

Colonial ideas, modern warfare: how British perceptions affected their campaign against  
the Ottomans, 1914-1916

by

Cameron Winter

A Thesis  
presented to  
The University of Guelph

In partial fulfilment of requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
in  
History

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

© Cameron Winter, April, 2017

## ABSTRACT

### COLONIAL IDEAS, MODERN WARFARE: HOW BRITISH PERCEPTIONS AFFECTED THEIR CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE OTTOMANS, 1914-1916

Cameron Winter  
University of Guelph, 2017

Advisor:  
Professor R Worringer

This thesis is an investigation of British campaign against the Ottoman Sultanate during the first two years of WWI. Despite Britain's purported superiority in all things military and technological, the Ottomans dealt the British several stinging reverses at the Dardanelles and in Mesopotamia, culminating in the capture of a British division at Kut. It is the argument of this thesis that these failures on the part of the British were the direct result of Britain's colonialist attitudes towards Muslims, and that a reading of both the secondary literature and available primary materials demonstrates this thoroughly. By examining memoirs, diaries, cabinet documents and minutes of War Council meetings, it becomes clear that Lord Kitchener, Winston Churchill, Austen Chamberlain, and other British leaders suffered from a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of Islam and of the Ottoman Army, and that this misunderstanding underwrote all of their subsequent failures over the 1914-1916 period.

Table of Contents

Introduction: One Debacle After Another .....	1
Chapter 1: Imperial Ghosts .....	7
Chapter 2: British Expectations, Ottoman Realities .....	33
Chapter 3: Lord Kitchener, Mister Churchill, and the “Naval-Only” Scheme .....	55
Chapter 4: Sir Ian Hamilton’s Dilemma .....	73
Chapter 5: Acknowledging Failure .....	91
Chapter 6: “Where Are We Going to Stop in Mesopotamia?” .....	108
Chapter 7: Besieged and Disgraced .....	125
Conclusion: Whom to Blame? .....	141
Bibliography .....	146

## Introduction: One Debacle After Another

On April 29, 1916, the men of Great Britain's 6<sup>th</sup> Indian Division filed out of the town of Kut and into captivity. For the past four and a half months, they had been besieged within the town, cut off from all relief as their rations slowly dwindled into nonexistence. The British Army's Tigris Corps, first under Sir Fenton Aylmer and then under Sir George Gorringe, had made numerous efforts to free the 6<sup>th</sup> Division, but had been frustrated at every turn by the soldiers of the Ottoman military's Sixth Army, who had resolutely refused to allow the British to reach their countrymen.<sup>1</sup> Now, with his command starving and the men emaciated, the 6<sup>th</sup> Division's commander, Sir Charles Townshend, was left with no choice but to surrender his division to the Ottomans.<sup>2</sup>

It was the final, tragic capstone on almost two years of near incessant failure. Since November 1914, the British War Council and its successors had sought to bring the Ottoman Sultanate to its knees. Viewed by Britain, France, and Russia alike as the weakest of Germany's allies, it had been assumed from the start that the Ottomans could not last long in the face of a direct assault from a modern military power like Great Britain.<sup>3</sup> By striking at the Ottomans, the British had aimed to undermine the Central Powers by knocking a key German ally out of the war at the earliest possible moment.

From the start, it had all gone wrong. Initial British successes in Egypt and Mesopotamia were soon buried beneath a cascading waterfall of fiascos. First a combined Anglo-French fleet lost a third of its number in trying to breach the Dardanelles in March

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles Townshend, *Desert Hell: The British Invasion of Mesopotamia*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011): 248.

<sup>2</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 248.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, January 13, 1915," January 13, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/1/16): 8.

of 1915.<sup>4</sup> Then, the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force under Sir Ian Hamilton landed at Gallipoli in April of 1915, only to find itself in a deadlock every bit as static as the one in Flanders.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Townshend's 6<sup>th</sup> Division was defeated at the battle of Ctesiphon and driven back to Kut where, after months of starvation, it was forced to surrender.<sup>6</sup> It was a stunning military upset, as Britain, supposedly the world's greatest superpower, suffered a succession of humiliating defeats at the hands of the so-called "Sick Man of Europe."

For decades since, historians have pondered how the joint disasters at Gallipoli and Kut came to be. Various culprits have been blamed, from local commanders like Sir Ian Hamilton and Sir Charles Townshend, to political dignitaries like Winston Churchill and Lord Herbert Kitchener. Even a cursory examination of the primary evidence, however, reveals that while all these men, and particularly Lord Kitchener, did bear a certain amount of responsibility for the military bungling at the Dardanelles and Mesopotamia they were far from alone. At every step along the way, leading figures in the British Cabinet and the Indian Raj lent their support to Kitchener's schemes for destroying the Ottomans. Men as varied as Sir Edward Grey, Lord Charles Hardinge, Lord George Curzon, Lord Robert Crewe, Austen Chamberlain, and HH Asquith fully supported the Dardanelles and Mesopotamian operations, contending that they were necessary, not only to defeat the Ottomans, but to prevent the Muslim populace of Britain's overseas empire from growing restive.<sup>7</sup> The problems, it is clear, were institutional and systemic, not merely the fault of any one man.

---

<sup>4</sup> Victor Rudenko, *Gallipoli: Attack from the Sea*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008): 52.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1920): 85.

<sup>6</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 163.

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915," October 21, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/4/15): 1-9.

The one thing that almost all histories of Britain's Middle Eastern campaign do concur on is that the British underestimated the fighting ability of the Ottomans. A majority of works on Gallipoli and Kut alike will mention, at some point, that the British did not respect the ability of the Ottoman military to wage a modern war. Yet for all that this point is near-universally acknowledged, it is rarely given pride of place as the reason for the disintegration of the campaign, nor is it explored in the depth that it rightfully deserves. After all, the Ottoman Sultanate, while impoverished and beset by internal troubles, had just survived two modern wars, and was in possession of a highly professional military organization trained to the modern standard.<sup>8</sup> That the Ottomans could prove potentially formidable adversaries was there for any and all foreign observers to see. That the British could not see the threat posed by the Ottomans, and in fact were far more concerned by the possibility of a revolution among their own Islamic subjects, owes not to the invisible nature of the Ottoman Army, but to long-standing colonial attitudes towards non-Europeans and in particular, Muslims, that had permeated the British political and military establishment. The Ottomans were subjected to the same set of stereotypes the British had previously held the Afghans, the Indian Muslims, and the Sudanese to, forced to fit into an archetypal mould that neither they, nor any of Britain's other Muslim foes, had ever truly belonged in.

So Eurocentric and Orientalist was the British outlook of the time, in fact, that it has continued to infuse the scholarship on the subject to this very day. There is a vast body of primary and secondary literature on Gallipoli, on Kut, and on the Middle Eastern campaign in general. Yet the great majority of this literature is entirely concerned with

---

<sup>8</sup> Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001): 10.

the British side of the war, and, like the British statesmen and soldiers of World War I, gives short shrift to the Ottoman Army and its accomplishments. The question asked by most Western authors is nearly always “What did the British do wrong?” and rarely “What did the Ottomans do right?” an attitude that reflects, in many ways, the colonialist assumption that their side must have made grave tactical, operational, and strategic mistakes in order to be defeated by the locals.<sup>9</sup> These issues are frequently reflective of pre-existing problems in the primary material. While much of the primary documentation on the British side, from Cabinet records to the diaries and memoirs of generals, is easily accessible, the Ottoman archives are less so. Comparatively few Ottoman primary sources have been translated into English, and many of those that have been are the memoirs of German officers like Otto Liman von Sanders, rather than documents originating with the Ottoman government and its army.<sup>10</sup> While some scholars, like Edward J. Erickson, have gained access to the Ottoman archives and have written important reappraisals of the Ottoman military, the very scarcity of works on the subject makes judging their accuracy somewhat difficult.<sup>11</sup> Suffice it to say, so strongly ingrained were British notions about Muslims in general and the Ottomans in particular that it continues to cast a shadow over modern research.

By examining Britain’s operations against the Ottomans in depth, it becomes increasingly clear that those same colonial attitudes, held over from wars against Muslim tribes in Afghanistan, India, and the Sudan badly coloured the outlook of the British leadership and helped ensure that one bad decision after another was made. Convinced that Muslims were incapable of forming truly professional, modern armies, the British

---

<sup>9</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, xvii.

<sup>10</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, xvi.

<sup>11</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, xvii.

instead obsessed over the possibility of an Islamic religious uprising among their imperial subjects, and sought to prevent it by winning cheap victories against the Ottomans. This colonialist dichotomy, in which Muslims could be only incompetent soldiers or dangerous fanatics warped the outlook of Kitchener, Churchill, Chamberlain, Hardinge, and all the other men who sat on the War Council or governed the Indian Raj, and created an almost entirely fictitious scenario in which the British military had to quickly best the “decadent” Ottomans before a loss of imperial prestige precipitated a Muslim revolution in India, Egypt or the Sudan. This in turn ensured that any British defeats would be followed not by a reappraisal and withdrawal, but by a doubling down on bad strategy, as new victories were sought to compensate for defeats.<sup>12</sup> To an imperial mindset that saw all Muslims as a monolith, and ascribed to them a collective fanaticism and desire for a religious form of government, any weakening in British prestige might presage a revolt, and thus damage or even destroy the empire. Rather than giving their generals freedom to make their own choices, British decision makers shackled them to a doctrine of maintaining prestige that made the winning of any real victories exceptionally difficult.

Sir Ian Hamilton, Sir Charles Townshend, and Sir Fenton Aylmer made their fair share of tactical mistakes. It was not these errors, however, that caused the British Empire to waste so many lives and so many resources against the Ottomans. To blame was a faulty strategic and operational concept based on a deeply flawed understanding of the nature of the enemy they were fighting. Chained to prestige doctrine and sent into battle on multiple fronts to win inexpensive victories against a professional army that could not

---

<sup>12</sup> Nikolas Gardner, “British Prestige and the Mesopotamia Campaign,” in *Historian* 77, no. 2 (June 2015): 269.

be cheaply beaten, the British military spent the better part of two years driving its head into a metaphorical concrete wall.

## Chapter 1: Imperial Ghosts

British attitudes towards the Ottomans in World War I did not emerge from a vacuum. All nations, it has been said, have ghosts: memories of past humiliations and traumatic defeats that indelibly mark the national psyche and haunt future policy-making. Imperial and colonial projects, such as the British Empire, which seek to impose uniformity and control over widely diverse peoples and nations across a multitude of continents, collect, by virtue of their very nature, a large number of these ghosts and carry them from one corner of the world to another. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the British Empire had suffered a succession of embarrassments at the hands of Islamic peoples, embarrassments which shaped imperial and military policy towards the Ottomans for the first two years of the war, as the British government and its military advisors sought to avoid what they believed had been the mistakes of the past, regardless, at times, of the accuracy of these beliefs.

One of the inherent problems with large institutions like governments and armies is that they are often very slow to recognize failed policies or learn from their mistakes. Worse still, if the lessons taken away from mistakes are the wrong ones, it can result in bad policy becoming ingrained in the institution, ensuring that errors will be repeated and the real mistakes will go uncorrected. This is especially true in situations in which failure is regarded as a national embarrassment, and the officials who might otherwise be held responsible are forced to search for an explanation that will salvage their dignity and exonerate them of any wrongdoing. If said explanation can be made to fit with preconceived ideas about the inherent character of the enemy, so much the better.

From 1838 to 1898, British notions about their military supremacy were challenged by Islamic peoples in Afghanistan, India, and the Sudan. Several of Britain's greatest colonial defeats, from the massacre in the Khyber Pass to the siege and surrender of Khartoum, took place in this period. British politicians, civil servants, and generals thought that they detected a pattern to these conflicts, positing that while British arms remained undefeated when confronting Muslim armies, the real threat to the stability of British conquests came from the seemingly innate religious fanaticism of Islamic tribal peoples, stirred up, they frequently believed, by foreign powers who hoped to disrupt the British Empire. This narrative of British military success undermined by religiously motivated rebellion would come to define British visions of the First and Second Afghan Wars, the Indian Mutiny, and the Sudanese War, obscuring the far more complex realities of what had happened. By briefly examining these conflicts, one can witness the emergence of the imperial and military doctrine of maintaining prestige above all else and see the beginning of the ideological problems that would so handicap British efforts in the first two years of their war against the Ottoman Sultanate.

\*

The First Afghan War of 1838 to 1842 was also the first war of Queen Victoria's lengthy reign, and easily one of the most disastrous. Fought for long term political gain rather than any immediate military need, the war damaged a generation of British officers and shaped perceptions of both the Afghanis and Islamic tribes in general for decades to come. It also saw the early formulation of the prestige doctrine that would be refined in later conflicts.

Primarily a project of Indian Viceroy Lord George Eden of Auckland and his secretary, William Hay Macnaghten, the war was conceived of as a way of gaining advantage over Russia in the so-called “Great Game” for control over Central Asia. For years, the British had regarded Russia’s slow advance through the predominantly Muslim states of Central Asia as a threat to British rule over India. As the borders of Russian Turkestan and the British Raj grew ever closer, paranoia in Britain about Russian intentions intensified. As prominent Russophobes, both Auckland and Macnaghten thought that something had to be done to check Russian advancement, an opinion that was hardly uncommon at the time.<sup>13</sup> As Auckland tried to stir up support for a preemptive war in Afghanistan an article in *The Times* made reference to “The Russian fiend who from the frontiers of Hungary to the heart of Burmah and Nepal ... has been haunting and troubling the human race, and diligently pursuing his malignant frauds...to the vexation of this industrious and essentially pacific empire.”<sup>14</sup> Public sentiment on the subject was famously divided—British peer Lord Salisbury once remarked that it seemed “You must disbelieve altogether in the existence of the Russians or you must believe they will be in Kandahar next year. Public opinion recognizes no middle holding ground.”<sup>15</sup>

Auckland and Macnaghten, however, had no doubts about the Russian threat towards India, and they viewed Dost Mohammed Khan, the current emir of Afghanistan, with the deepest of suspicion. Dost Mohammed, while friendly towards Britain, had sought to remain neutral in the ongoing colonial conflict between Russia and the Raj, which in Auckland and Macnaghten’s minds, made him a Russian agent.<sup>16</sup> He was also

---

<sup>13</sup> Karl E. Meyer & Shareen Blair Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, (Washington: Counterpoint, 1999): 62.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in Diana Preston, *The Dark Defile*, (New York: Walker Publishing Company Inc, 2012): 67.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Preston, *The Dark Defile*, 67-68.

<sup>16</sup> Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 63.

an inveterate enemy of Ranjit Singh, Sikh ruler of the Punjab, and Britain's traditional ally in the region.<sup>17</sup> When a Persian army laid siege to the Afghani province of Herat, Auckland decided that the Persians must be acting as Russian proxies, and that the only way to stop them would be to convert Afghanistan into a puppet state under Shah Shuja, Dost Mohammed's ousted predecessor.<sup>18</sup> Britain's agent in Kabul, Alexander Burnes, tried to warn Auckland and Macnaghten against pursuing this course, but his dispatches to India were carefully edited by Claude Wade, a British agent in northwestern India who wanted to ensure that Burnes towed the party line.<sup>19</sup>

Other prominent British politicians tried to warn against the expedition. Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, declared that "The consequences of crossing the Indus once, to settle a government in Afghanistan, will be a perennial march into that country."<sup>20</sup> Mounstuart Elphinstone, leader of the first British expedition to Kabul, informed Auckland that "if you send 27 000 men up the *Durra-i-Bolan* to Kandahar (as we hear is intended), and can feed them, I have no doubt you will take Kandahar and Kabul and set up Shuja; but for maintaining him in a poor, cold, strong, and remote country, among a turbulent people like the Afghans, I own it seems to be to be hopeless."<sup>21</sup> Auckland was not listening however, and having won the support of prominent political figures in Britain, including foreign secretary Lord Palmerston, who believed Afghanistan must inevitably become either a British or a Russian colony, declared war on Dost Mohammed, accusing him of conspiring with Persia, and therefore Russia, to undermine British rule. That Dost Mohammed was at war with Persia and

---

<sup>17</sup> Preston, *The Dark Defile*, 20.

<sup>18</sup> Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 67.

<sup>19</sup> John H. Waller, *Beyond the Khyber Pass*, (New York: Random House, 1990): 122.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in Preston, *The Dark Defile*, 68.

