance in the Mediterranean by acquiring other bases to counter-balance Russian power. Specifically, they proposed acquiring the Greek isle of Lemnos, or favoured a second British combined operation at Alexandretta in Syria to secure that port as a permanent naval facility.³⁹⁰ Hankey supported neither proposal, however, due to his recognition that a second operation in Syria would deprive his Dardanelles proposal of needed resources and secondly because his vision of British power in the region was not tied to permanent bases. Rather, Hankey cited the CID memorandum’s conclusion that ““while Russia would no doubt obtain certain naval advantages from the change, it would not fundamentally alter the present strategic position in the Mediterranean.””³⁹¹ Instead, Hankey envisioned the counterbalancing of Russian influence in the region *via* a series of strong alliances with Greece and other Balkan powers, which could be used to acquire a temporary rather than permanent and expensive base in the proximity of Constantinople should war occur. Interestingly this

³⁸⁹ “The Russians have made it clear that they want Constantinople & the whole of the European shores of the Bosphorus, the Marmara & Dardanelles, but not the Asiatic side, which they would like to leave in the hands of the Turks.” Hankey diary, 6 March 1915, HNKY 1/1.

³⁹⁰ War Council, *WSC*, 6:612; Kitchener, Alexandretta and Mesopotamia, 16 March 1915, TNA: CAB 24/1/12; Memorandum by the Admiralty, Alexandretta and Mesopotamia, 17 March 1915, TNA: CAB 24/1/13; Jackson, “Alexandretta: Its Importance as a Future Base”, 18 March 1915, TNA: CAB 24/1/15.

³⁹¹ Hankey, “Russia and Constantinople”, 11 March 1915, TNA: CAB 24/1/11, 1.

perspective brough Hankey into odds with Fisher and several other temporary allies, who asked him to produce a favourable memorandum to influence opinion in their favour. Hankey, however, merely produced an ambivalent memorandum about the possibilities of Alexandretta and privately convinced Asquith to oppose the scheme.³⁹²

While Hankey maneuvered to influence the course of future events, the Dardanelles operation was coming undone. Whereas the outer defences had been overcome with ease, as the fleet advanced further into the Dardanelles it found itself unable to knock out the Turkish guns until the minefields were removed. However, the few minesweepers brought for the offensive were quickly destroyed or damaged by enemy fire when they advanced to remove the obstacles. It dawned on Carden that the slow and methodical destruction of the inner defences originally envisioned by Churchill was no longer achievable. By 18 March, Carden had been replaced by Admiral John de Robeck, who hoped that troops could eliminate the forts, however, both Kitchener and Churchill opposed this immediate course of action due to the severe disadvantage the small force currently gathered at Lemnos would be in if they attacked. Although the news caused Kitchener to finally release the XXIXth Division for the operation, it did not prevent Churchill from giving a superficially optimistic report of the offensive to the War Council, while he and the Admiralty decided to pursue a more aggressive solution. Despite the Navy's aggressive efforts to overcome the defences and Churchill's camouflaging efforts at the Admiralty, it quickly became evident to Hankey and others that all was not well at the Dardanelles.

³⁹² Hankey diary, 24 March 1915, HNKY 1/1

Hankey became aware of the realities on the spot through his duties as prime ministerial interlocutor. On 12 March, Hankey met Sir Ian Hamilton, the newly appointed commander of the Expeditionary Force to the Dardanelles, before he left for the Dardanelles and beyond being offered a place on his staff by Hamilton, who deeply admired Hankey's abilities, the secretary learned from Hamilton that Churchill wanted Hamilton to ignore Kitchener's instructions and attack with the troops available so the fleet could rush the straits.³⁹³ Finally, Fisher revealed a telegram confirming the minesweepers were useless due to the inability of the fleet to destroy the Turkish guns. Hankey walked away from these conversations furious that his original plan had not been heeded and bemoaned in both a letter to Esher and memorandum to Asquith that "the advantage of surprise has been lost already in delay to despatching troops."³⁹⁴ Yet, while Churchill sought to make up for the lack of surprise by launching another hasty attempt to rush the Dardanelles, Hankey's memorandum offered a different approach. Hankey was cognizant that the Turks had been given ample time to prepare for an Allied landing, whereas the British lacked the necessary troops and planning to carry out either Churchill's ill-planned rush or Kitchener's proposed steady advance. Rather than risk ruin, Hankey urged Asquith to cross-examine the military authorities and ensure the necessary preparations for a successful combined operation were in place.³⁹⁵ Asquith's response to these urgings, after a long talk about the paper, was to re-assure Hankey that he would raise his concerns with the War Council that coming Friday.