<sup>21</sup> Cited in Preston, *The Dark Defile*, 68.

could hardly be conspiring with them at anything did not enter into Auckland's equation. Nor did the fact that the siege of Herat had already been lifted by the time Auckland's invasion was readied.<sup>22</sup> The goal, after all, was not to deal with any short term threat, but to frustrate the supposedly long term designs of Russia. The 32 000 man Army of the Indus, including men from each of Britain's Indian armies and the Raj's Sikh allies, crossed into Afghanistan and dethroned Dost Mohammed.<sup>23</sup>

The victory initially seemed as easy as Auckland and Macnaghten had anticipated. Dost Mohammed tried to rally his nation with a call to jihad, but with limited success.<sup>24</sup> While the Ghilzai tribes of the border fought hard, the Afghan Army, composed of loosely united tribal levies of dubious loyalty to Dost Mohammed, collapsed once it became clear the British were going to win.<sup>25</sup> Most chiefs proved willing to surrender to Shah Shuja and his new allies, and Dost Mohammed first fled the country, then subsequently surrendered himself into British captivity. The British left a garrison of 4500 men and 12 000 camp followers under General William Elphinstone in Kabul and withdrew from the country.<sup>26</sup> Macnaghten remained behind to help Shah Shuja run the new British puppet state, while Auckland declared victory, saying that "The plans of aggression by which the British Empire in India was dangerously threatened, have, under Providence, been arrested. The Chiefs of Kabul and Kandahar, who had joined in hostile designs against us, have been deprived of power, and the territories which they ruled have been restored to the government of a friendly monarch."<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Waller, *Beyond the Khyber Pass*, 122.

<sup>23</sup> Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 87.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010): 115.

<sup>25</sup> Preston, *The Dark Defile*, 92.

<sup>26</sup> Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 93.

<sup>27</sup> Preston, *The Dark Defile*, 99.

The victory did not last. Shah Shuja had not been a popular ruler during his initial reign, and the personality flaws that had handicapped him in his first period on the throne proved just as damaging the second time. Cold and austere and obsessed with court protocol, Shah Shuja was a remote and officious emir, in sharp contrast to Dost Mohammed who had always had time to meet with petitioners.<sup>28</sup> Macnaghten only made the situation worse. Determined to provide Shah Shuja with a professional army instead of the inefficient system of tribal levies, Macnaghten reduced the payments that the crown had traditionally made to the tribal chieftains and attempted to create a new, pan-Afghani army.<sup>29</sup> He also seized or revoked the tax free status of religious endowments and, in 1841, cut the emirate's payments to the Ghilzai chiefs of the border regions by half.<sup>30</sup> These factors, coupled with the rising price of food in Kabul, saw rebellion sweep through the capital and the surrounding countryside. The Ghilzai and Kohistani tribes joined the revolt, and by September 1841, had cut off Kabul from the rest of the country. Dost Mohammed's favourite son, Akbar Khan, returned to Afghanistan and took control of the anti-British coalition. Macnaghten was killed by forces loyal to Akbar, his body suspended from meat hooks in the bazaar.<sup>31</sup> General Elphinstone, cut off from all possible help, surrendered Kabul to Akbar in January 1842 in exchange for safe passage out of the country. He was granted it, but Akbar's control over the Ghilzai tribesmen of the frontier regions was limited.<sup>32</sup> During Elphinstone's retreat through the Khyber Pass,

---

<sup>28</sup> Preston, *The Dark Defile*, 113.

<sup>29</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 119.

<sup>30</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 121.

<sup>31</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 124.

<sup>32</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 124.

his army was slaughtered almost to a man by the Ghilzais, whose long-barrelled *jezail* hunting rifles well-outranged the British muskets.<sup>33</sup>

The defeat shocked the British nation, and the press was filled with stories of the massacre in the Khyber. *The Times*, unable to process the notion that Afghani tribesmen had destroyed a British army, insisted that the Ghilzais must have had Russian assistance. An “Army of Retribution” was assembled, with the explicit goal of restoring British prestige and preventing Afghanistan from “backsliding” into the Russian camp.<sup>34</sup> Forcing the Khyber Pass, the Army of Retribution entered Kabul in September of 1842.<sup>35</sup> Demolishing the bazaar in revenge for Elphinstone and Macnaghten, the Army of Retribution left the way it had come, abandoning Afghanistan to the restored Dost Mohammed. While the British papers crowed about their victory over the Afghans, the reality of defeat was understood by most of the British officer corps.

The lessons that the British learned from the failure of the First Afghan War were not necessarily the ones that they should have. Ignoring Macnaghten’s disastrous mishandling of relations between Shah Shuja and the tribes, they instead focused on the seemingly religious nature of the revolt. Certainly, the Ghilzai and Kohistani chieftains had declared that a state of jihad existed between themselves and the British, and they had made use of sympathetic clerics to spread the message, but this was ultimately little more than subterfuge, meant to put a politically acceptable face on the reality that they were fighting against the man who had robbed them of their regular subsidies.<sup>36</sup> Dost Mohammed, it should be remembered, had also called for a jihad against the British, but

---

<sup>33</sup> Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 98.

<sup>34</sup> Preston, *The Dark Defile*, 240.

<sup>35</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 126.

<sup>36</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 122-123.

had been unable to rally sufficient support. It had taken Macnaghten's mismanagement of the emirate's tribal vassals, rather than any genuinely religious feeling, to set off the uprising. The war also saw the emergence of the empire's prestige doctrine, as embodied by the Army of Retribution. In the face of defeat by the likes of the Afghans, it was believed, the British army had to win new victories, lest the humiliation encourage rebellion within the rest of the empire.<sup>37</sup> The recapture of Kabul by the Army of Retribution had, it was thought, ensured that neither Akbar Khan nor Dost Mohammed could act against British India, not that either had any intention of doing so.

The British would remember the First Afghan War as a disaster in which they had bested the Afghan Army, but been driven from the country by the fanatical religiosity of the Afghani tribesmen. They would also insist that the Army of Retribution's expedition had fulfilled a vital function in preventing revolt from spreading into Indian territory. Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, these ideas would grow in strength and prominence, influencing Britain's behaviour throughout her wars with other Muslim powers.

\*

If events in Afghanistan had shocked the British public, the Indian Mutiny of 1857 to 1859 horrified them. For decades, the British had conditioned themselves to believe that they were beloved in India and that the Indian soldiers, or sepoy, who composed the bulk of their Indian armies, were totally loyal to their officers and their foreign kings and queens. As one officer recorded in his diary, "You might see the sepoy, watchful and tender as a woman, beside the sickbed of the English officer, or playing with the pale-faced children beneath the veranda of his captain's bungalow. There was

---

<sup>37</sup> Preston, *The Dark Defile*, 240.

not an English gentlewoman in the country who did not feel measureless security in the thought that a guard of sepoy watched her house, or who would not have traveled, under such an escort, across the whole length and breadth of the land.”<sup>38</sup> When fully a fourth of the Bengal Army, Hindu and Muslim alike, rose up against the Raj, the British could scarcely comprehend it. The mutiny lasted two years, cost more than 100 000 Indian lives, and required the dispatch of 60 000 additional British troops to the subcontinent before it was suppressed.<sup>39</sup> In the aftermath, the structure and the racial and religious composition of the Indian armies was completely overhauled, and control over the colony was transferred from the East India Company to the British crown.

In an echo of their commentary on the First Afghan War, many British papers saw the Mutiny as the result of Russian intriguing.<sup>40</sup> The idea that the Indians themselves, as Britain’s racial and religious inferiors, could have threatened to overthrow the Raj was simply too unacceptable a thought. Afterwards, the Mutiny was chiefly remembered as a religious affair, triggered by Britain’s mishandling of local sectarian sentiment. Almost all histories of the Indian Mutiny, including Christopher Hibbert’s seminal work *The Great Mutiny*, focus on Britain’s issuing of bullets coated in, respectively, pig fat and cow fat, to Muslim and Hindu troops.<sup>41</sup> Since the cartridges had to be bitten into before they could be fired, the simple act of loading one’s musket became sacrilege against the laws of Islam and Hinduism. Even a century and a half after the Mutiny, a majority of

---

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Christopher Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny: India 1857*. New York: The Viking Press, 1978): 49.

<sup>39</sup> Byron Farwell, *Queen Victoria’s Little Wars*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972): 91.

<sup>40</sup> Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 152.

<sup>41</sup> Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny*, 55.

histories focus on this single incident, as well as the increased presence of Christian missionaries in India, as the cause of the revolt.<sup>42</sup>

In truth, the Mutiny had numerous causes that went well beyond the religious. Pay in the Bengal Army, never high, had not risen in fifty years, while the cost of living had more than doubled.<sup>43</sup> Promotion for Indian soldiers was slow, based on time served rather than performance or ability, while the slowing of British expansion in the region meant that there were fewer wars, and thus fewer opportunities for the soldiers to augment their pay with booty.<sup>44</sup> Since the Bengal Army was primarily a mercenary force, made up of men who served for pay and honour alike, these factors, coupled with the incompetence of many of the white officers under whom the sepoys were required to serve, created a bedrock of resentment upon which the Mutiny could be built.<sup>45</sup> The issuing of the sacrilegious bullets, while not irrelevant, was a final straw rather than the actual cause of the Mutiny, the last bit of evidence in the minds of many rebellious sepoys, that the Raj did not care about them in the least.

These unpleasant realities were essentially ignored by the British in the aftermath of the Mutiny. It was simply easier, and far less damaging to imperial prestige, to write off the Mutiny as the result of foreign interference and religious fanaticism. While the changes instituted in the aftermath of the Mutiny, most notably an influx of better quality officers, succeeded in solving many of the problems which had upset the sepoys in the first place, the British remained almost oblivious to this.<sup>46</sup> From hereon, British rule in India would be defined by a deep-seated distrust of Indian soldiers. The ratio of British

---

<sup>42</sup> Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny*, 55.

<sup>43</sup> Heather Streets, *Martial Races*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004): 26.

<sup>44</sup> Streets, *Martial Races*, 26.

<sup>45</sup> Streets, *Martial Races*, 27.

<sup>46</sup> Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 151.

soldiers to Indian soldiers was increased, and the Indians were never again allowed control over their own artillery.<sup>47</sup> Future commanders of the now unified Indian Army would make further changes, all aimed at preserving British racial superiority and prestige.

Among those who served in and survived the Mutiny was a young officer named Frederick Roberts. The winner of a Victoria Cross for his actions during the Mutiny, Roberts would go on to become the most famous soldier of his era, serving as a key commander in the Second Afghan War and eventually as Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army. Profoundly shaped by the experience of the Mutiny, the future Lord Roberts developed a martial race theory, in which only the Ghurkhas and Punjabi Sikhs could be trusted by the British administrators.<sup>48</sup> All the other races and religions of the subcontinent were to be looked at askance at best, actively distrusted at worst. This was especially true of Muslims in general, and the Pathan tribes of the Northwest Frontier in particular, whom Roberts saw as unfailingly fanatical and dangerous.<sup>49</sup> The Muslim religion, he believed, placed these peoples in inherent opposition to Christian virtues, and the British Empire as an institution.<sup>50</sup> Writing once of the Indian Army, Roberts encapsulated his own fears and those of the Raj, saying that “an army of Asiatics, such as we maintain in India, is a faithful servant, but a treacherous master. Powerfully influenced by social and religious prejudices with which we are imperfectly acquainted, it requires the most careful handling.”<sup>51</sup> He later added that above all “it must never be

---

<sup>47</sup> Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 151.

<sup>48</sup> Streets, *Martial Races*, 132.

<sup>49</sup> Streets, *Martial Races*, 133.

<sup>50</sup> Farwell, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars*, 147.

<sup>51</sup> Frederick Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India* volumes 1 & 2. (London: Richard Bentley, 1897), 671.

allowed to lose faith in the supremacy of the governing race.”<sup>52</sup> Constructing the Indians as religious zealots who could only be controlled through Britain’s superior racial prestige, Roberts wittingly or unwittingly summed up Britain’s nineteenth century Muslim policy.

\*

It was Roberts’ involvement in the Second Afghan War of 1878 to 1881 that placed him in a position to put his notions about martial races and imperial prestige into action. As the Duke of Wellington had predicted forty years previously, the aftershocks of the First Afghan War, coupled with continued British paranoia about Russian intentions, saw the Raj once again contemplating a march into Afghanistan. As the frontiers of Russian Turkestan advanced through the Emirate of Bukhara and the Khanate of Khiva, the Indian Viceroy, Lord Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton, became convinced, as had Lord Auckland before him, that the Russians had designs on India.<sup>53</sup> The Czar’s concurrent war against the Ottoman Sultan for control over Bulgaria made Lord Lytton’s fears seem more rational than they truly were, and when Sher Ali, Dost Mohammed’s son and successor as Emir of Afghanistan, permitted a Russian delegation to enter Kabul but refused to admit a British one, Lytton ordered the invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>54</sup> That Sher Ali had, in 1869, requested British aid in modernizing his army and had been turned down, was overlooked by Lytton who, driven by fears of Russia, was merely seeking an excuse to invade.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 671.

<sup>53</sup> Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 155.

<sup>54</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 140.

<sup>55</sup> Farwell, *Queen Victoria’s Little Wars*, 202.

The Second Afghan War was, in many ways, the First Afghan War all over again. Once again, Britain's Indian Army marched into Afghanistan not because of any provocation by the Afghans, but from fear of Russia. Once again, the British military easily bested the Afghan Army and dethroned the reigning Emir who in this case, conveniently died of illness a few months later.<sup>56</sup> Once again, the British installed a compliant puppet emir, this time in the form of Yakub Khan, Sher Ali's despised eldest son.<sup>57</sup> Once again, the British declared victory, with Lord Lytton boasting of having equalled the achievements of India's Mughal Empire.<sup>58</sup> Once again, British officials set up shop in Kabul and began issuing orders in the name of the Emir. Once again, the British attempted to cut costs by restricting the money paid to the tribes and to the professional army that Sher Ali had built.<sup>59</sup> When three Herati regiments were forced to go without pay they came to Kabul to complain.<sup>60</sup> The British officials refused to pay the Afghani soldiers and a riot broke out as the Herati troops joined forces with the Kabul mob and overran the British residency, killing Sir Louis Cavagnari, British resident in Kabul, in the process.<sup>61</sup>

Lord Roberts responded by occupying Kabul and hanging those he deemed guilty in the market square, deposing Yakub Khan, blowing up the Bala Hissar palace that had served as the traditional seat of Afghanistan's Emirs, and imposing direct British rule.<sup>62</sup> This blatant violation of Afghan sovereignty provoked the Ghilzai and Kohistani

---

<sup>56</sup> Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 188.

<sup>57</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 141.

<sup>58</sup> Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 189.

<sup>59</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 141.

<sup>60</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 141.

<sup>61</sup> Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 193.

<sup>62</sup> Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 192.

tribesmen who laid siege to Kabul with 50 000 men.<sup>63</sup> Roberts and his army survived the siege, which broke up in the spring of 1880.<sup>64</sup> In the meantime, Sher Ali's younger son, Ayyub Khan, arrived in Kandahar with 4500 professional infantry, 3200 professional cavalry, and 4000 tribal levies.<sup>65</sup> Encountering a 2800 man British detachment at Maiwand, Ayyub shattered it, driving the British back inside Kandahar and besieging them within.<sup>66</sup> As it had the first time, British dominion over Afghanistan was coming unglued.

Like the massacre in the Khyber Pass before it, the battle of Maiwand was viewed by the British as a national humiliation. Some insisted that Ayyub Khan must have had Russian assistance, as there was no other way that he and his Afghani force could have beaten the British in the field.<sup>67</sup> Roberts and his army abandoned Kabul and over twenty-three days made a forced march to Kandahar and relieved the city, forcing Ayyub to retreat to his power base in Herat.<sup>68</sup> The action made Roberts a national hero. A "Kabul to Kandahar" medal was struck in his honour. In 1892, when he was raised to the peerage, it was as Earl of Kandahar.<sup>69</sup> No amount of heroism, however, could turn a losing campaign into a winning one. In the spring of 1881, the British withdrew from Afghanistan, leaving the Emirate in the hands of Ayyub Khan's cousin and rival, Abdur Rahman.

Following the conclusion of the war, Roberts opined that the real problem had been that the British had made peace with the Afghans too early, before "we had instilled

---

<sup>63</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 142.

<sup>64</sup> Farwell, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars*, 213.

<sup>65</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 144.

<sup>66</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 144.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, (London: John Murray Publishers Ltd, 1990): 399.

<sup>68</sup> Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, 400.