³⁹³ Hankey diary, 12 March 1915, HNKY 1/1.

³⁹⁴ Hankey diary, 16 March 1915, HNKY 1/1; Hankey to Esher, 15 March 1915, *WSC*, 6:701; Bell, *Dardanelles*, 137.

³⁹⁵ Hankey, *Command*, 1: 290-1; Hankey to Asquith, 16 March 1915, TNA: CAB 63/3.

When the War Council gathered on 19 March, it was apparent to everyone that the situation had gone from bad to worse. Per the constraints imposed on him, de Robeck had tried to force the Dardanelles but failed and in the process the Allies also lost one French and two British battleships on 18 March, as well as suffered heavy damage to HMS *Inflexible*, and the French warship, *Bouvet*. When the War Council gathered, Hankey described himself and Fisher as being “in the rather unenviable position of being able to say, ‘I told you so.’”³⁹⁶ Subsequently, Hankey redoubled his already feverish efforts to mitigate the damage and bring about the military cooperation that he so long desired. To that end, Hankey did not relent in his appeals to Asquith, who although aware of the desperate situation nonetheless told Stanley, “I agree with Winston & K that the Navy ought to make another big push, so long as the weather clears.”³⁹⁷ Opting to outflank both Churchill and Kitchener, Hankey went to Asquith “impressing him to appoint naval and military technical committee to plan out military attack on the Dardanelles.”³⁹⁸ According to Hankey’s correspondence with Lloyd George, whom he hoped would back the proposal, “We don’t want Lord K. or the First Lord on the C[omit]tee but just technical people. They can overhaul the Report afterwards but have no time for detail. Mr. Balfour would be a good chairman.”³⁹⁹ Clearly, Hankey, who had become privy to Kitchener and Churchill’s slapdash decision-making throughout the operation sought to overcome the most glaring flaws of the decision-making process by ensuring the Admiralty and War Office worked in cohesion without interference by their

³⁹⁶ Hankey diary, 19 March 1915, HNKY 1/1.

³⁹⁷ Asquith to Stanley, 23 March 1915 [i], *Letters*, 501.

³⁹⁸ Hankey diary, 19 March 1915, HNKY 1/1.

³⁹⁹ Hankey to Lloyd George, *WSC*, 6: 716-7.

abrasive political chiefs.⁴⁰⁰ Moreover, Hankey intended to stack the committee with old allies and experts in amphibious operations such as Hamilton, Fisher, Jackson, and Callwell, while he would serve as secretary and possibly even bring in Lloyd George, due to the latter's expertise in logistics and past support.⁴⁰¹ However, while this proposal speaks much to Hankey's ambitions, his sense of urgency, and his closeness with Asquith (given he was even willing to float such a proposal), these plans never gained traction in Bell's estimation because "without support from Kitchener nothing was likely to come of them and nothing did."⁴⁰²

Hankey's failure to outmanoeuvre Asquith's other two favourites did nothing to dent his own reputation. In the coming days, neither Kitchener nor Churchill were in any position to challenge Hankey's increasing criticism of their handling of the Dardanelles operation and as the operation worsened, the three were forced to come together once more. On 30 March after weeks of power-jockeying and poor news from the Dardanelles, Asquith informed Stanley:

I had a small conclave here this morning – K, Winston, myself, & Hankey – to go over carefully & quickly the situation, actual & progressive, at the Dardanelles. There are risks, & it will in any event be an expensive operation, but I am sure we are right to go through with it.⁴⁰³

Herein this mundane and forgettable note to Stanley is the only written proof that the Prime Minister decided in conference with his service ministers and informal military

⁴⁰⁰ Hankey, *Command*, 1:293-5.

⁴⁰¹ After meeting with Lloyd George *tête-à-tête*, Hankey described meeting with the listed figures, all of whom expressed their opposition to the purely naval attack and favoured a combined operation. "Had lunch with Admiral Jackson ... & Fisher at the Admiralty. Both very angry with Churchill as they warned him that troops were necessary to carry the Dardanelles ... Also saw General Callwell D.M.O., War Office, who has taken the same view & wants to land troops at Cape Helles." Hankey diary, 20 March 1915, HNKY 1/1; "It might even be worth while to bring Sir Ian Hamilton home to take part." Hankey to Asquith, 20 March 1916, HNKY 63/3.

⁴⁰² Bell, *Dardanelles*, 142.

⁴⁰³ Asquith to Stanley, 30 March 1915, *Letters*, 520.

adviser to proceed with a combined assault designed to occupy the Gallipoli Peninsula. For Hankey, this note is the only proof of his own unprecedented triumph that day. Hereafter, Hankey and the three other men in the room that day onwards became the nerve centre of British strategy and decision-making and consequently the tetrarchic “Inner Cabinet,” “foreshadowed the later War Cabinet,” in that “it streamlined the decision-making process and avoided long and divisive debate amongst [Asquith’s] ministers.”⁴⁰⁴ Asquith’s decision to empower the conclave that Hankey identified as the “Inner Cabinet” was motivated by his unwillingness to resummon the War Council, which had grown cumbersome and prone to unproductive debates like the cabinet before it and subsequently fell into abeyance until the establishment of the First Coalition. As such, Asquith would from here on heed the advice of his most trusted advisors, two of whom were the service ministers already responsible for overseeing the day-to-day management of the conflict. Moreover, to balance Churchill and Kitchener’s competing personalities, Asquith could rely on Hankey’s trusted military knowledge so he could adjudicate in the event of a dispute. In short, the solution was *ad hoc*, informal, and profoundly “Asquithian” by nature that perpetuated the old system and directly catered to Asquith’s personal needs while alleviating none of the organizational strain placed upon the war effort.

Contrary to this conclusion, that the “Inner Cabinet” dominated the decision-making process, Nicholas Lambert argues that the predominant decision-making body of the war, alongside the cabinet was the Food Prices Committee. Nonetheless, this is a flawed assessment and Lambert overestimates the influence of the Food Prices

⁴⁰⁴ Bell, *Dardanelles*, 165.

Committee and its membership most notably Lord Crewe, who Lambert improperly labels as Asquith's "right hand."⁴⁰⁵ Whereas Lambert argues that these ministers and war councillors were deeply impressed by the committees' findings and alleges that their understanding of a prospective economic crisis was the spark that led to the Dardanelles' scheme's acceptance – this project must counter with stronger evidence.⁴⁰⁶ Firstly, despite Lambert's focus on the old guard of the Liberal Party that surrounded Asquith in peacetime, the actual direction of the war effort was clearly not in their hands. Rather, as has been repeatedly established by the present project and others, the "Inner Cabinet" was the real nerve center of British decision making, with Asquith being advised by his most strategically minded advisers, none of whom belonged to the group Lambert discusses. Indeed, it must be said that Lambert repeatedly mischaracterizes the inner circle's members and underestimates their influence on Asquith.⁴⁰⁷ The most egregious mischaracterization is that of Hankey, who Lambert depicts as opposed to combined and peripheral operations, and above all else a fanatical proponent of solely economic warfare. Furthermore, Lambert goes on to characterize Hankey as a up-jumped lackey who was punching above his political weight. Continuing in this vein of misrepresentation, Lambert effectively sidelines Hankey as a major influence in the evolution of the Dardanelles scheme. Instead, he argues that Hankey's most meaningful contributions were his role in lobbying the government for Fisher and leading the government cover-up during the Dardanelles Commission (all ironic given his

⁴⁰⁵ Lambert, *War Lords*, 152-3.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 267-8.

⁴⁰⁷ "Generally speaking, by the beginning of 1915 Churchill's political stock within both Cabinet and the Liberal Party had sunk, and he had become the least esteemed, least trusted member of the War Council ... A realistic assessment of Churchill's standing in the Cabinet at this time makes it implausible that he could have bamboozled and bulldozed the other members of the War Council into approving his operation." *Ibid.*, 3-5.

supposedly low stature per Lambert's thesis).⁴⁰⁸ This assessment, however, is inherently flawed, frequently relies upon cherry picked evidence and further undermines the credibility of Lambert's work, as evidenced in great detail by this thesis' research.