<sup>69</sup> Farwell, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars*, 214.

that awe of us into the Afghan nation which would have been the only reliable guarantee for the safety of the mission.”<sup>70</sup> In Roberts’ mind the British had failed to fully demonstrate their military and racial superiority over the Afghanis and this, more than anything else, had led to the failure of the operation. He went on to say that:

“It is comparatively easy for a small body of well-trained soldiers, such as those of which the army in India is composed, to act on the offensive against Asiatics, however powerful they may be in point of numbers. There is something in the determined advance of a compact, disciplined body of troops which they can seldom resist. But a retirement is a different matter. They become full of confidence and valour the moment they see any signs of their opponents being unable to resist them, and if there is the smallest symptom of unsteadiness, wavering, or confusion, a disaster is certain to occur.”<sup>71</sup>

In this quotation Roberts perfectly captured, as he so often did, two key strains of British colonial thought regarding Muslims. The first was that no Islamic army, however professionally equipped or trained could hope to withstand the advance of European soldiers. The second was that any retreat, or sign of weakness, could be, and would be, devastating to Britain’s racial and imperial prestige. The only way that Britain could hope to maintain its rule over Islamic subjects was to continuously win victories over them and their coreligionists, constantly reinforcing the fact that the British were their betters. Roberts himself was dead by the time the British began their World War I operations against the Ottomans, but the ideas that he so articulately voiced would long outlive him. Among those who would echo Roberts’ sentiments were future Viceroy Lord George Curzon and Lord Charles Hardinge, as well as his successor as Britain’s most famous soldier, Lord Herbert Kitchener.

Like Roberts’ ideas, the Second Afghan War would have a lengthy afterlife. Skirmishes along the northwestern border between the Raj and the Afghan Emirate would

---

<sup>70</sup> Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 1045.

<sup>71</sup> Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 1210.

continue for decades and the supposed savagery and religious fervour of the Afghani tribes became the stuff of legend and Boys' Own Adventures. In 1895, 3000 Pathan tribesmen under a chieftain named Umra Khan would cross the border into north-western India and besiege a young officer named Charles Townshend at the fort of Chitral.<sup>72</sup> Unlike so many of the British Empire's other foes, the Afghanis refused to be beaten, remaining a persistent threat to the Raj and a constant drain on its resources. In a poem entitled "Arithmetic on the Frontier", Rudyard Kipling bemoaned the amount of money that Britain spent training its soldiers only for them to be shot by Afghanis armed with "ten rupee" *jezails*.<sup>73</sup> "No proposition Euclid wrote," he declared, "No formulae the text-books know, will turn the bullet from your coat, or ward the tulwar's downward blow. Strike hard who cares - shoot straight who can, the odds are on the cheaper man."<sup>74</sup> This cry of dismay from Britain's most celebrated imperial poet, more than anything else perhaps, shows the degree to which the "fanatical" Afghani tribesmen, real and fictitious, had entered the British imagination as an implacable adversary, in a way that their more stereotypically civilized counterparts in the Afghan Army had not.

\*

If the Second Afghan War belonged, in the minds of the British public, to Lord Roberts, then Britain's final Muslim war of the nineteenth century belonged to Herbert Horatio Kitchener, heir to Roberts' mantle of Britain's most beloved warlord. Kitchener had been a young major in intelligence when the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan rose up in revolt between 1881 and 1884, and had lost his personal hero, General Charles Gordon, amid

---

<sup>72</sup> Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, 485.

<sup>73</sup> Rudyard Kipling, "Arithmetic on the Frontier." Cited in Preston, *The Dark Defile*, 261.

<sup>74</sup> Kipling, "Arithmetic on the Frontier." Cited in Preston, *The Dark Defile*, 261.

the upheaval. A decade later, Kitchener was only too glad to return to the Sudan and gain, in subjugating the former Egyptian colony, a measure of revenge.

Egypt's status was unusual in the nineteenth century. Depending on who one asked, it was either subject to the Ottoman Sultanate or an independent empire in its own right. Both claims were diplomatic fictions. In truth, the Egyptian economy was controlled by a British trust, British officers trained the Egyptian army, and British administrators ran an increasingly large part of the government.<sup>75</sup> The Sudan, therefore, found itself in the unenviable position of being colonized by Egypt and Britain at the same time, with the British and their Egyptian protégés often declining to cooperate in maintaining any sort of set policy.<sup>76</sup> While Egypt had nominally banned slavery, its markets still did a brisk business in Sudanese slaves, even as British governors, like Charles Gordon, who served in the Sudan for several years, tried to eradicate slavery within the Sudan.<sup>77</sup> Since the British fought Sudanese slave traders but not Egyptian ones, the net result of these conflicting efforts was that the British succeeded in antagonizing both the black Africans of the Sudanese south, who did not wish to be enslaved by the Egyptians, and the Arab slave traders of the Sudanese north who saw the British as a threat to their profits.<sup>78</sup> By 1881, the Sudan was ripe for revolution.

Said revolution expressed itself, as the Afghani and Indian uprisings had, in religious terms. A Sudanese holy man named Muhammad Ahmad proclaimed himself to be the Mahdi, the successor to the prophet Muhammad that certain Islamic sects had long been waiting for. Rallying the disparate tribes of the Sudan to himself, the Mahdi

---

<sup>75</sup> Dominic Green, *Three Empires on the Nile*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007): 22.

<sup>76</sup> Green, *Three Empires on the Nile*, 27.

<sup>77</sup> Green, *Three Empires on the Nile*, 45.

<sup>78</sup> Green, *Three Empires on the Nile*, 67.

inflicted a series of crushing defeats on the Egyptians and their British backers, destroying an 8000 man Egyptian army under British officer William Hicks and penning General Gordon up behind the walls of the colonial capital of Khartoum.<sup>79</sup> Gordon was a popular figure in Britain, and pressure from the public and elements of the political establishment saw Prime Minister William Gladstone forced to dispatch a relief column to extricate Gordon from Khartoum.<sup>80</sup> The column was held up for a variety of reasons, including a series of fierce battles against the Mahdists who, while unable to defeat the British, succeeded in breaking an infantry square at the battle of Taimat, something that had never before been accomplished.<sup>81</sup> Before it could reach Khartoum, Mahdist forces stormed the city and killed Gordon.<sup>82</sup> Kitchener, who spoke fluent Arabic, and who had spent much of the previous months carrying messages between Gordon and the relief force, never forgot the death of his hero, nor the humiliation of the relief column's retreat from the Sudan.<sup>83</sup> The Mahdi himself died shortly after the fall of Khartoum, but the Sudanese state that he had created, known to its subjects as the Mahdiyya, lived on under his successor, Khalifa Abdullahi.<sup>84</sup>

For the next decade, the Mahdiyya was a favourite target of the British press and of imperialist politicians who painted it as a land of religious fanaticism, its army composed of so-called “dervishes” whose fervour prevented them from fearing death as normal men did.<sup>85</sup> This vision of the Mahdiyya has long survived in the popular consciousness, and is echoed everywhere from the film *Khartoum*, in which Laurence

---

<sup>79</sup> David Levering Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, (New York, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1987): 31.

<sup>80</sup> Green, *Three Empires on the Nile*, 142.

<sup>81</sup> Green, *Three Empires on the Nile*, 146.

<sup>82</sup> Green, *Three Empires on the Nile*, 146.

<sup>83</sup> Green, *Three Empires on the Nile*, 246.

<sup>84</sup> Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, 104.

<sup>85</sup> Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, 140.

Olivier, made-up in blackface, portrayed the Mahdi, to a recent popular history entitled *The First Jihad*, that tries to link the Mahdi to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. While the Mahdi and the Khalifa were religious leaders first and foremost, their followers were a mix of genuine zealots, independence-seeking tribal chiefs, and opportunistic slavers, all brought together under the banner of the Mahdiyya.<sup>86</sup> Not all of their followers were even Muslims. Some of the Mahdiyya's best soldiers were drawn from southern animist tribes who had aligned themselves with the Mahdi and the Khalifa in the search for independence from Egypt and Britain.<sup>87</sup> These nuances were lost in the British accounts, which aimed to excuse the collapse of the Egyptian Army, the failure of the relief column, and the death of Gordon as the result of a war against militant Islam.

Ten years went by before the British again found themselves in conflict with the Mahdiyya. In 1895, a French expedition set out for the ruined fortress of Fashoda, in an effort to lay claim to the source of the Nile.<sup>88</sup> The British military instructed its representatives in Egypt to prevent this at all costs. In 1896, Britain's Egyptian Army, generously reinforced with British units and commanded by now General Herbert Kitchener, entered the Sudan to do just that. Among the officers under his command were then Colonels Ian Hamilton and John Maxwell, both of whom would go on to play important roles in the Ottoman campaigns of WWI. By 1898, Kitchener had reached the Mahdist capital of Omdurman, where his troops would kill more than 10 000 of the Khalifa's followers in open battle.<sup>89</sup> After capturing the city, Kitchener detailed Gordon's nephew to blow up the Mahdi's tomb. Kitchener justified this action as being necessary

---

<sup>86</sup> Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, 143.

<sup>87</sup> Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, 143.

<sup>88</sup> Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, 154.

<sup>89</sup> MW Daly, *Empire on the Nile*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 2.

to the maintenance of British prestige, claiming that the tomb “was the centre of pilgrimage and fanatical feeling.”<sup>90</sup> Kitchener also exhumed the Mahdi’s corpse, reportedly with the intent of using his skull as a drinking glass.<sup>91</sup> Taken to task by his superiors, including Queen Victoria herself, for this apparently barbaric act, Kitchener again employed the need to combat fanaticism and maintain British prestige in his defence. “I was advised by Mahomedan officers,” Kitchener wrote, “that it would be better to have the body removed, as otherwise many of the more ignorant people of Kordofan would consider that the sanctity with which they surrounded the Mahdi prevented us from doing so.”<sup>92</sup> While Kitchener was instructed to reinter the Mahdi’s corpse, he was not punished. Implicit in this was the acknowledgement that while Kitchener had gone too far, his behaviour was based on understandable fears.

Kitchener was not the only officer to escape punishment for questionable actions after the battle. The night after Omdurman fell, John Maxwell and his soldiers went on a quiet killing spree, eliminating the Khalifa’s more devoted associates. Writing about it after the fact, Maxwell bragged “I have always considered a dead fanatic as the only one of his sort to extend any sympathy to—I am very sorry for them when dead! For this reason I quietly made away with a bunch of Emirs after Omdurman and I was very sorry for them after it was all over.”<sup>93</sup> Winston Churchill criticized Maxwell’s conduct in his book, *The River War*, but nothing was ever done to punish Maxwell, and he would eventually receive a knighthood and a commission as a general, serving as Egyptian

---

<sup>90</sup> “Cromer to Salisbury,” March 12, 1899, (Catalogue ref: PRO 30/57/14). Cited in Daly, *Empire on the Nile*, 5.

<sup>91</sup> Daly, *Empire on the Nile*, 6.

<sup>92</sup> “Cromer to Salisbury,” March 12, 1899, (Catalogue ref: PRO 30/57/14). Cited in Daly, *Empire on the Nile*, 6.

<sup>93</sup> “Maxwell to Wingate,” May 24, 1908, (Catalogue ref: SAD 282/5). ). Cited in Daly, *Empire on the Nile*, 4.

Commander-in-Chief from 1908 onward.<sup>94</sup> That Maxwell's justifications for his actions were wholeheartedly accepted further demonstrates the degree to which the British believed they were fighting religious militants, and the lengths to which it was deemed acceptable to go in doing so.

Kipling, writing after the fact, penned a poem entitled "Fuzzy-Wuzzy," in which he paid tribute to the ferocity of the Sudanese dervishes. "ere's ~to~ you, Fuzzy-Wuzzy," he declared, "an' the missis and the kid; Our orders was to break you, an' of course we went an' did. We sloshed you with Martinis, an' it wasn't 'ardly fair; But for all the odds agin' you, Fuzzy-Wuz, you broke the square."<sup>95</sup> For all that it drips with racial condescension the poem is, by the standards of its day, a fair one, acknowledging the bravery of the Sudanese in the face of a vastly technologically superior enemy, and their previously unthinkable feat of cracking an infantry square. Stirred in with that respect, however, is an element of fear. Like Kitchener and Maxwell, Kipling and the British public that he wrote for were frightened of the dervishes, and the implacable sectarian violence they supposedly represented. If the Indian Mutiny and the Afghan Wars were but a distant memory when World War I broke out, the Mahdist War was not, and Kitchener, Maxwell, and their political and military colleagues alike would all remember, with a tinge of fright, the "Fuzzy-Wuzzies" whose faith in Allah had in Kipling's words, "crumpled up the square."

\*

By the end of the nineteenth century, the British were no strangers to embarrassment, and even outright defeat, at the hands of Islamic peoples. They had twice

---

<sup>94</sup> Daly, *Empire on the Nile*, 4.

<sup>95</sup> Rudyard Kipling, "Fuzzy Wuzzy," in *Departmental Ditties, Barrack Room Ballads and Other Verses*, (New York: United States Book Company, 1890): 180.

been driven from Afghanistan, nearly lost India to their own mutinous sepoys, and had their expansion into the Sudan checked for a decade. The scars of defeat and humiliation went deep into the national psyche, as well as the personal psychologies of men like Lord Roberts, Lord Kitchener, and Sir John Maxwell, all of whom would be responsible, in one form or another, for shaping Britain's reaction to the next Islamic challenge. Roberts, long since retired, died in November of 1914, but the Indian Army that he had restructured on the basis of his "martial race" ideas was still there, and his notions about the importance of prestige lingered in London and the Raj. Kitchener, as Secretary of State for War, and Maxwell, as Commander-in-Chief of Egypt, would play direct roles in the conception and execution of Britain's campaign against the Ottoman Sultanate. Both would be influenced, as would their political and military colleagues, by their experiences in the Sudan and the principle notions about fighting Muslims that had emerged over the past century.

First of these concepts was that a professional Muslim army was nothing to fear, so long as it was not on your side. Britain's seemingly easy victories over the Afghan Army, the rebellion of their own Bengal Army, and the disintegration of the Egyptian Army in the face of the Mahdi, had all combined to convince the British that Muslims were incapable of acting as a truly professional fighting force. Influenced by religion and lacking the qualities of a true martial race, Muslim troops could not be relied upon to fight a modern war. Throughout the war against the Ottomans, the British would eagerly await the collapse of the Sultanate's army while carefully watching their own Indian Muslim troops for signs of treachery.

The second concept was that while Muslims might be incapable of forming a modern army, religiously motivated uprisings among tribal peoples were a thing to be rightly feared. Unable or unwilling to examine the mistakes that the Empire had made in each separate case, the British preferred to believe that all the Islamic rebellions that they had faced in Afghanistan, India, and the Sudan were motivated by a single overriding factor, namely the Islamic faith and the supposed fanaticism that it engendered among its adherents. Ghilzai and Kohistani chieftains, badly paid Indian sepoy, and Mahdist revolutionaries were all tarred with the brush of Islamism and caricatured as madmen, willing to die in their thousands so long as they took some of the infidel with them. Even as they dismissed the Ottoman Army, the British would keep a wary eye on the Muslim populations of Egypt, the Sudan, and India, fearing that a resurgence of Islamic fervour might lead to rebellion throughout the Empire.

Third and perhaps most important, the British firmly believed that the only way to keep their hold over Egypt, the Sudan, India, and all their other Muslim territories was through the careful maintenance of imperial and racial prestige. The subject peoples of the Empire, it was argued, could only be kept in line through the repeated demonstration of Britain's greater military might. With each victory that the British won over Islamic adversaries, the argument went, the Empire strengthened its grip on those Muslims already under its rule by showing them that they had no hope of throwing off the British yoke.<sup>96</sup> Conversely, defeat at the hands of a Muslim enemy, it was thought, had the potential to upset the racial order of the Empire and provoke the very religious revolts that the British sought to avoid.<sup>97</sup> Additionally, such defeats might invite other Islamic

---

<sup>96</sup> Gardner, "British Prestige and the Mesopotamia Campaign," 269.

<sup>97</sup> Gardner, "British Prestige and the Mesopotamia Campaign," 269.

nations such as Persia, or the always turbulent Afghans, to join the war on the side of Britain's enemies. In order to avoid this, the British had to remain victorious in the field at all times, or at the very least, swiftly avenge any battlefield defeats before their prestige suffered irrevocable damage.