The decision of the "Inner Cabinet" to undertake the Gallipoli landings to redeem the failed naval operation should have represented an enormous victory for Hankey. However, while Hankey believed that a combined operation was the best possible means to overcome the Dardanelles defences, he was increasingly conscious that there was one glaring flaw: a lack of planning. When the "Inner Cabinet" gathered to discuss the forthcoming Gallipoli assault for the next time, Hankey was unimpressed by how "none of them appeared to me in the least to realise the mounting difficulties of the situation. Sir Ian Hamilton's plan seems to me fraught with the possibility of an appalling military disaster if the Turks fight at all."⁴⁰⁹ Hankey preferred to delay the operation until the necessary preparations were in place but was subsequently drawn into an argument with an impatient Churchill, who dismissed Hankey's concerns. Ultimately, the back-and-forth debate was terminated, and a decision was deferred.

Hankey's realization that the forthcoming operations were endangered by a severe lack of staff planning led him to conclude that the operation could not and should not be undertaken for a myriad of strategic concerns inherently tied to the Dardanelles operational success. On 7 April, Hankey personally went to convince Asquith that while the operation was designed to demonstrate the Entente's military strength to the skittish neutral powers, a "serious reverse [at the Dardanelles]," due to poor military planning,

⁴⁰⁸ "At the same time, thanks largely to lobbying by Admiral Fisher, aided by Hankey, the commitment of British troops to the Dardanelles operation was scaled up to some 50,000 men, though envisioned for a mopping-up role rather than as an amphibious assault force." Lambert, *War Lords*, 267-8.

⁴⁰⁹ Hankey diary, 6 April 1915, HNKY 1/1.

“might result in choking off Italy and destroying [the] whole of [our] Balkan policy.”⁴¹⁰ Rather than risk Italy’s entry into the war by engaging in a hazardous operation, Hankey argued that by delaying the operation they would not only gain her entry into the conflict, but also use Italian forces to launch “an operation on a larger scale.” Hankey was also hopeful that Italy’s eventual participation in the operation would precipitate Greece and Bulgaria’s entry into the war, thereby giving the operation the momentum necessary for its success, or even bypassing the need to attack Constantinople *via* the Dardanelles altogether. Building on this premise, Hankey argued there was not only an opportunity to postpone the operation, but also outright abandon it for the time being on sound military grounds. Moreover, as a sweetener, Hankey proposed that the resources currently husbanded for the forthcoming Dardanelles and Gallipoli campaigns could be recommitted to landings at Haifa and Beirut, where they would encircle the Turkish army attacking Egypt in a Cannae-esque pincer attack and destroy them. Asquith “did not take kindly to the proposal at first,” but consented to consider it.⁴¹¹

While Asquith pondered his advice, Hankey used his connections within the services to undermine any further attacks against the Dardanelles by reviving Richmond’s Syrian scheme. However, in *lieu* of attacking Alexandretta, Hankey told Richmond, on 8 April, to propose to Fisher that troops be landed at Beirut and Haifa, thereby outflanking the Turkish army attacking Egypt and postponing naval action at the Dardanelles. To further outflank Churchill within the “Inner Cabinet,” Hankey also approached Kitchener *via* his secretary Colonel Oswald Arthur FitzGerald. After convincing FitzGerald that any further action at the Dardanelles should be postponed,

⁴¹⁰ Hankey diary, 7 April 1915, HNKY 1/1.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*

Hankey arranged that FitzGerald should approach Kitchener to impress the benefits of postponement on him. Simultaneously, Hankey approached Balfour, whom he persuaded to support postponement of any further action at the Dardanelles. Thereafter, the results of Hankey's machinations were acutely felt by the members of the "Inner Cabinet." On 8 April, Churchill received a letter from Balfour urging him to consider delaying any further action; simultaneously, Fisher circulated to the War Council a memorandum favouring the redeployment of British assets to Syria until Italy entered the war.⁴¹² Likewise, Kitchener, who Cassar indicates was already having cold feet about further military action, was swayed by FitzGerald on Hankey's behalf to postpone the operation till further staff work was completed.⁴¹³ Thereafter, while Churchill stubbornly supported the attack, Asquith was persuaded by "the great deal of force" in Hankey's arguments to postpone the attack on 9 April.⁴¹⁴ Thus, despite Asquith's "streamlining" of the decision-making process, Hankey was able to successfully employ the same tactics he used prior to 30 March to advance his agendas.

Hankey's willingness to abandon the operation in favour of an alternative, which he had devoted enormous time and energy to bring to fruition, while sudden was not unfounded. Already, Hankey had developed serious misgivings about the operation in its present form and while a cynic could argue that his support for a Syrian venture was merely a feint designed to achieve his larger ends, this project does not doubt Hankey's seriousness. Previously, Hankey had argued in the Boxing Day Memorandum that in *lieu* of a combined operation against the Dardanelles, an operation in Syria was the next best

⁴¹² Hankey diary, 8 April 1915, HNKY 1/1; Balfour to Churchill, 8 April 1915, *WSC*, 6:779; Churchill to Balfour, 8 April 1915, *WSC*, 6:780; Fisher Memorandum, 8 April 1915, *WSC*, 6:781.

⁴¹³ Cassar, *Kitchener*, 326.

⁴¹⁴ Asquith to Stanley, 7 April 1915, *Letters*, 535.

solution to opening a peripheral theatre of war. Moreover, Hankey undertook several key steps, which further illustrates he was serious about the Syrian adventure. Firstly, Hankey not only relied on his usual allies, Richmond and Fisher, to advance the Syrian plan by telling them to produce a memorandum outlining his plan, but he revealed the idea to Balfour, so the redoubtable old conservative could promote it to Churchill.⁴¹⁵ Secondly, whereas Hankey previously worried about a Syrian operation being used to seize Alexandretta, this possibility was removed because he had successfully convinced Asquith that said plan lacked merit.⁴¹⁶ Finally and most critically, Hankey directly approached Asquith with the proposal, something he only did whenever he felt said proposal carried serious merit, lest he undermine his position of trust with the Prime Minister. Furthermore, it must be said that while Hankey wanted to redirect resources to Syria, this did not preclude the possibility of returning to the Dardanelles once more favourable circumstances were in place, e.g., the entry of Italy and the Balkan powers into the war. Ultimately, while the Syrian adventure never came to pass, Hankey was pleased that Hamilton agreed to postpone any landing until 25 April 1915. While Hamilton made his preparations, Hankey, who was unnerved by the lack of interservice communication, circulated his own appreciation of the military situation on 12 April. Kept well-informed of military opinion by his position as interlocutor between the two services, Hankey's appreciation agreed with them that Cape Helles was an ideal main disembarkation site. However, he expressed worry over the subsequent inland advance,

⁴¹⁵ "In the meanwhile, without all abandoning the scheme, it would, I should have thought, be worth considering whether we should not delay its completion till we have destroyed the Turkish army in Syria." Balfour to Churchill, 8 April 1915, *WSC*, 6:779.

⁴¹⁶ Hankey diary, 24 March 1915, HNKY 1/1.

the success of which was dependent on “the supposed shortage of supplies and inferior fighting qualities of the Turkish armies.”⁴¹⁷

Subsequently, Hankey’s views about the difficulty of the Dardanelles campaign were “closely borne out,” during the campaign.⁴¹⁸ This resulted in Hankey growing increasingly pessimistic about the two campaigns’ chances of success because the failure of the Gallipoli offensive to breach the enemy lines and secure the peninsular would inevitably result in the whole scheme’s downfall. Hankey, in coordination with Callwell, concluded that the campaigns’ only real hope for a breakthrough rested in the Entente’s diplomatic efforts to secure Greek or Bulgarian military support.⁴¹⁹ However, while Hankey assumed this pessimistic stance towards the ultimate outcome of the Gallipoli campaign, Churchill continued to uphold a more optimistic expectations until it became all too clear that a stalemate akin to the one on the western front was unfolding. Thereafter, Churchill admitted that Hankey was right; however, he was unwilling to call the scheme off due to the resources and prestige sunk into it, and despite the emerging stalemate he refused to allow the fleet to remain inactive. Churchill after plying his staff for a risk assessment of a hypothetical attempt to rush the straits did not remove the possibility from the board. Instead, he opted to wait and see if an opportunity emerged to do so, while simultaneously using the fleet to support the troops onshore. Churchill’s attitude was not popular with his subordinates, particularly Fisher, and it resulted in the intrigues which Hankey was inevitably drawn into. Hankey’s involvement in the intrigues against Churchill by Fisher or the other Admiralty staff between April and May were premised

⁴¹⁷ Hankey, *Command*, 1:302.

⁴¹⁸ Hankey diary, 27 April 1915, HNKY 1/1.

⁴¹⁹ Hankey diary, 15 May 1915, HNKY 1/1.

on Hankey's perception that Churchill was engaging in risky strategic actions. This view was heavily informed by his own interactions with Churchill, the picture spun by his allies, and Hankey's own growing pessimism towards the operation, all of which led him to oppose the First Lord. Ultimately, however, while Hankey was clearly able to hamstring Churchill with Fisher, his actions also encouraged Fisher to overstep his bounds and help ignite the wider cabinet crisis that undermined the Asquith government.