One might have expected at least some of these ideas to be challenged by the Orientalists, the portion of Britain's academic community devoted to Islamic studies. Unfortunately, as Edward Said first pointed out in his influential work, *Orientalism*, the British, and indeed, the European intellectuals of the era were far more interested in exoticizing Islamic peoples and in justifying the colonial conquest of the Islamic world than they were in achieving a genuine understanding of Islam.<sup>98</sup> A number of Britain's leading experts on the Muslim world were colonial officials like Evelyn Baring, Earl of Cromer, former Consul-General in Egypt, and Lord George Curzon, one-time Indian Viceroy, men who had little interest in disputing the military's stereotypes about Islam, or who, in many cases, subscribed to those same patterns of thinking.<sup>99</sup> According to these thinkers, Muslim civilization was inherently inferior to that of the West, trapping the religion's devotees in a backwards "shame culture" in which fatalism, fanaticism, and stagnation were the defining characteristics of life.<sup>100</sup> Muslims, it was believed, regardless of ethnicity or nationality, lived in a medieval hierarchy in which strength was respected above all else, a notion that came to underpin and reinforce rather than contending with the Army's prestige doctrine.<sup>101</sup> In reading key Orientalist works like Lord Cromer's *Modern Egypt* or French lecturer Ernest Renan's "Islam and Science" one

---

<sup>98</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Random House, 1978): 61-65.

<sup>99</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 237.

<sup>100</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 81.

<sup>101</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 81.

is struck by how indistinguishable these supposedly scholarly works are from Lord Roberts' *Forty-One Years in India*.<sup>102</sup> In some respects Roberts, himself something of an amateur Orientalist, actually held far more nuanced views of Islam and Muslims than Cromer or Renan, since he at least acknowledged that in time the supposedly negative attributes of Islamic culture might be overcome, something that Lord Cromer especially would have sneered at.<sup>103</sup> In general, however, the military and intellectual elite were in absolute agreement with one another on the topic of how to handle Muslims: they must be kept in perpetual awe of their British overlords, lest a religious revival in the style of the Mahdiyya engender revolt.

That most of the Islamic world cared little about a war between Britain and the Ottoman Sultanate was ignored in this equation, which saw all Muslims as a religious and cultural monolith. Also ignored were the many sectarian divides within Islam. Shi'a Persia, after all, was not realistically likely to enter World War I on the side of their traditional enemies, the Sunni Ottomans. To Britain's war planners, however, the fear of an Empire-wide Islamic revolution, brought about by battlefield losses and the tarnishing of imperial prestige, was all too real. This was the legacy of Akbar Khan and the Ghilzais in the Khyber Pass, of the Indian sepoy and the Great Mutiny, of Ayyub Khan and the battle of Maiwand, and of Mahdi Muhammad Ahmad and the fall of Khartoum, the legacy of Muslim leaders and warriors who had resisted British encroachment and inflicted shocking defeats upon the world's greatest power. Rather than coping with the actual causes of these reversals, the institutions of the British Empire and army had transformed their enemies into brutes and zealots, capable of threatening a modern

---

<sup>102</sup> Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 78-83, 93-95.

<sup>103</sup> Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 1042-1043.

military with only their faith. In a poem aimed at young British soldiers, Rudyard Kipling dispensed the following advice: “When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains, and the women come out to cut up what remains, jest roll to your rifle and blow out your brains, an' go to your Gawd like a soldier.”<sup>104</sup> It was a sentiment that, after decades of being warned of Islamic savagery, many soldiers would have agreed with. Scarred by the past and having learned all the wrong lessons from it, the men at the helm of the British Empire carried their ghosts with them into the next century and the next war.

---

<sup>104</sup> Rudyard Kipling, “The Young British Soldier.” Cited in Preston, *The Dark Defile*, 262.

## Chapter 2: British Expectations, Ottoman Realities

From the start of the First World War it was more or less accepted in Britain that the Ottoman Sultanate would eventually declare its support for Germany and Austria-Hungary. While relations between London and Istanbul had once been good, they had soured in the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, and the British occupation of Ottoman Egypt in 1882. Britain's subsequent alliance with Russia, the Sultanate's traditional and most implacable adversary, had done nothing to ease tensions between the two nations. The Ottomans had received a considerable influx of German money and infrastructural and military aid following the ascension of Kaiser Wilhelm II. With Ottoman foreign policy dominated, at least from the British perspective, by anti-Russian sentiment, few in London expected that the Ottomans could be kept from throwing in with the Germans.

Following a coup in 1913, the Ottoman Sultan, Mehmed V, and his Grand Vizier, Said Halim Pasha, had held little real authority. Power had devolved to a ruling triumvirate composed of the "Three Pashas": Ahmed Cemal Pasha, Minister of the Marine, Mehmed Talaat Pasha, Minister of the Interior, and Ismail Enver Pasha, Minister of War. While Cemal held some Anglophile and Francophile sympathies, Talaat and Enver were known as pro-German reformers, and Russophobes as well.<sup>105</sup> This was particularly true of Enver, who was generally regarded as the dominant figure in the triumvirate and the loudest voice in favour of closer ties to Germany. British perceptions of Enver and his triumvirate colleagues were far from positive, and the belief in the

---

<sup>105</sup> Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East*, (New York: Basic Books, 2015): 38

Foreign Secretariat that none of them could be trusted only furthered British pessimism about keeping the Ottomans out of the war.\*

British efforts to keep the Ottomans from joining Germany and Austria-Hungary were hardly first rate, however. From the start the British were not prepared to offer the Ottomans anything in the way of territorial claims. The most they were prepared to offer was respect for the Sultanate's current territorial integrity, an offer that was suspect at best given Britain's alliance with Russia and Serbia, both major proponents of disassembling the so-called "Sick Man of Europe."<sup>106</sup> When Cemal Pasha, the most pro-Entente of the triumvirs visited Paris to raise the subject of an alliance he was rebuffed by the French who did not believe that Russia or Britain would sanction it.<sup>107</sup> For the Entente, Russian, and subsequently British and French, colonial claims on Ottoman territory trumped any potential benefits that might come from allying with the ailing Muslim state. When the war officially began in August, Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, confiscated a pair of dreadnoughts that British shipyards had been constructing for Cemal's Ottoman Navy, renaming them and adding them to the British fleet. When the subject of compensating the Ottomans, who had obtained much of the money for the ships from public fundraising, was brought up, Churchill openly mocked the idea. "They may join the Germans," he said, "in which case we shall save our money."<sup>108</sup> That Ottoman belligerence on the part of Germany might cost Britain far more than recompensing them for the dreadnoughts, seems to have been lost on Churchill. When Cemal responded to the seizure of the ships by cancelling Vickers-

---

\* Given Enver, Cemal, and Talaat's complicity in the Armenian genocide and the ethnic cleansing of Greek and Assyrian minorities, British distrust of their morals and characters was, for once, justified.

<sup>106</sup> Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, 39

<sup>107</sup> Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, 39.

<sup>108</sup> Cited in Sean McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2015): 114.

Armstrong's contract to reconstruct the Istanbul dockyards, the British ambassador complained to Secretary of Foreign Affairs Sir Edward Grey, accusing Cemal of "acting like a spoiled child."<sup>109</sup> Apparently, the ambassador had expected Cemal to maintain the dock contract despite Britain's refusal to deliver the ships that would have been berthed there.

This casual attitude towards the subject of Ottoman belligerency was rooted in British notions about the minimal threat posed by a Muslim military. While the British cabinet had concerns about the effect that an Ottoman declaration of war might have on Egypt and India, as well as France and Russia's Islamic possessions, their fear of the Ottoman military itself was decidedly limited. When the *Goeben*, a German battlecruiser of the *Moltke* class sought refuge from her British pursuers in an Ottoman port, the British were angered, but not particularly alarmed. When Enver and Cemal announced that the Sultanate had purchased the *Goeben*, and her companion, the light cruiser *Breslau* to help replace the loss of the British dreadnoughts, the reaction in London was one of wry amusement. Prime Minister HH Asquith, on being told of the news, joked "As we shall insist that the *Goeben* shall be manned by a Turkish instead of a German crew it does not much matter, as the Turkish sailors cannot navigate her except onto rocks or mines."<sup>110</sup> The contempt for the Ottoman military in Asquith's statement is readily apparent, the echoes of Lord Roberts' opinion of "Asiatic armies" only slightly less so.

---

<sup>109</sup> Cited in McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame*, 114.

<sup>110</sup> HH Asquith, *Memories and Reflections 1852-1927*, (London: Cassel & Co, 1928): volume 2, 26. Cited in Paul K. Davis, *Ends and Means: The British Mesopotamian Campaign and Commission*, (London: Associated University Press, 1994), 21.

The assumption would appear to have been that since the *Goeben* was a modern ship, the backwards Muslims of the Ottoman Sultanate could not possibly hope to operate it.\*

Asquith and Churchill were far from alone in their contempt for Ottoman military prowess. In a memorandum circulated to the Cabinet, Evelyn Baring, Lord Cromer, former governor of Egypt, outlined what actions Britain should take in the event of a war with the Ottomans.<sup>111</sup> Widely regarded as one of Britain's greatest living experts on the Orient, Cromer, who did not actually speak Arabic and had only a limited command of Ottoman Turkish, had published his two volume *Modern Egypt* upon his return to Britain in 1908.<sup>112</sup> In it, Lord Cromer offered up his analysis of the last three decades of Egyptian history, as well as the efficacy of the British occupation.<sup>113</sup> He also endeavoured, in the best traditions of intellectual Orientalism, to draw clear lines of delineation between the Western and Oriental mind.<sup>114</sup> Westerners, Cromer had written, were natural logicians, innately sceptical of any unproven theories. Orientals, conversely, were "eminently unsceptical [sic]" and suffered from deficiencies in their logical faculties, as well as a fatalistic mindset that caused them to accept any authority once it had been firmly imposed upon them.<sup>115</sup> A thoroughly condescending document if ever there was one, Cromer's work, which was widely read and accepted in Britain, criticized the Egyptians for everything from their manner of walking down the street to their

---

\* In the end, the *Goeben*, rechristened the *Yavuz Sultan Selim*, remained under the command of German Vice-Admiral Wilhelm Souchon, who traded in his officer's cap for a fez and was inducted into the Ottoman navy.

<sup>111</sup> Evelyn Baring, "Memorandum by Lord Cromer Respecting the Steps to be Taken in Event of War with Turkey," October 27, 1914. (Catalogue ref: 37/121/124): 1-8.

<sup>112</sup> Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 93.

<sup>113</sup> Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 93.

<sup>114</sup> Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 93.

<sup>115</sup> Evelyn Baring, *Modern Egypt* volumes 1 and 2. (New York: MacMillan, 1908). Cited in Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 93.

supposedly fanatical adherence to Islam.<sup>116</sup> Of Islam itself, Cromer was especially contemptuous, regarding it as an outdated political and religious ideology that served as an inherent barrier to progress. “Islam cannot be reformed,” Cromer insisted, “that is to say, reformed Islam is Islam no longer; it is something else.”<sup>117</sup> The Egyptians, Cromer firmly believed, required the tutelage of the British, who as a people were the one best suited to saving the Muslims of the Orient from themselves.<sup>118</sup> It should especially be stressed perhaps, that in Cromer’s view, the Egyptians were not in and of themselves a people, but a collection of castoffs of various races, united only by geography and their religion.<sup>119</sup> This then, was the outlook of the man to whom Asquith’s Cabinet turned for advice on how to handle Egypt, and by extension their other Islamic colonies, in the event of a war with the Ottomans.

Ostensibly a military memorandum, Lord Cromer’s paper contained less than a page on actual military operations, in which he recommended that the British ensure that the *Goeben* did not make it into the Indian Ocean.<sup>120</sup> The other seven pages of the memorandum were concerned in their entirety with the potential impact of Ottoman entry into the war on Egypt and India. Warning that Islamic faithfulness to the Ottoman Sultan in his role as Caliph was ingrained at a fundamental level, Cromer claimed that the loyalties of all Egyptian and Indian Muslims had to be considered suspect.<sup>121</sup> Questioning the allegiance of Abbas II, Britain’s puppet Khedive of Egypt, Cromer recommended deposing him and imposing direct British rule over Egypt, provided that such a move

---

<sup>116</sup> Baring, *Modern Egypt*. Cited in Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 94.

<sup>117</sup> Baring, *Modern Egypt*. Cited in Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 94.

<sup>118</sup> Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 94.

<sup>119</sup> Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 94-95.

<sup>120</sup> Baring, “Memorandum by Lord Cromer,” 6.

<sup>121</sup> Baring, “Memorandum by Lord Cromer,” 2.

would not provoke a Muslim uprising.<sup>122</sup> He also recommended having the Aga Khan, India's highest ranking Muslim cleric, issue a statement disavowing Muslim fealty to the Caliphate and suggested that the British might try to exploit anti-Turkish sentiment in Arabia to trigger an Arab revolt against Ottoman rule.<sup>123</sup> Throughout the report, Cromer's tone remained decidedly pessimistic. Opining that the Islamic mind was profoundly different from that of a European, Cromer did not believe that there was much the British could do to head off the possibility of Islamic revolts in Egypt or India and was concerned that Britain might have to disarm units of the Egyptian Army in order to prevent them from going over to the Ottomans.<sup>124</sup> Steeped in Orientalist intellectualism, and deeply influenced by his role in Britain's military and political occupation of Egypt, Lord Cromer made it clear that in his "expert" opinion, an Islamic revolution in Egypt was simply a matter of time.

Lord Cromer's opinion was shared by many throughout the British Empire, including Sir Francis Reginald Wingate, Governor-General of the Sudan. A veteran of both the failed expedition to rescue Gordon, and Kitchener's conquest of Omdurman, Wingate had written a book on the rise of the Mahdiyya and was still haunted by the memory of Mahdist zealotry.<sup>125</sup> Like Lords Roberts and Cromer, Wingate had pretensions of intellectualism and enjoyed pontificating on the unique and decided non-Western nature of Oriental peoples, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. In his book, *Mahdiism and the Egyptian Sudan*, Wingate offered a brief history of "Eastern religious

---

<sup>122</sup> Baring, "Memorandum by Lord Cromer," 5.

<sup>123</sup> Baring, "Memorandum by Lord Cromer," 2-3.

<sup>124</sup> Baring, "Memorandum by Lord Cromer," 7.

<sup>125</sup> Francis Reginald Wingate, *Mahdiism and the Egyptian Sudan: Being an Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahdiism and of Subsequent Events in the Sudan to the Present Time*, (London: MacMillan, 1891).

sects in general,” in which he sought to trace the origins of the concept of a Mahdi, and drew links between the Mahdists of the Sudan and the Senussi Brotherhood of Egypt.<sup>126</sup> He subdivided the Sudan by race and argued, as Cromer had for Egypt, that it was religious fervour that held these disparate ethnicities together; he also contended that it was religious differences between the Khalifa and the “heathens” of the South Sudan that would eventually aid the British in toppling him.<sup>\*127</sup> While Wingate, who actually spoke Arabic, understood many of the nonreligious grievances that had first triggered the Mahdist War, he was inclined to blame all of the inequities of Anglo-Egyptian rule on the Egyptians, whom he regarded as not only racially inferior, but unable to run a proper administration without the aid of British soldiers like Gordon.<sup>128</sup> Including translated sections of some of the Mahdi’s letters in his book, Wingate aimed to demonstrate that Mahdism and theocratic government in general could only work in the Orient as “its success mainly depends on the credulity of the masses, which in the East is very considerable.”<sup>129</sup> Again, like Lords Roberts and Cromer, Wingate believed that religious feeling trumped all else when it came to analyzing and anticipating Muslim actions and as was typical of British military men, political thinkers, and writers of the era, expressed his anxieties in racialized and Orientalist terms as the countdown to WWI began. Writing to Lord Cromer in 1914, Wingate shared his worries about the allegiances of his Egyptian officers, saying that “one must remember that many of them have Turkish blood in their veins and are connected with Turkish families. The majority of the younger officers who

---

<sup>126</sup> Wingate, *Mahdiism and the Egyptian Sudan*, 2-7.

\* Wingate’s book was published in 1891, before Kitchener’s re-conquest of the Sudan.

<sup>127</sup> Wingate, *Mahdiism and the Egyptian Sudan*, 10.

<sup>128</sup> Wingate, *Mahdiism and the Egyptian Sudan*, 12.