Although Hankey's actions during the subsequent cabinet crisis are fascinating, they go beyond the purview of this thesis. However, the result of that crisis, the First Coalition government, did not dilute Hankey's informal influence over the decision-making process. Rather, while the Coalition resulted in the reconstitution of the War Council under its new moniker, the Dardanelles Commission, and should have resulted in the empowerment of that body this was not the case. Rather, as the Coalition muddled along, Asquith continued to place his trust in the "Inner Cabinet," now consisting of Asquith, Hankey, Kitchener, and Balfour (who replaced Churchill as First Lord), and as such decisions continued to be made in a haphazard and *ad hoc* manner. Moreover, while Hankey continued to desire the reformation of the cabinet system, he continued to subtly manipulate the informal system through the impetus of his numerous roles under Asquith often by employing the same methods seen above. Specifically, Hankey continued to rely upon his position as gatekeeper and prime ministerial interlocutor or "liaison officer," as he was now titled, to forge a wide range of alliances within the hierarchy to advance his own strategic agenda. In turn, when the lure of his unprecedented access was not enough to convince potential allies, Hankey relied on his role as Asquith's trusted military advisor and Secretary to both the CID and now Dardanelles Committee to produce and

circulate memoranda conducive to his strategic agenda. The strategic ramifications of Hankey's growing influence were the intensification of the Gallipoli campaign, as Hankey actively influenced Asquith and the War Office to shift resources eastwards. This was part of Hankey's desire to make 1915 the year the Ottoman Empire was destroyed and thereby lay the groundwork for the arrival of Kitchener's New Armies to join the already veteran forces at the front for a coming offensive in 1916. However, while Hankey entertained these grand ambitions, they were built atop faulty foundations, which collapsed under the weight of past strategic mistakes and the poor maintenance provided by the informal system.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Maurice Hankey portrayed himself as an apolitical bureaucrat, first to the Dardanelles Commission and later to history. For nearly a century, he has almost-universally been regarded as an unbiased observer of the British high command in the First World War. Through a talent for self-propaganda and the blessing of being a trusted and seemingly inconspicuous bureaucrat, rather than a politician or high-ranking officer, Hankey spun a narrative around his own career that has been used to shape our understanding of the First World War and British governance. Capitalizing on his reputation as one of the founders of the Cabinet Secretariat and modern British system of governance, Hankey argued that he tried to redirect Asquith towards reforming the heavily flawed informal system of governance, only to be frustrated by the Prime Minister's unwillingness to depart from tradition. Hankey responded by trying to instill some semblance of order through the creation of written documentation and other streamlining efforts that foreshadowed his reforms under Lloyd George. Simultaneously, Hankey argued that although the flawed nature of British decision-making hampered its war efforts, ultimately the British defence establishment (including himself) succeeded in creating not one, but multiple strategies for Britain to choose from once war began in 1914. In turn, subsequent historians, who have long been fed Hankey's reputation as a reputable witness, have upheld his arguments about his role without any real scrutiny.

However, while the “Hankey Myth” has proven pervasive, it has not been without critics in whose footsteps this thesis has followed. As previously mentioned, during the height of the Dardanelles Commission the wartime correspondent, Repington, argued that Hankey was not simply a lowly bureaucrat, but rather a military advisor to the Prime Minister, who wielded greater influence than he was due. Subsequently, Bell’s modern analysis of Churchill’s culpability for the Dardanelles revealed, in the same vein as Repington, that Hankey wielded greater influence over the operation than previously claimed and obscured numerous events. Likewise, a school of historians, inspired by Ashton’s argument that Britain lacked a coherent military strategy at the out-set of the First World War, have since undermined Hankey’s arguments about British grand strategy. The most prominent of these are Seligmann and Morgan-Owen, who illustrated Hankey upheld and expanded upon “maritime” strategic principles, but neither Hankey nor the rest of the British defence establishment created the coherent wartime strategy Hankey claims, or for that matter multiple strategies.

Whereas the bulk of historians have ignored these flaws or been occupied analyzing another problem larger than Hankey, this thesis has taken a direct interest in these findings and built upon them. Specifically, it has analyzed a portion of Hankey’s storied career – i.e., his pre-war career and role under Asquith’s wartime Liberal government (1914-1915), to determine what if any influence Hankey wielded over British strategy and its consequences. Ultimately, Hankey’s arguments crumbles when scrutinized by this project’s novel approach of making Hankey the focus of its analysis. By shifting focus from towering figures like Churchill and Kitchener, Hankey no longer appears to be an apolitical bureaucrat. Rather, by scrutinizing Hankey’s actions and

relationships, he emerges as a wartime *éminence grise*, whose influence exceeds the descriptions propagated by Hankey or his greatest champion, Roskill. Furthermore, despite his portrayal as a virtuous bureaucrat, who stood above the fray of cabinet intrigue, it is equally apparent that Hankey owed his influence on his adroit manipulation of the very informal system he sought to reform. Moreover, in the process of analyzing Hankey's ascendancy from obscure bureaucrat to Asquith's right-hand it becomes apparent that, while Hankey was correct that the failings of the informal system and Asquith's leadership style undermined Britain's early wartime effectiveness, there is no evidence to support his claim Britain entered the war with a coherent strategy. Rather, while Hankey was responsible for the formalization of British war-plans *via* the War Book and advanced several strategic ideas including the utilization of new technologies, "maritime" strategy, and economic blockade, he and the larger defence establishment failed to agree upon or implement a single coherent strategy.

Hankey's rise to the position of wartime Secretary to the War Council was not as sanitized as Hankey or his supporters argue. Whereas they claim that Hankey owed his rise to his brilliant performance as Secretary to the CID, the remarkable work he performed on the War Book, and his good relations with leading decision-makers, this thesis uncovered a more complicated rise to influence. While it is true that Hankey was a brilliant young officer in the Royal Marines and intelligence who caught the eye of Fisher and Esher through his staunch support of the "maritime" school and capacity for work, Hankey's tenure as Secretary of the CID was not an easy one. Rather, Hankey's attempts to win the prime ministerial support necessary to transform the organization into the nerve-centre of strategy it was intended to be, so he could advance a "maritime" strategy,

floundered because of Asquith's lack of interest in military affairs and in Hankey himself. As a result, however, Hankey simultaneously acquired a talent for intrigue and a reputation for not being an intriguer! Both of which he utilized to gain greater technical responsibilities, including the right to produce the War Book, to gain Asquith's favour. These skills, which were further enhanced by his apprenticeship to Fisher, Esher, and Balfour, would prove essential once he entered Asquith's orbit in 1914, when the July Crisis changed everything.

The near simultaneous July and Curragh Crises forced Asquith to search for an able subordinate to assist the overwhelmed premier at the War Office. Hankey's station as Secretary to the CID, made him the obvious candidate. Hankey came into close contact with the Prime Minister and exceeded Asquith's wildest expectations by implementing the War Book, which Hankey had helped create. Subsequently, Asquith, refused to part with Hankey once the war began and instead moved him into the informal role of *de facto* military advisor to the Prime Minister. In his role, Hankey was present when Asquith summoned a Council of War that did not agree to a strategy as Hankey later suggested in his memoirs, but rather settled upon several pre-existing war plans within the wider framework of the half-baked "business as usual" strategy if it can even be called a strategy.

Thereafter, Hankey continued to rise in Asquith's esteem not only due to his capabilities as a strategist and administrator, but also because the informal system Asquith perpetuated allowed no one else to assume the necessary roles of *de facto* military advisor and prime ministerial interlocutor, or liaison officer (as it would later be known) to the services. Whereas Asquith would have preferred to rely upon his service

ministers or his pre-war political confidantes for the roles Hankey assumed, ultimately, they were unavailable owing to preoccupation with existing duties, inexperience, illness, or disgrace. Asquith turned to Hankey, who had already proven himself invaluable during the July Crisis and was easily accessible to Asquith due to the decline of the CID.

Subsequently, Hankey excelled in his role as military advisor by successfully guiding Asquith through the Ostend operation and Siege of Antwerp in 1914. Simultaneously, as prime ministerial interlocutor, Hankey enjoyed access to the services that allowed him to gather and synthesize information on military or departmental matters for Asquith's digestion. Furthermore, while the CID was in decline, Asquith relied on Hankey's skills from that post to investigate matters on his behalf (such as home defence) and act as Secretary to the nascent War Council upon its establishment in 1914.