<sup>129</sup> Wingate, *Mahdiism and the Egyptian Sudan*, 36.

come from the Cairo schools, which are the home of Nationalist propaganda and anti-English, and, in some cases, pro Turkish ideas, were, I knew, the dangerous element.”<sup>130</sup>

When the Ottomans finally entered the war in November of 1914, the British cabinet adopted almost all of Lord Cromer’s proposals. Abbas II, the pro-Ottoman Khedive of Egypt was deposed and replaced by his pro-British uncle Hussein Kamel. Egypt was declared an independent Sultanate, owing no fealty to the Ottomans, and Hussein Kamel became Sultan of Egypt. Viceroy Lord Charles Hardinge of India persuaded the Aga Khan to issue a statement denouncing the Ottomans as unfit to hold the Caliphate, and reaffirming Indian Muslim loyalty to Britain. The Aga Khan was also sent on a tour of Egypt to assess local Muslim sentiment towards the Empire.<sup>131</sup> The subject of separating the Arabs from the Ottomans would also be discussed repeatedly, although no definitive steps would be taken towards that goal until mid-1916, when Sharif Hussein bin Ali of Mecca inaugurated the Great Arab Revolt. In an effort to further cement Muslim loyalties, the British announced that the Islamic holy places currently under Ottoman control would be respected.<sup>132</sup> Sir John Maxwell, Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Army, *de facto* ruler of Egypt, and veteran of the Mahdist War, went a step farther, pledging that no Egyptian soldier would be asked to fight against the Ottomans. “Recognizing the respect and veneration with which the Sultan is regarded by the Mahomedans of Egypt,” Maxwell pronounced, “[Great Britain] takes upon herself the sole burden of the present war without calling upon the Egyptian people for aid

---

<sup>130</sup> Daly, *Empire on the Nile*, 154.

<sup>131</sup> “Note by the Aga Khan and M.A. Ali Baig on the Situation in Egypt.” January 12, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 37/123/25)

<sup>132</sup> Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, 69.

therein.”<sup>133</sup> Sir Reginald Wingate, as Maxwell’s subordinate and Governor-General of the Sudan outdid even his boss, denouncing Enver, Talaat, Cemal and the rest of their compatriots as antithetical to Islam. In a speech to a body of Sudanese clerics on November 8, 1914, Wingate remarked that “Not content with the overthrow of the Sultan Abdul Hamid...unrestrained by the loss, through their mismanagement and maladministration, of the European and other former provinces of their Empire, these men—this syndicate of Jews, financiers and low-born intriguers—like broken gamblers...have gone to war with the one Power who has ever been a true and sympathetic friend to the Moslems and to Islam.”<sup>134</sup> These steps highlight just how concerned the British were about the possibility of an Islamic insurrection against the Raj and the Egyptian protectorate, and the degree to which they construed the Ottomans as a political, colonial and religious menace, rather than a military one.

\*

Before proceeding further, it is worth pondering the extent to which British perceptions of the Ottoman danger were correct and the extent to which they were mere fantasy. Was there a real chance of the Ottomans instigating a religious revolution in Egypt or the Indian Raj? Perhaps more importantly, just how negligible was Ottoman military might?

To answer the first question one has to understand that British ideas about the power of the Caliphal title were, for the most part, inflated. The Ottomans had obtained the title in 1517, when Sultan Selim I “the Grim” conquered the Mamluk Sultanate of

---

<sup>133</sup> Cited in Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, 69.

<sup>134</sup> “His excellency the governor-general’s speech to the ulema,” encl. in PS to Symes, March 20, 1919 (Catalogue ref: INTEL 1/8/41). Cited in Daly, *Empire on the Nile*, 163.

Egypt, which had previously claimed the position.<sup>135</sup> The Mamluk claim had in and of itself been somewhat dubious; after defeating the Mongols, who had murdered the last undisputed claimant to the Abbasid Caliphate in 1258, the Mamluks had set up an Abbasid pretender in Cairo under their control.<sup>136</sup> Said pretender and his descendents were not universally recognized outside of Mamluk territory, and when the Ottomans annexed Egypt and relocated the Caliphate to Istanbul they were hardly taking possession of an untarnished title.<sup>137</sup>

Even before the fall of the Abbasids, the Caliphs had held little real power, kept under virtual house arrest by a succession of Turkic warlord dynasties who had ruled their territories in the Caliphs' names. The various Shi'a sects had never recognized the Sunni Abbasid right to the Caliphate, and had once set up their own Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt and North Africa, while in Spain and Morocco the Umayyad family, from whom the Abbasids had seized the position of Caliph in the first place, and the Almohad religious sect set up rival Sunni Caliphates.<sup>138</sup> Throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries the Shi'a Safavid Shahs of Persia had challenged the Ottomans' status as Islam's leading power, as had their Qajar successors.<sup>139</sup> During the Mahdist War, Mahdi Muhammad Ahmad and his successor, Khalifa Abdullahi, had accused Egypt's nominal Ottoman rulers of being heretics and had dispatched a letter to Sultan Abdul-Hamid II demanding that he return to the true faith.<sup>140</sup> During its ten years of existence, the Mahdiyya had been, in effect, a rival Caliphate, even if the title was not

---

<sup>135</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2,000 Years*, (New York: Scribner, 1995): 114.

<sup>136</sup> Lewis, *The Middle East*, 105.

<sup>137</sup> Lewis, *The Middle East*, 105.

<sup>138</sup> Lewis, *The Middle East*, 79, 83, 87.

<sup>139</sup> Lewis, *The Middle East*, 113-114, 118-119, 281.

<sup>140</sup> Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda*, 30.

used.\* For the British to assume that all Muslims, or even all Sunni Muslims, accepted Sultan Mehmed V's status as Caliph was to not only ignore most of Islamic history, but the career of one of the very men who had engendered in them their fear of Muslim revolt.

British concerns therefore came less from an understanding of Islamic history than they did from modern thinking about the Islamic mind. Borrowing from Maxime Rodinson, Zachary Lockman describes the British, and indeed, the general European attitude towards Muslims as stemming from a belief in the existence of a *homo islamicus* or “Islamic man” who was fundamentally different in his thinking from Western man.<sup>141</sup> This *homo islamicus* possessed a fixed mindset that could be deduced not through conversation with actual Muslims, but through the reading of a select few key texts from the medieval period that were thought to embody the underlying principles of Islamic civilization.<sup>142</sup> Constrained by this kind of thinking, it is perhaps unsurprising that British Orientalists often failed to comprehend the vast divisions that existed within the Muslim world or that, when confronted by the evidence of those divisions, twisted the facts to fit their preconceptions. Sir Reginald Wingate, for instance, acknowledged the existence of numerous historical Caliphates in *Mahdiism and the Egyptian Sudan*, but claimed that this only showed how susceptible the Eastern mind was to the call to form a theocratic government.<sup>143</sup> For Wingate, the very fractured nature of Islam and the questionable

---

\* It should be noted that Abdullahi's title of “Khalifa” stems from the same Arabic root as the more common “Caliph”. Both mean “successor”—just as the caliphs were the successors of Muhammad, Abdullahi was the successor to the Mahdi.

<sup>141</sup> Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 74.

<sup>142</sup> Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 77.

<sup>143</sup> Wingate, *Mahdiism and the Egyptian Sudan*, 36-37.

legitimacy of the Ottoman claim to hold the Abbasid Caliphate became proof of the danger it posed to Britain.

None of the above is to suggest that there were not Muslims who did take the Sultan's Caliphal status seriously, or that the Ottomans, for that matter, did not try to exploit that fact. During his reforms Mehmed V's predecessor, Abdul-Hamid II, had pushed pan-Islamism as part of a new political creed meant to paper over national differences and bind the disparate peoples of the Sultanate more closely to the person of the Sultan.<sup>144</sup> The coups and countercoups of 1908 and 1909 that brought the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), better known in the West as "the Young Turks," to power had seen pan-Islamism largely abandoned in favour of both pan-Ottoman sentiments among some members of the new ruling class and pan-Turkic nationalism among others, but the concept remained.<sup>145</sup> Kaiser Wilhelm II and his advisors, influenced by the thinking of their own Orientalist academics, had cultivated the Ottomans as an ally with the intent of exploiting pan-Islamic sentiment in British, Russian, and French occupied territory. Like their British foes, the Germans believed that the Ottomans could be of the greatest use as a religious and political threat to the stability of the British colonies.<sup>146</sup>

In this objective the Germans found a willing ally in Enver Pasha who, in his capacity as Minister of War, was prepared to try anything that would weaken the Entente. A veteran of the 1911 Italo-Ottoman War for rule over Libya, Enver had had a great deal of success in that conflict in organizing Ottoman regulars and Bedouin raiders into guerrilla bands under the auspices of the Senussi Brotherhood, a militant religious order

---

<sup>144</sup> McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame*, 56.

<sup>145</sup> McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame*, 56.

<sup>146</sup> Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, 47.

with influence throughout Libya.<sup>147</sup> In 1913, Enver created the *Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa*, or Special Organization, a special operations branch of the Ottoman military that aimed to help the Ottomans replicate the guerrilla success in Libya in other parts of the Islamic world.<sup>148</sup> Over the course of WWI agents were deployed to Libya, Afghanistan, Russian Turkestan, the Caucasus, Palestine, Mesopotamia, the Sudan and even the Balkans and Persia, with the intent of raising guerrilla fighters against the occupying governments.<sup>149</sup>

In the end, the Special Organization's only real military success was in Libya. Bands of Bedouin tribesmen and Senussi Brethren would raid the Western Desert of Egypt repeatedly in 1915 and 1916, creating a panic all out of proportion to the size of the actual raids, and badly worrying Sir John Maxwell, who was terrified that the raids would lead to an uprising by Egypt's Muslims.<sup>150</sup> The success of these operations, however, was not easily duplicated. In Libya, the Ottomans could take advantage of a pre-existing network of religious rebels who they themselves had created and armed during their last year of ruling the province.<sup>151</sup> Even after the conclusion of the war and the secession of Libya to Italy, Enver and the Special Organization had continued to funnel weapons and funds to the Senussi and their Bedouin allies, who had kept up the fight against the Italians following the Ottoman surrender.<sup>152</sup> Convincing the Senussi to take up arms against the British as well as the Italians was comparatively simple, as was sending them supplies and Arab-speaking officers to train their warriors.<sup>153</sup> On the

---

<sup>147</sup> EE Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949): 110.

<sup>148</sup> Meysat Uyar & Edward J. Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans: From Osman to Atatürk*, (Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2009): 250.

<sup>149</sup> Uyar & Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans*, 250.

<sup>150</sup> Uyar & Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans*, 251.

<sup>151</sup> Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, 125.

<sup>152</sup> Uyar & Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans*, 251.

<sup>153</sup> Stuart Hadaway. *Pyramids and Fleshpots: The Egyptian, Senussi, and Eastern Mediterranean Campaigns, 1914-16*, (Briscombe Port Stroud: Spellmount, 2014): 99-100.

psychological front, the Ottomans also benefited from the presence of Maxwell, whose crushing paranoia, stemming, perhaps from his war criminal past in the Sudan, made it easy for the Ottoman provocateurs and their Libyan allies to tie up British resources. Maxwell's nightmares of a second Mahdist War would, in fact, assist the Ottoman war effort on several occasions, as will be demonstrated later.

None of these advantages were present in the other places to which Enver sent his Special Organization, and the results were paltry. In Mesopotamia, Suleiman Askeri Bey managed to gather 4000 Arab tribesmen to support his army, but their loyalty, as we will see, proved fickle.<sup>154</sup> In Afghanistan, the Emir entertained Ottoman and German agents, causing the British no end of worry, but wisely chose to keep his impoverished nation out of the war.<sup>155</sup> In the Sudan, the Ottomans established contact with Sultan Ali Dinar of Darfur, but were unable to provoke him into joining the war before the British annexed Darfur and deposed him.<sup>156</sup> In Persia, Ottoman operatives seemed to meet with early successes, so much so that Enver would eventually order an army of 25 000 under Ali Ihsan Pasha to invade Persia.<sup>157</sup> While Ihsan Pasha's army would advance one hundred fifty miles into Persian territory, there was no local rebellion, which given the longstanding enmity and religious differences between the Ottoman and Persian states, surprised no one save the British, the Germans, and the overambitious Enver.<sup>158</sup> Writing after the war, German General Otto Liman von Sanders, who spent five years with the Ottoman army, dismissed the Persian operations as not only impractical, but as a

---

<sup>154</sup> Uyar & Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans*, 255-256.

<sup>155</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 178.

<sup>156</sup> Daly, *Empire on the Nile*, 176.

<sup>157</sup> Otto Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, (East Sussex: The Naval & Military Press, Ltd, 1927): 134.

<sup>158</sup> Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, 134.

complete waste of time and effort.<sup>159</sup> The Ottomans could not, he wrote, have made the Persians enter the war, and even if they had, the Persians had no functioning army with which to threaten Britain or Russia.<sup>160</sup>

The possibility of the Ottomans spurring a grand religious revolt against the Triple Entente was always, in layman's terms, a pipe dream. The Caliphal title simply did not matter to enough people across the Islamic world, and even in those places where it did matter, neither the Ottomans, nor their German allies, nor their local agents, had enough resources to transform sympathy into revolution. Outside of the exceptional case of Libya and the Senussi, the Ottomans were unable to do anything besides worry the British and their Russian and French partners. Said Liman von Sanders, "In the borderlands of the Islamitic (sic) religion, whose assistance was counted on, the positive power rested in the firm hands of states belonging to the Entente or, like Persia, they were wholly incapable of a general national rising or warlike activity on a grand scale."<sup>161</sup> He noted too that the Sultan's declaration of jihad, which so worried the British, had little value attached to it, "except by foreigners, and in consequence of press exaggerations, in Germany."<sup>162</sup> In spite of British worries, German hopes, and Enver's promises, there was never much chance of a general Islamic uprising against the Entente.

\*

If the Ottoman religious threat to Britain was mostly fantastic, the Ottoman military threat was only too real. This was something that the British military and political leadership, as embodied by HH Asquith, Sir Edward Grey, Viceroy Charles

---

<sup>159</sup> Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, 134.

<sup>160</sup> Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, 134.

<sup>161</sup> Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, 34-35.

<sup>162</sup> Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, 35.

Hardinge, Winston Churchill, and Lord Kitchener, failed to accept. Over the past half century, the Ottomans had been victorious in a single war, the 1897 Thirty Days' War against Greece over the island of Crete. In every other major conflict of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Ottomans had found themselves on the losing side, ceding territory to Russia in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878, giving up Libya to Italy in the Italo-Ottoman War of 1911, and abandoning almost all of their European possessions to the Balkan League in the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913. From a purely superficial perspective, the Ottoman Army seemed incapable of waging a modern war, a view that dovetailed nicely into pre-existing British ideas about Islamic soldiers and "armies of Asiatics."

A somewhat closer look would have revealed the flaws in this picture. The Ottomans had lost the Russo-Turkish War, it was true, but they had nearly bankrupted the Russians in the process.<sup>163</sup> At Plevna, Ottoman officer Osman Pasha had repelled three separate Russian and Rumanian assaults, costing the Russians more than 25 000 casualties in the space of three days.<sup>164</sup> Eventually starved into submission, Osman was allowed to keep his sword by Russian General Skobelev, who said that "Osman the Victorious he will remain, in spite of his surrender."<sup>165</sup> In the Italo-Ottoman War, a few thousand Ottoman regulars, aided by Enver Pasha's Senussi irregulars tied down more than 100 000 Italians, killing or wounding 4000 and 8000 respectively.<sup>166</sup> The cost of the war for the Italians reached more than a billion lira, 957 000 000 francs or 38 260 000 pounds, a price that consumed forty-seven percent of the national budget and crashed the

---

<sup>163</sup> Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 165.

<sup>164</sup> Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 165.

<sup>165</sup> Meyer & Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows*, 166.

<sup>166</sup> Charles Stephenson, *A Box of Sand: The Italo-Ottoman War 1911-1912*, (Ticehurst, Tattered Flag Press, 2014): 148, 211.

Italian economy.<sup>167</sup> In contrast, an Ottoman official informed the British that it was costing the Ottomans less to prosecute the war than it had to run the province in peacetime, and that in light of this “there will be no peace until the summer comes, when the cholera and perhaps the Senoussi (sic) may clear the invaders out of Tripoli.”<sup>168</sup> In his book *The Arabs in Tripoli*, journalist Alan Ostler commented that “when Europe knows how few were the men who for months kept the great and splendidly equipped Italian army cooped up, so that it hardly dared to venture forth from the town of Tripoli, and is even now confined to a very few miles of coast-line, the standing of Italy as a military power must surely be forever lost.”<sup>169</sup> In the Balkan Wars, the outnumbered and outgunned Ottomans, still occupied with the war against Italy, lost badly, but managed to recover by the end, regaining the city of Edirne before the peace treaty that concluded the Second Balkan War.<sup>170</sup> The pattern was clear if the British had cared to look for it. Even when badly outclassed by their foes, Ottoman soldiers always gave a good account of themselves.

The Ottoman Army had also undergone major reforms and restructuring since the conclusion of the Second Balkan War. The German military mission under Otto Liman von Sanders had altered the structure of Ottoman divisions which adopted the triangular formation that all armies would employ by the end of WWI.\*<sup>171</sup> German officers helped train Ottoman troops and filled gaps in Ottoman military administration, acting as

---

<sup>167</sup> Stephenson, *A Box of Sand*, 212.

<sup>168</sup> Quoted by WT Stead, “Untitled,” in *The Review of Reviews* (June 1912). Cited in Stephenson, *A Box of Sand*, 147.

<sup>169</sup> Alan Ostler, *The Arabs in Tripoli*, (London: John Murray, 1912): 58. Cited in Stephenson, *A Box of Sand*, 120.

<sup>170</sup> ER Hooton, *Prelude to the First World War*, (Oxford: Fonthill Media, 2014): 186-187.

\* In this respect, the Ottoman Army was actually more modern than their British foes, who still used a four brigade divisional structure.

<sup>171</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 10.

engineers, quartermasters, and at times, field commanders. There was also an influx of German weapons and ammunition. On the Ottoman side, Enver Pasha's purges of the officer corps had removed many older officers, replacing them with young, ambitious men like Mehmed Esat Pasha, Mehmed Vehip Pasha, Nureddin Bey, and Mustafa Kemal Bey, all of whom would play important roles in Ottoman victories.<sup>172</sup> On average, Ottoman divisional and corps commanders were fifteen years younger than their British counterparts, and thus more willing to embrace a sense of tactical flexibility.<sup>173</sup> They were also, for the most part, veterans of the Libyan or Balkan Wars, and thus had experience of modern warfare, something that the British commanders, whose service had typically been in colonial conflicts, lacked.<sup>174</sup> Many of the troops were veterans as well, with Esat Pasha's III Corps, which would play a key role at Gallipoli, containing many Balkan War veterans who had fought over the same ground two years previously, an advantage that the British would struggle mightily to overcome.<sup>175</sup>

This is not to say that the Ottoman Army was devoid of problems. Underfunded and badly equipped, the Ottoman military frequently struggled to feed, clothe, and arm its soldiers, let alone lead them to victory in battle.<sup>176</sup> Enver Pasha, while a competent military reformer and guerrilla fighter, was out of his league as a commanding general, prone to drafting extravagant plans that could not be achieved with existing resources, and displaying a callous indifference, even by the standards of the First World War, to the suffering that his failures caused among the men.<sup>177</sup> Worse still, since Enver had

---

<sup>172</sup> Edward J. Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2015): 94

<sup>173</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 102.

<sup>174</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 102.

<sup>175</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 81.

<sup>176</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 16-17.

<sup>177</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 52.

monopolized the roles of Minister of War, Commander-in-Chief, and Chief of Staff, and was not shy about purging those he disliked, there were few officers left who could rein in his flights of operational fantasy.<sup>178</sup> Mustafa Kemal, who despised Enver, said in his memoirs that “how his designs were to be carried out was for him a matter of detail. He was generally ignorant in military matters, as he had not progressed step by step from the command of a battalion to that of a regiment, and so on.”<sup>179</sup> Liman von Sanders, who served with Kemal at Gallipoli, seconded this opinion of Enver throughout his memoirs.<sup>180</sup> Over the course of the war, Enver’s impractical ideas would cost the Ottomans dearly in lives and treasure. However, neither budgetary problems nor Enver Pasha’s personal failings should be allowed to obscure the fact that the Ottoman Army was a thoroughly professional force, ably officered, well-trained, and containing a high proportion of veterans. It was not an army to underestimate, though the British would do exactly that.

The strange thing is that there was little reason for the British to underestimate the Ottomans. Had they been paying attention to some of the war’s earliest operations, they would have been given ample opportunity to reassess the Ottoman Army’s capabilities. In the early battles in the Caucasus , before Enver overreached and nearly destroyed the Ottoman Third Army, the Ottomans acquitted themselves well against the Russians. Liman von Sanders remarked that “the Turkish troops fought well and success and failure were fairly balanced between the opposing forces.”<sup>181</sup> He added that “the Russian advance had certainly been brought to a complete standstill by Hassan Izzet’s action. As

---

<sup>178</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 52.

<sup>179</sup> Cited in Stephenson, *A Box of Sand*, 138.

<sup>180</sup> Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, 39-40.

<sup>181</sup> Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, 37.

compared with Turkish performances in the Balkan War, a considerable gain in efficiency was notable.”<sup>182</sup> While the Ottomans soon suffered a series of reverses, the war in the Caucasus would continue to seesaw back and forth, with the eventual attempt by the British to take the Dardanelles straits being prompted in part by a Russian plea for assistance in the aftermath of an Ottoman advance.

Even an Ottoman invasion of British territory could not convince Britain’s senior military leaders to adjust their attitudes. Between January 26 and February 4 of 1915, the British repulsed an Ottoman attack on the Suez Canal, led by none other than Cemal Pasha, Minister of the Marine and now Governor of Syria and 4<sup>th</sup> Army commander.<sup>183</sup> While the British succeeded in repelling Cemal’s raid, the fact that the Ottoman naval minister and his German chief of staff, Friedrich Freiherr Kress von Kressenstein had marched an army of 20 000 men across the Sinai and into British Egypt without being spotted until the last minute by Anglo-Egyptian scouts or losing a man in transit, should have been of concern.<sup>184</sup> At the very least, it should have alerted the British to the fact that they were dealing with a professional and potentially dangerous adversary. Instead, the Cabinet focused on the lack of disturbance among the Egyptian populace, and their own victories in Mesopotamia, where by December of 1914 they had occupied both Basra and Qurna. In a War Council meeting on January 28, just as Cemal’s attack was getting underway, Kitchener actually expressed his hopes that the Ottomans would launch a direct assault on the Suez Canal, since it would enable the Royal Navy to retaliate by striking at Gaza and cutting their supply lines: something that did not end up

---

<sup>182</sup> Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, 37.

<sup>183</sup> Hadaway. *Pyramids and Fleshpots*, 56

<sup>184</sup> Hadaway. *Pyramids and Fleshpots*, 57.

happening.<sup>185</sup> In his report to Kitchener on February 18, Maxwell's chief concern was that Egypt had not risen. "It is now common knowledge among the people of the country," he wrote, "that the Turkish troops met with a severe reverse on the canal."<sup>186</sup> Asquith gloated in a letter that "the Turks have been trying to throw a bridge across the Suez Canal & in that ingenious fashion to find a way into Egypt. The poor things & their would-be bridge were blown to smithereens, and they have retired into the desert."<sup>187</sup> In reality the Ottomans had suffered fairly light casualties, and Cemal Pasha retreated in good order. Yet to Asquith, Kitchener and the rest of the Cabinet, the failure of the attack on the Suez and the early British success in Mesopotamia remained evidence that they had been correct all along; the decadent Ottoman Army and its Oriental troops could not and did not pose a threat to Great Britain.

\*

From the summer of 1914 through to the end of the first bout of operations against the Ottomans in the winter of 1915, the British political and military leadership badly misconstrued the nature of the enemy that they faced. Convinced of Ottoman military inferiority, the British did little to keep the Sultanate from entering the war and ignored signs of Ottoman military competence that did not conform to their anti-Islamic narrative of Asiatic inability.

Dismissing their enemies as militarily negligible, the British instead obsessed over potential religious revolution within Egypt and the Raj, devoting considerable

---

<sup>185</sup> Maurice Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, January 28, 1915," January 28, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/1/26): 2.

<sup>186</sup> "Maxwell to Kitchener," February 18, 1915 (Catalogue ref: PRO, WO 33/731). Cited in McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame*, 161.

<sup>187</sup> "Asquith to Venetia Stanley," no. 288 February 2, 1915, in *Asquith, Letters*, 414. Cited in McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame*, 161.

political resources to assuaging Muslim opinion and suppressing a rebellion that was highly unlikely to ever get off the ground. Battling against the almost imaginary enemy of Islamic fanaticism, British leaders failed to treat the enemy in front of them, the Ottoman Army, with the seriousness that its capabilities deserved.

In the ensuing campaigns in Gallipoli and Mesopotamia, these two factors would come together with devastating results for the British military. Basing their plans around the assumption that the Ottomans were weak but had to be beaten quickly, lest the Muslims of India and Egypt, or Afghanistan and Persia, get any ideas, the British would stumble from one ill-thought out scheme to the next, resulting in the bloody stalemate of Gallipoli, the shattering defeat of Ctesiphon, and the humiliation of the siege and surrender of Kut. When British expectations met Ottoman realities, the outcomes would prove more damaging than anything that British planners could have dreamt.

### Chapter 3: Lord Kitchener, Mister Churchill, and the “Naval-Only” Scheme

The cliché about success having a thousand fathers and failure being an orphan has never been so true as in the aftermath of the Gallipoli operation. The members of the War Council and its successors, the War Committee and Dardanelles Committee, would all disavow responsibility for the failure of the scheme, seeking to fix the blame on their colleagues rather than themselves. In the end, the member of the Cabinet to whom the most blame was assigned was Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, who lost his position and found himself demoted to Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster over the debacle. Many histories have followed this lead, and Churchill frequently comes in for the lion’s share of the recriminations from historians.

The reality, of course, is that there was a great deal of blame to go around. HH Asquith, Sir Edward Grey, Arthur Balfour and the Lords Haldane and Crewe all signed off on the operation as well, despite its manifold flaws. They did so at the urging of not only Churchill, but of Lord Kitchener who, in his capacity as Secretary of War, dominated the early War Council meetings. As one of Britain’s most famous public figures and the highest ranking soldier in a room filled with civilians, Kitchener was assumed by his colleagues to be an expert in matters military, and to understand the issues on which he was pontificating.\* Throughout the first two years of Britain’s war against the Ottomans, it was Kitchener who steered the decision making process and brought the rest of the wartime leadership around to his way of thinking.

---

\* The War Council, and later War Committee and Dardanelles Committee, secretary, Maurice Hankey was also a soldier, but only held the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. Sir James Wolfe Murray, Lieutenant-General and Chief of the Imperial General Staff was also present on many occasions, but rarely spoke.

That Kitchener was singularly ill-suited to the task of running the war effort was something that the other members of the Cabinet would only become aware of with time. A classic colonial soldier in the mould of Lord Roberts, Kitchener's experience of warfare beyond the merely tactical level was nonexistent.<sup>188</sup> Having made his name in colonial wars in the Sudan and South Africa, Kitchener was completely unprepared for the stresses of a large scale, high technology, modern war against a multitude of professionally trained opponents.<sup>189</sup> As time went by, Kitchener's handicaps would become increasingly apparent, to the point where, in mid-1916, shortly before the Secretary of War's death by drowning, Arthur Balfour would observe to his niece that "K. knows nothing. He does nothing right."<sup>190</sup> When his niece inquired if Kitchener were a stupid man, Balfour followed up by stating, "That's it; he is. He is not a great organizer, he is not a great administrator, nor a great soldier. And what is more, he knows it. He is not vain. He is only great when he has little things to accomplish."<sup>191</sup> These were flaws that Kitchener's confidantes had been aware of for much longer. Writing in his diary in 1915, Sir Ian Hamilton, Kitchener's friend and subordinate, and who was generally quite admiring of his superior, observed that, "he remains, in the War Office sense, an amateur."<sup>192</sup>

Kitchener's problems went beyond an unfamiliarity with the conduct of a modern war. As Secretary of War, Kitchener oftentimes seemed to forget that he was neither Commander-in-Chief nor Chief of the General Staff, and regularly allowed subordinate

---

<sup>188</sup> Trevor Royle, *The Kitchener Enigma*, (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1985): 319.

<sup>189</sup> Royle, *The Kitchener Enigma*, 319.

<sup>190</sup> Cited in Robert K. Massie, *Castles of Steel: Britain, Germany, and the Winning of the Great War at Sea*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004): ch 34 .

<sup>191</sup> Cited in Massie, *Castles of Steel*, ch 34.

<sup>192</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 15.

commanders to bypass the chain of command and contact him directly. This remained particularly true of former comrades-in-arms like Sir Ian Hamilton, Sir John Maxwell, and Sir Reginald Wingate, all of whom were able to gain Kitchener's attention by addressing letters to him. The end result of this was that Kitchener received regular direct exposure to the paranoia and Islamaphobia of the likes of Maxwell and Wingate without any filter to help him process it. Kitchener's own experiences in the Sudan and Egypt seem to have prejudiced him towards believing Maxwell and Wingate's prognostications, and ignoring the lack of any active evidence of rebellion. Shocked by the scale of the carnage on the Western Front, Kitchener was eager to explore other options for obtaining British victories, and saw a campaign against an Islamic enemy as one way to go about it.

The idea of forcing the Dardanelles Straits with the Royal Navy and knocking the Ottomans out of the war was first broached at a War Council meeting on November 25, 1914.<sup>193</sup> The subject was raised by Winston Churchill, who in his capacity as First Lord of the Admiralty, was becoming increasingly obsessed with finding a way to use Britain's naval supremacy to obtain victories on land. Over the course of 1914 and early 1915, Churchill would not only suggest an attack on the Dardanelles, but an assault on Germany's Baltic coast and the landing of troops at the port of Zeebrugge in Belgium behind German lines.<sup>194</sup> For Churchill, the apparently overwhelming power of the British navy was a solution in search of a problem to solve, and the possibility of an attack on the Dardanelles was but one way in which the Royal Navy might be used to strike a decisive blow against Germany and her allies. Kitchener, while unable and unwilling to spare the troops that Churchill believed he needed to reinforce the naval attack suggested on

---

<sup>193</sup> Maurice Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, November 25, 1914," November 25, 1914. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/1/4): 3.

<sup>194</sup> Graham T. Clews, *Churchill's Dilemma*, (Saint Barbara: Praeger, 2010): 60.

November 25, liked the notion of circumventing Germany and Austria-Hungary and striking at the Ottomans.<sup>195</sup> In early January, asked Churchill to explore the concept of a naval-only attack on the Dardanelles.<sup>196</sup>

The results of the study should not have been encouraging. In 1906, a finding commissioned under First Sea Lord Admiral Jacky Fisher had asserted that forcing the Dardanelles without a significant deployment of troops was a veritable impossibility.<sup>197</sup> The technical advisors that Churchill consulted with in January of 1915 said much the same thing, as did Fisher himself, who had been pulled out of retirement and reinstalled as First Sea Lord under Churchill.<sup>198</sup> While Admiral Fisher appreciated the notion of taking out the Ottomans via a naval assault, he remained convinced that ground troops would be needed to back up the navy and exploit any gains. When Churchill bypassed Fisher and spoke to Vice-Admiral Sackville Carden, the Royal Navy's commander in the Mediterranean, Carden was, at best, cautiously optimistic, suggesting that while he could get through the Dardanelles with his navy, he would require a significant number of additional ships to do so, and that it would be a slow and deliberate process.<sup>199</sup> Churchill, undeterred, brought these findings to the War Council and, with Kitchener's support, secured permission to begin planning an assault to commence on February 18, 1915.<sup>200</sup>

Churchill's optimism about the ability of the ships to get through on their own did not last long. Soon after the beginning of the naval assault he began pleading with

---

<sup>195</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, January 13, 1915," 8.

<sup>196</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, January 13, 1915," 8

<sup>197</sup> Dan Van Der Vat, *The Dardanelles Disaster: Winston Churchill's Greatest Failure*, (New York: The Overlook Press, 2009): 22.

<sup>198</sup> Clews, *Churchill's Dilemma*, 123.

<sup>199</sup> Clews, *Churchill's Dilemma*, 93.

<sup>200</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, January 13, 1915," 10.

Kitchener to make available up to 100 000 men whom the navy might use to reinforce their successes.<sup>201</sup> In these efforts Churchill was supported by David Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, who noted that the naval attack was, “something of an experiment,” and should be backed up by more conventional military force.<sup>202</sup> Kitchener, however, continued to insist that no large body of soldiers would be needed to break through the Dardanelles. At times Kitchener granted that the 29<sup>th</sup> Division might be made available to the navy, at others the Australian and New Zealand Corps (Anzac), but at no point prior to the conclusion of the naval-only attack was he prepared to put both units on standby.<sup>203</sup> When asked why, Kitchener gave two reasons: first, troops had to be ready for deployment to the Western Front should the situation there change all of a sudden, and second, that one of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division or the Anzacs had to be available for duty in Egypt, since Maxwell did not trust the locals to remain loyal to the Crown.<sup>204</sup> On what Maxwell’s fears were based, if anything, Kitchener did not bother to inform the War Council; that his protégé was afraid was enough for Kitchener and would have to be enough for his colleagues.<sup>205</sup> This would not be the last time that Maxwell’s concerns about an Egyptian uprising would command Kitchener’s attention, nor the last time that said concerns would interfere with Britain’s ability to prosecute the war against the

---

<sup>201</sup> Maurice Hankey, “Secretary’s Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 26, 1915,” February 26, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/1/47): 2.