While Hankey used his positions to keep Asquith well-informed and advised of military affairs, he also capitalized on his unparalleled position to advance his own strategic and institutional agendas. The former was premised on the enactment of a "maritime" strategy based on peripheral operations, economic warfare, and the utilization of new technologies, as outlined in the Boxing Day memorandum, to defeat the Central Powers. Likewise, Hankey continued to advocate for the reform of the informal system into a more formal one, by either transforming the CID or War Council into the dedicated nerve centre of British strategy. However, Asquith proved hostile to the latter agenda and so, Hankey frequently sacrificed it by manipulating the informal system in favour of advancing his strategic agenda. The methods Hankey employed to manipulate the system and advance his preferred strategies relied upon Hankey's omnipresent position within the system. Hankey's role as prime ministerial interlocutor and *de facto* military advisor,

contrary to Lambert's or even Roskill's assertions, allowed Hankey to leverage his unparalleled access to the Prime Minister, as well as other areas of government, and Asquith's trust in him, with other actors to convince them to support his agenda. Moreover, Hankey's position as Secretary to the CID and War Council, allowed him to produce and circulate memoranda designed to influence members of the War Council, most notably Asquith, to favour his strategic agenda. Examples of this practice can first be seen in 1914, while Hankey was still coming into his influence, when he convinced his superiors to support his combined operation at Ostend and likewise deploy the RND to Antwerp. Thereafter, in the aftermath of the first Battle of Ypres, when stalemate gripped the Western Front, Hankey committed the bulk of his energies to realizing his proposed combined attack on the Dardanelles.

During both the lead-up to and actual operation, Hankey played a much larger role than he admitted to the Dardanelles Commission, or in his memoirs. Specifically, he utilized the previously described methods and the influence garnered through them to advance the initial plan until Churchill produced a bastardized version. This version, which proposed a purely naval assault, was accepted for political reasons by the War Council despite Hankey's best efforts to scuttle it immediately. Thereafter, Hankey, who believed a purely naval attack against the Dardanelles to be doomed, entered a series of temporary alliances with likeminded officers and political elites to actively undermine the scheme. The results of this highly coordinated campaign of intrigue, was that Hankey slowly but surely convinced Asquith and other key members of the hierarchy to embrace a combined operation. However, while Hankey's efforts were a factor behind their decisions, their slow embrace of Hankey's advice also stemmed from the gradual

realization of the validity of his concerns about the campaign. These included Hankey's warning that the straits' defences could not be overcome without troops and his statements to Asquith that the Admiralty disapproved of the Dardanelles scheme as it increasingly departed from its original naval or combined plan, depending on the officer. The accuracy of Hankey's advice and the evident failings of the War Council, due to Asquith's own refusal to properly utilize the War Council, resulted in Asquith reliance upon Hankey and an informal group of advisors, including Kitchener and Churchill, which would be described as the "Inner Cabinet." The "Inner Cabinet" soon superseded the War Council as the real nerve-centre of British strategy and decision-making once it was decided that military forces needed to be landed at the Dardanelles. However, while Hankey's inclusion in the body brought him greater influence, the flawed nature of the system and the wasted potential of the operation, resulted in its collapse by winter of 1916.

Overall, the importance of this research should not be lost on scholars of the First World War or British strategy, many of whom have undoubtedly used Hankey as an unbiased source or have embraced one pervasive aspect of the "Hankey Myth." Such aspects could be anything from Hankey's interpretation of British strategy, or his sanitized defence of the Asquith government during the Dardanelles Commission which has served as the basis for much scholarship both hostile and supportive of one "great man" of history or another. Ultimately, however, by engaging in a novel approach to researching Hankey, i.e., making him the real focus of this study for the first time since Roskill, this project has determined that the myth he expertly constructed for himself is flawed. Whereas Hankey presented himself as a mere scribe of events and humble

advisor to greater men, he was in fact a highly ambitious and adroit intriguer, who utilized his informal influence to promote his strategic vision during the First World War. In this regard, Repington was by far the most astute observer of Hankey, when he noted that the diminutive secretary was in fact more akin to a military advisor, who wielded great influence over British strategy, rather than a scribe who simply pushed paperwork. While it is fascinating alone, to realize just how much influence Hankey wielded because of his relationship with Asquith and the failings of the informal system Hankey manipulated and later reformed, it is stunning to realize the actual consequences of his actions. While Hankey may have been correct in his assumption that a combined attack stood a better chance than a purely naval one at the Dardanelles, ultimately, he persisted in his determination to see his vision through and because of a myriad of factors thousands lost their lives attempting to realize that vision.

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