<sup>202</sup> Maurice Hankey, “Secretary’s Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 24, 1915,” February 24, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/1/42): 5.

<sup>203</sup> Hankey, Maurice. “Secretary’s Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 19, 1915.” February 19, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/1/36): 4.

<sup>204</sup> Hankey, “Secretary’s Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 24, 1915,” 4.

Hankey, “Secretary’s Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 26, 1915,” 5.

<sup>205</sup> Hankey, “Secretary’s Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 24, 1915,” 4.

Ottomans. For Kitchener and Maxwell both, securing Egypt often seemed more important than actually taking the fight to the Ottoman Sultanate.

Kitchener strengthened his argument in the War Council by insisting that the Ottoman Army was a completely unprofessional and badly trained force that would disintegrate the moment any serious pressure was applied to it.<sup>206</sup> At War Council meetings on February 19, 24, and 26, Kitchener repeatedly insisted that a naval breakthrough at Gallipoli would result in the Sultan, the Young Turk government, and the majority of the Ottoman Army abandoning the Sultanate's remaining European possessions and fleeing to Asia.<sup>207</sup> On March 3, Kitchener further expounded on his views of Ottoman capabilities, stating that, when the war was over, all the British would have to do to cripple the Ottoman military was demand the removal of all German officers.<sup>208</sup> It was a profoundly Orientalist perspective, but one that was not wholly surprising coming from a colonial veteran like Kitchener. When David Lloyd George expressed the opinion that the Ottoman Army, rather than surrendering would most likely fight to the last man, as they had done in the Russo-Turkish War and the Balkan Wars, he was ignored by the rest of the War Council, who assumed that Kitchener knew what he

---

<sup>206</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 19, 1915," 5

Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 24, 1915," 3, 5.

Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 26, 1915," 2.

<sup>207</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 19, 1915," 5

Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 24, 1915," 3, 5.

Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 26, 1915," 2.

<sup>208</sup> Maurice Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, March 3, 1915," March 3, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/2/3): 5.

was talking about.<sup>209</sup> Sir Edward Grey, in fact, went even further than Kitchener, assuring that the capture of the Gallipoli peninsula would not only result in the collapse of the Ottoman Army, but in a coup d'état against the regime of Enver, Cemal, and Talaat.<sup>210</sup> The threat of Istanbul coming under the guns of the Royal Navy was thought to be something the Ottomans were simply not constitutionally capable of handling.

His March 12 meeting with Sir Ian Hamilton, who was to command the ground forces at Gallipoli, found Kitchener still clinging to the notion that no ground forces would be needed. While Kitchener had admitted on February 24 that, in the event of a naval failure, the task of salvaging British prestige would fall to the army, Kitchener was still adverse to the idea of a ground assault.<sup>211</sup> "I hope," he told Hamilton, "that you do not have to land at all; if you *do* have to land, why then the powerful Fleet at your back will be the prime factor in your choice of time and place."<sup>212</sup> While Kitchener was at last prepared to make both the 29<sup>th</sup> Division and the Anzac Corps, as well as the Royal Naval Division and a contingent of French soldiers, available to Hamilton, he continued to insist that the Royal Navy would defeat the Ottomans without need of the army.<sup>213</sup>

"Supposing," he remarked to Hamilton, "one submarine pops up opposite the town of Gallipoli and waves a Union Jack three times, the whole Turkish garrison on the Peninsula will take to their heels and make a bee line for Bulair."<sup>214</sup> He went on to tell Hamilton that, "Once the Fleet got through the Dardanelles, Constantinople could not

---

<sup>209</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 26, 1915," 4.

<sup>210</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 24, 1915," 5.

<sup>211</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 24, 1915," 5.

<sup>212</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 12.

<sup>213</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 13.

<sup>214</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 13.

hold out.”<sup>215</sup> He added that, “the bulk of the people were not Osmanli or even Mahomedan and there would be a revolution at the mere sight of the smoke from the funnels of our warships.”<sup>216</sup> That the Ottomans at Gallipoli were, even as he spoke, steadfastly resisting the combined Anglo-French naval contingent was something Kitchener never mentioned to Hamilton. To him, the assumption of Ottoman weakness seems to have been less a matter of factual analysis and more an article of the faith. In over his head as Secretary of War, and with little idea of how to prosecute the conflict against Germany and Austria-Hungary, Kitchener appears to have gone searching for a familiar colonial war to fight, regardless of how much information he had to ignore to transform the Ottomans into an appropriately colonial foe.

\*

While Kitchener was still refusing to tell Hamilton whether a ground assault would be necessary, the naval only assault was turning into a fiasco of the first order. Initially begun on February 19, bad weather delayed the attack for almost a week, with Admiral Carden left unable to recommence operations until February 25.<sup>217</sup> Far more damaging to British hopes, however, were their own assumptions about the quality of the Ottoman defences. Churchill and Kitchener’s entire plan of attack was based on the belief that not only did the Ottoman military lack the professionalism to stand up to a sustained naval bombardment, but that the physical fortifications of the Dardanelles Straits were too primitive to provide any serious resistance to the British fleet.<sup>218</sup> The idea that the

---

<sup>215</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 14.

<sup>216</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 14.

<sup>217</sup> Hankey, “Secretary’s Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 24, 1915,” 3.

<sup>218</sup> Hankey, “Secretary’s Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, January 13, 1915,” 8.

straits could be forced by ships alone was predicated on Carden's Anglo-French Mediterranean squadron simply outgunning their Ottoman adversaries in much the same way that the British Army had traditionally outgunned the tribal peoples of Africa and Asia.

There was a grain of truth in these assumptions. Many of the fortifications in the Cannakale Fortress Command, the Ottoman name for the military sector at the Dardanelles, were in a poor state of repair, while the antiquity of the Fortress Command's large naval guns limited their ship-killing power.<sup>219</sup> Since August of 1914, however, Enver Pasha had instituted a series of renovations, reforms, and reinforcements aimed at improving the Dardanelles' defences and rendering the straits impregnable. Enver's general mobilisation order of August 2, 1914, had included Esat Pasha's III Corps, which, comprising the 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> Divisions, now occupied the Peninsula.<sup>220</sup> Esat was a veteran of the Balkan Wars, and had seen extensive service along the Greek and Anatolian coasts.<sup>221</sup> A majority of his officers and many of his men were veterans as well, and were, after three months of intensive training in anti-amphibious operations, deployed by Esat to reinforce the Cannakale Fortress Command and repel landings.<sup>222</sup> In September of 1914, the III Corps was reinforced by the arrival of five hundred German naval engineers and technicians under Vice-Admiral Guido von Usedom, a prominent specialist in coastal defence.<sup>223</sup> Between them, Usedom, Esat, and Cannakale Fortress Commander Cevat Pasha set about building new roads, improving seaward defences, and

---

Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, January 28, 1915," 6.

<sup>219</sup> Edward J. Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2010): 11.

<sup>220</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 81.

<sup>221</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 96.

<sup>222</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 96.

Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 11.

<sup>223</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 77.

laying new minefields.<sup>224</sup> By the time that Admiral Carden was ready to begin his assault on the Dardanelles, a dozen minefields, composed of upwards of four hundred mines, would block the straits, requiring intensive effort to defuse or bypass them.<sup>225</sup>

Improvements were also made to the Fortress Command's artillery. With Enver and Cemal's permission, naval guns were removed from the forts at Edirne and Catalça, as well as the Ottoman Navy's more obsolete ships, and transported to the Dardanelles.<sup>226</sup> Even more importantly, as it would turn out, was the dispatch by the army of multiple batteries of 120mm and 150mm howitzers to serve as mobile field artillery.<sup>227</sup>

Concentrated for the most part in the 8<sup>th</sup> Heavy Artillery Regiment under Mehmet Zekerriya, these howitzers were scattered about the intermediate defences in mobile kill-zones from which they could deliver plunging fire onto the decks of British and French warships.<sup>228</sup> While the howitzers lacked the ship-killing power of genuine naval guns and would be fortunate to do more than scratch the paint on the Entente's newest dreadnoughts, they could rain shrapnel down on any exposed crewmembers and even pierce the thin deck armour of the older Anglo-French ships.<sup>229</sup> That they could be moved after firing made the howitzers still more useful as weapons of harassment, since their mobility would prevent Carden's squadron from effectively targeting them. Initially composed of twenty-two 150mm howitzers, Zekerriya's artillery regiment was swiftly reinforced with ten more 150mm howitzers, fourteen 120mm howitzers, and six 210mm mortars.<sup>230</sup> By January 1915, the 8<sup>th</sup> Heavy Artillery, once a standard two-battalion

---

<sup>224</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 78-79.

<sup>225</sup> Rudenno, *Gallipoli: Attack from the Sea*, 27, 30.

<sup>226</sup> Rudenno, *Gallipoli: Attack from the Sea*, 32.

<sup>227</sup> Edward J. Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2010): 12.

<sup>228</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 12.

<sup>229</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 12.

<sup>230</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 12.

artillery regiment, had four battalions, comprising twelve batteries of 150mm and 120mm howitzers.<sup>231</sup> In total, there were eighty-two fixed naval guns and two hundred thirty mobile field guns and howitzers defending the Dardanelles by February 18, 1915.<sup>232</sup>

To make Carden's difficulties worse, neither Kitchener nor Churchill was particularly inclined to make the technological gap that they envisioned between the Entente fleet and the Ottoman Fortress Command a reality. While Carden's squadron did include the modern battlecruiser *Inflexible* and the ultramodern super-dreadnought *Queen Elizabeth*, the rest of the squadron was composed of obsolete ships.<sup>233</sup> Churchill actually stripped two modern battlecruisers, *Indomitable* and *Indefatigable*, from Carden's command.<sup>234</sup> In their place, Carden was sent the pre-dreadnought battleships *Agamemnon*, *Albion*, *Canopus*, *Cornwallis*, *Irresistible*, *Lord Nelson*, *Majestic*, *Ocean*, *Prince George*, *Swiftsure*, *Triumph* and *Vengeance*.<sup>235</sup> The French contribution to Carden's squadron were the pre-dreadnought battleships *Bouvet*, *Charlemagne*, *Gaulois* and *Suffren*, all obsolete.<sup>236</sup> With a total of sixteen pre-dreadnought battleships, Carden had a strong force on paper, but in practise a majority of these ships were entirely obsolescent, with no fewer than eight of the British pre-dreadnoughts scheduled for scrapping within the next fifteen months. Worse still, Carden's best ship, the *Queen Elizabeth*, was new and had yet to complete her gunnery calibration exercises.<sup>237</sup> Churchill had a report from the Admiralty that assured him that this would not matter, and that *Queen Elizabeth* could easily destroy the Dardanelles fortresses from well

---

<sup>231</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 13.

<sup>232</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 16.

<sup>233</sup> Van Der Vat, *The Dardanelles Disaster*, 84.

<sup>234</sup> Van Der Vat, *The Dardanelles Disaster*, 99.

<sup>235</sup> Van Der Vat, *The Dardanelles Disaster*, 99.

<sup>236</sup> Van Der Vat, *The Dardanelles Disaster*, 99.

<sup>237</sup> Van Der Vat, *The Dardanelles Disaster*, 89.

outside their response range. Unfortunately, this report's assumptions were based on *Queen Elizabeth's* performance while at anchor.<sup>238</sup>

Perhaps the greatest weakness of Carden's squadron, however, was in his lack of ground troops or dedicated minesweepers. Carden had 2000 Royal Marines at his disposal, but these men were badly outnumbered by the soldiers of Esat Pasha's III Corps, whose presence rendered their deployment risky.<sup>239</sup> Carden had requested that the Admiralty send him their purpose-built minesweepers, but had been turned down.<sup>240</sup> His request to use some of his destroyers for minesweeping purposes had also been turned down after complaints from the destroyer commander, Captain Charles Coode.<sup>241</sup> Instead, Carden was sent twenty-one unarmoured North Sea fishing trawlers, contracted to the Royal Navy, but still crewed by civilian fishermen.<sup>242</sup> In a sign of the colonial arrogance that so afflicted the campaign, Carden was assured by Churchill that these untrained civilians and their unprotected ships would be more than enough to eradicate the Ottoman mines.

The flaws in the plan became apparent from fairly early on. While Carden's fleet succeeded in neutralizing the outer forts, it was discovered in the process that fire from naval guns, even the massive 15inch guns of the *Queen Elizabeth*, was insufficient to actually destroy the Ottoman forts and the guns within them.<sup>243</sup> In order to complete the elimination of the outer forts, Carden was forced to send in landing parties of Royal Marines who finished off the Ottoman naval guns with demolition charges.<sup>244</sup> When no

---

<sup>238</sup> Clews, *Churchill's Dilemma*, 109.

<sup>239</sup> Tim Travers, *Gallipoli*, (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2001): 27.

<sup>240</sup> Travers, *Gallipoli*, 29.

<sup>241</sup> Travers, *Gallipoli*, 29.

<sup>242</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 20.

<sup>243</sup> Rudenno, *Gallipoli: Attack from the Sea*, 43.

<sup>244</sup> Rudenno, *Gallipoli: Attack from the Sea*, 41.

marines were landed, the Ottoman gunners would simply withdraw from the fortresses during the periods of the heaviest shelling, then return and once more open fire when the Anglo-French fleet moved onto new targets. As Carden's armada entered the inner region of the straits, difficulties mounted as units of Esat's III Corps or attached to Cevat's Fortress Command moved to counterattack the Marines.<sup>245</sup> Aiming to lighten the burden on the III Corps, Enver Pasha transferred the 11<sup>th</sup> Division to Gallipoli that March, further increasing the pool of Ottoman soldiers who were available to repulse the Marines.<sup>246</sup>

The greatest problem, however, arrived when Carden and his armada entered the howitzer kill-zone. None of Kitchener, nor Churchill, nor Carden himself had reckoned with the havoc that these small, mobile field guns could wreak among the fleet, and particularly the minesweepers. Originally meant to do little more than harass the British capital ships, the howitzers came into their own when the fishing trawlers attempted to remove the mines from the straits. Completely unprotected against shrapnel, let alone direct hits, the fishing trawlers also failed to exceed five or six knots in speed, making them easy targets for Zekarriye's gunners.<sup>247</sup> Attempts to shift to night minesweeping failed due to the presence of Ottoman searchlights, which illuminated the trawlers and made them, if anything, even easier for the howitzers to hit. I. Worsley Gibson of the *Albion* observed sympathetically that "It must be very nerve wracking being up there sweeping at night expecting the batteries to open fire any minute."<sup>248</sup> In a March 17 diary entry, Sir Ian Hamilton, in the area to observe on behalf of the army, commented, "His

---

<sup>245</sup> Rudenno, *Gallipoli: Attack from the Sea*, 42.

<sup>246</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 70.

<sup>247</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 20.

<sup>248</sup> Cited in Travers, *Gallipoli*, 27.

chief worry lies in the clever way the enemy are now handling their mobile artillery. He can silence the big fortress ordinance, but the howitzers and field guns fire from concealed positions and make the clearing of the minefields something of a V.C. sort of job for the smaller craft.”<sup>249</sup> A sentence or two later, Hamilton added wryly that, “The mine-sweepers are slow and bad with worn out engines. Some of the civilian masters and crews of the trawlers have to consider wives and kids as well as V.C.s.”<sup>250</sup>

The result was a deadlock. So long as the howitzers were active, the trawlers could not effectively sweep for mines, so long as the naval guns in the fortresses remained intact, the escort vessels could not target the howitzers, and so long as the mines were untouched, the capital ships could not eliminate the heavy naval ordinance. Carden, under increasing pressure from the Admiralty, suffered a nervous breakdown and was replaced by his immediate subordinate, Admiral John de Roebeck, who, in a change of plan, attempted to rush the straits on March 18.<sup>251</sup>

In doing so, de Roebeck ensured that March 18 went down in history as a black day for the British and French navies. At twelve-thirty that afternoon, the French pre-dreadnought *Gaulois* was struck by a fourteen-inch shell just below the waterline. Taking on hundreds of tonnes of water, the *Gaulois* broke formation and eventually beached herself on an island just outside the entrance to the straits.<sup>252</sup> *Lord Nelson*, *Suffren*, *Charlemagne*, *Albion*, *Irresistible*, and *Bouvet* were all struck by naval shells and field artillery alike, with the *Suffren* suffering serious damage to her turrets, including a

---

<sup>249</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 20.

<sup>250</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 20.

<sup>251</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 67.

<sup>252</sup> Rudenno, *Gallipoli: Attack from the Sea*, 50.

magazine fire that was only extinguished by partially flooding the ship.<sup>253</sup> De Roebeck pressed on with the attack and was rewarded for his recklessness when, at two o'clock, the French pre-dreadnought *Bouvet* struck a mine, heeled over, and sank in the space of less than a minute.<sup>254</sup> Unbeknownst to the British and French admirals, the Ottomans had, over the course of the previous week, laid a new minefield parallel to those whose presence the Entente was already aware of.<sup>255</sup> The *Bouvet* had been the first ship to encounter one of these mines; it would not be the last. At 4:11, the modern battlecruiser *Inflexible* also struck a mine and was forced to retreat; by the time she made good her escape, the battlecruiser's deck was almost level with the ocean and parts of her were afloat.<sup>256</sup> Fifteen minutes later, the British pre-dreadnought *Irresistible* also struck a mine and, with both engine rooms flooded, was left without propulsion.<sup>257</sup> De Roebeck signalled for the fleet to retreat at five o'clock, but the losses were not yet done accumulating. At five minutes after six, the pre-dreadnought *Ocean*, which had been attempting to tow the *Irresistible* to safety, hit a mine. Both ships sank later that night.<sup>258</sup>

By any metric, March 18, 1915 proved a disastrous day for the Anglo-French squadron. More than 2000 British and French sailors had been killed in exchange for a total of ninety-seven casualties among the Ottoman defenders.<sup>259</sup> Of the eighteen ships that had been assigned to Carden in February, six were now sunk or crippled. In the space of an afternoon, the Mediterranean Fleet had suffered thirty-three percent casualties. Yet the men on the War Council remained blithely unconcerned. Despite the complete lack of

---

<sup>253</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 72.

<sup>254</sup> Travers, *Gallipoli*, 34.

<sup>255</sup> Travers, *Gallipoli*, 36.

<sup>256</sup> Rudenno, *Gallipoli: Attack from the Sea*, 50.

<sup>257</sup> Travers, *Gallipoli*, 34.

<sup>258</sup> Rudenno, *Gallipoli: Attack from the Sea*, 52.

<sup>259</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 21.

returns for these losses, it was determined that de Roebeck should be told to continue the operation.<sup>260</sup> The conversation subsequently moved onto how the Ottoman Sultanate would be partitioned after the war, with Lord Kitchener and Sir Edward Grey making the case for the establishment of an Arab state with a puppet Caliph that would answer to Britain.<sup>261</sup> In this way the British might ensure control over the political future of Islam, and prevent any rebellions among their Indian or Egyptian subjects.<sup>262</sup> Once more, the perceived political threat of Islamic fanaticism was given priority over the very real damage that the Ottoman military had just inflicted on the Entente's combined fleet.

It was only after de Roebeck and Hamilton wrote to Churchill and Kitchener to inform them that the naval assault could not go forward again, that the War Council turned its collective intelligence to the next stage of the Gallipoli operation. "The Army's part," Hamilton wired Kitchener, "will be more than mere landings of parties to destroy Forts, it must be a deliberate and progressive military operation carried out at full strength so as to open a passage for the Navy."<sup>263</sup> With this in mind, Hamilton was authorized by Kitchener and the War Council to begin planning a landing at Gallipoli. Despite Kitchener's best efforts, the Army was going to have to land at the Dardanelles after all.

\*

From beginning to end the naval-only assault on the Dardanelles was a badly thought out and ill-conceived plan. It rested not on military intelligence but on severely

---

<sup>260</sup> Maurice Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, March 19, 1915," March 19, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/2/14): 5.

<sup>261</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, March 19, 1915," 5-6.

<sup>262</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, March 19, 1915," 6.

<sup>263</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 28.

flawed assumptions about British naval supremacy and technological superiority, as well as an ingrained belief that the Ottomans, when confronted with the might of the British Navy, would not fight back. It was, in effect, a fantasy project of Lord Kitchener's, meant to turn an unwinnable global war into a familiar colonial conflict in which the technical wizardry of the Royal Navy would intimidate the supposedly primitive locals into surrendering.

Unshakably convinced of their superiority over the enemy, Kitchener and Churchill had not even bothered to make the most of their supposed technological advantages. Carden's Anglo-French squadron contained not the cream of the Royal Navy, but the dregs of both the British and French pre-dreadnought fleets, sent to the Mediterranean because they would have been of little use against Germany's ultramodern High Seas Fleet. True both the *Inflexible* and especially the *Queen Elizabeth* were modern, up to date ships, but even had the *Queen Elizabeth*'s gunnery been all that the Admiralty made it out to be, surely two ships could not be expected to crack the Dardanelles by themselves. The absence of modern minesweeping vessels only tipped the scales further against Carden and then de Roebeck, leaving their outdated battleships hopelessly vulnerable in the face of concealed explosives. Without substantial ground forces at their disposal, neither Carden nor de Roebeck was in any position to change tactics or possessed of the ability to eliminate the Ottoman howitzers, whose plunging fire had rendered the minesweepers inoperable.

One could make a compelling argument, in fact, that it was the Ottoman forces, under Cevat Pasha and Esat Pasha, whose innovative integration of mines, naval guns, and field howitzers displayed the greatest sense of technical sophistication and

proficiency during the battle. Lacking the sheer firepower required to meet the Anglo-French armada on equal terms, the Ottomans had improvised a highly effective solution, in which interlocking defences protected one another and inflicted horrific casualties on Carden and de Roebeck's sailors. Whether a better-prepared Entente fleet, containing a higher proportion of modern ships and a dedicated, and sizable, force of ground troops, could have made its way through the well-prepared Ottoman defensive grid is ultimately an unanswerable question. What is not in question, however, is that Kitchener and Churchill's deployment of obsolete battleships and unarmoured fishing trawlers handicapped the entire operation, tying Carden's hands, and effectively shutting down any chance of success before the campaign had even begun. Convinced that the Ottomans could not withstand even their weakest efforts, the Secretary of War and First Lord of the Admiralty sent an underequipped and undergunned fleet to its near annihilation at the hands of the Ottoman Fortress Command.

#### Chapter 4: Sir Ian Hamilton's Dilemma

In a different army or a different war, the comprehensive failure of the navy-only assault on the Dardanelles might have prompted those in charge to reconsider not only their tactics, but the entire strategic and operational concept. The devastating losses that Cevat and Esat Pasha's soldiers had inflicted on Carden and de Roebeck's squadron should, at the very least, have prompted the British to re-evaluate the quality of adversary they faced. Certainly, Cevat and Esat had outperformed the two British admirals with their confident, well-organized defence of the straits providing a sharp contrast with Carden's cautious advance and de Roebeck's mad dash to oblivion. In the face of both de Roebeck and Sir Ian Hamilton's reports, the very feasibility of the Gallipoli operation should have been called into question.

Rather than withdrawing from the Dardanelles, however, the War Council, still largely guided by Lord Kitchener, now advocated for an amphibious operation to land troops on the Gallipoli Peninsula and drive the Ottoman defenders back inland. This, Kitchener contended, was necessary in order to maintain British prestige in the Muslim world, which had been severely wounded by the disasters of March 18. By clearing the Ottomans from Gallipoli, the British Army would make up for the Royal Navy's defeat, restore Britain's status in the eyes of Islam, and open the Dardanelles to de Roebeck's armada which would once again be able to set sail for Istanbul. This in turn would knock the Ottomans out of the war and enable the partition of their decaying empire among the victorious Entente powers. That the troops would successfully occupy the peninsula and that Istanbul would fall was accepted as simply a matter of course.

The man chosen to conduct this enterprise was Sir Ian Hamilton, Kitchener's friend and protégé. Credited by the German General Staff appreciation of him as the single most experienced soldier anywhere in the world, Hamilton had seen action all across India, Afghanistan, the Sudan, and South Africa, serving in the Second Anglo-Afghan War, the First Anglo-Boer War, the Mahdist War, and the Second Anglo-Boer War.<sup>264</sup> Dispatched to East Asia to observe the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, Hamilton had seen firsthand what modern combat looked like, and had a far greater understanding than most of his contemporaries did about the realities of First World War warfare, something that did him no favours with his hidebound, traditionalist superiors.<sup>265</sup> Widely regarded as too liberal and intellectual for a position on the Western Front, Hamilton was awarded control of the Gallipoli operation in deference to both his seniority and his close personal relationship with Lord Kitchener. Despite his wide-ranging experience, Hamilton had never held operational command before, and as he was to discover, the Dardanelles campaign would not prove an easy one to cut his teeth on.

\*

While he would remain optimistic in many of his communiqués with Kitchener, Hamilton's personal writings reveal an officer who was fully cognizant of the risks he was undertaking. One of his first actions after being appointed commander of the newly minted Mediterranean Expeditionary Force (MEF) was to purchase the notebook that eventually became his *Gallipoli Diary*.<sup>266</sup> In Hamilton's own words, the reason for maintaining a diary was so that if he found himself in front of a court martial or Royal Commission, as his superiors had following the Second Anglo-Boer War, he would have

---

<sup>264</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 87.

<sup>265</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 87.

<sup>266</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 4.

all his notes in one place and be able to properly defend himself.<sup>267</sup> Thoughts such as these from the Commander-in-Chief of the operation did not bode well for the Dardanelles expedition.

Hamilton's concerns only grew after his initial attempts at familiarizing himself with the Dardanelles failed. A search of the military archives revealed no existing plans for an amphibious raid on Gallipoli.<sup>268</sup> Worse still, the army lacked any up to date maps of the peninsula, and any real information on the strength of the Ottoman defences. "The Dardanelles and Bosphorus (sic)," Hamilton fumed in his diary, "might be in the moon for all the military information I have got to go upon. One text book and one book of traveller's tales don't take long to master and I have not been so free from work or preoccupation since the war started."<sup>269</sup> In the absence of any data to work with, Hamilton found his hopes of drafting an initial plan to be a nonstarter. "There is no use in trying to make plans," he wrote, "unless there is some sort of material, political, naval, military or geographical to work upon."<sup>270</sup>

One of the reasons why Hamilton had accompanied Carden and de Roebeck was with the intent of viewing the Dardanelles himself and working out a functioning scheme for the landings, should they be needed. Alas for Hamilton, he arrived on March 17, only one day before de Roebeck's cataclysmic attempt at rushing the straits put a halt to naval operations and made the need for an army landing clear. On March 22, de Roebeck told Hamilton that his remaining ships, even if reinforced, could not hope to crack the

---

<sup>267</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 4.

<sup>268</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 16.

<sup>269</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 16.

<sup>270</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 16.

Ottoman defences without the support of the army.<sup>271</sup> Suddenly Hamilton, who had joined the fleet planning only to observe, was responsible for drafting, on the spot, a plan for a joint army/navy amphibious attack on Gallipoli. Writing in his journal that day, Hamilton observed that “The fat (that is us) is fairly in the fire.”<sup>272</sup>

It was here that Kitchener’s longstanding refusal to admit a land campaign might be necessary came back to haunt Sir Ian Hamilton. Despite de Roebeck’s assurances that it was impossible for his flotilla to advance without the aid of Hamilton’s ground troops, Hamilton was in no position to chance a landing. His total staff still consisted of nine General Staff officers, with no Administrative Staff to support them.<sup>273</sup> Hamilton’s designated Quartermaster-General, Adjutant-General, and Surgeon-General had all been unavailable to join him at the Dardanelles, and while Sir William R. Birdwood’s Anzacs were ready for action, Sir Aylmer Hunter-Weston’s all important 29<sup>th</sup> Division was not.<sup>274</sup> “On the German system,” Hamilton informed his diary, “plans for a landing on Gallipoli would have been in my pocket, up-to-date and worked out to a ball cartridge and a pail of water. By the British system (?) I have been obliged to concoct my own plans in a brace of shakes almost under fire.”<sup>275</sup> With no available plan to work with, Hamilton was forced to cable Kitchener, requesting, among other things, that the Secretary of War make available additional engineers, hand grenades, trench mortars, bombs, and periscopes.<sup>276</sup> He also requested that a brigade of Indian Ghurkha mountain

---

<sup>271</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 30.

<sup>272</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 30.

<sup>273</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 43.

<sup>274</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 31-32.

<sup>275</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 31.

<sup>276</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 34.

troops be made available to assist Birdwood's Anzacs and began the search for additional landing craft, as those initially detailed to him were overloaded and insufficient.<sup>277</sup>

The absence of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division and with it, the ability to risk an immediate landing, would bedevil Hamilton for the rest of March 22. Writing to himself, Hamilton complained that "There are no small craft to speak of. There is no provision for carrying water. There is no information *at all* about springs or wells ashore. There is no arrangement for getting off the wounded and my Principal Medical Officer and his Staff won't be here for a fortnight. My orders against piecemeal occupation are specific. But the 29<sup>th</sup> Division is our *pièce de résistance* and it won't be here, we reckon—not complete—for another three weeks."<sup>278</sup> Attempting a landing under these circumstances, he concluded, would be pointless. "If I did so handle my troops on the spot as to sup on Achi Baba to-morrow night, I still could not counter the inevitable reaction of numbers, time and space. The Turks would have at least a fortnight to concentrate their whole force against my half force; to defeat them and then to defy the other half."<sup>279</sup>

Kitchener's reticence about land operations was proving seriously detrimental to Hamilton's hopes of recovering the situation. Long after the Secretary of War had come around to the idea of landing men at Gallipoli, his initial reluctance mobilize sufficient troops for that purpose continued to hamper Hamilton's ability to plan. For over a month, Hamilton would have to fall back to Egypt to gather and train his troops and staff, and, after the latter's arrival, hash out a workable scheme for taking Gallipoli. During that time, neither Enver Pasha nor his men on the spot would prove idle, and the defences at Gallipoli would only, as Hamilton feared, grow stronger.

---

<sup>277</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 36.

<sup>278</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 32.

<sup>279</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 33.

\*

Sir Ian Hamilton's life did not become notably easier upon his arrival in Egypt. Despite its status as a British Army base of operations, Egypt was, at least nominally, not involved in the war. Worse still, from Hamilton's perspective, was the fact that while he was in charge of the MEF and the Gallipoli expedition, he was not in command of Egypt itself. The rule fell to High Commissioner Henry McMahon who controlled the diplomatic side of things, and British General Sir John Maxwell who was in charge of all other British forces in Egypt. Hamilton and Maxwell had served together in the Mahdist War and the Second Anglo-Boer War and had gotten along tolerably well, but in both of those conflicts the chain of command had been clear.<sup>280</sup> Here it was not, with neither Hamilton nor Maxwell falling into the other's sphere of control.<sup>281</sup> If Hamilton wished to effect events in Egypt or requisition reinforcements from among the troops deployed there, he either had to depend upon Maxwell's generosity, which was never great, or circumvent Maxwell by writing to Kitchener, always a risky procedure. The Secretary of War, Hamilton wrote, had an explosive temper where requests for reinforcements were concerned. "It is like going up to a tiger," Hamilton said, "and asking for a small slice of venison: I remember only too well his warning not to make his position impossible by pressing for troops etc."<sup>282</sup> Kitchener, for his part, was loathe to intervene between his two former protégés, which only further confused matters and drove Hamilton to distraction.

It did not take long for Hamilton to come into conflict with both McMahon and Maxwell, whose priorities were radically different from his own. Where Hamilton's chief

---

<sup>280</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 40.

<sup>281</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 40.

<sup>282</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 37.

concern was the success, inasmuch as success was possible, of his plans for a Gallipoli landing, McMahon and Maxwell's main goal was to prevent religious and nationalist unrest within Egypt. Hamilton believed, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the surest means of achieving that objective was to knock the Ottomans out of the war as quickly as possible. This was not a notion that McMahon and Maxwell shared.<sup>283</sup> When Hamilton, aware of the rocky terrain at Gallipoli, requested that a brigade of the Gurkha mountain troops assigned to Egypt be attached to Birdwood's Anzacs, Maxwell would not entertain the idea, insisting that he needed every man to protect Egypt against Ottoman-inspired sedition.<sup>284</sup> Hamilton's contention that the Ottomans could not possibly raise Egypt against Britain with the British Army camped outside Istanbul fell on deaf ears, and in the end both men wound up writing to Kitchener to express their cases.<sup>285</sup> Kitchener would eventually instruct Maxwell to "supply any troops in Egypt that can be spared, or even selected officers or men that Sir Ian Hamilton may want, for Gallipoli," but Maxwell, fearing for Egypt's security balked at this, and concealed Kitchener's telegram on the subject from Hamilton.<sup>286</sup> This was not the last time that the subject of reinforcements for Hamilton's MEF would run into difficulties at the hands of Sir John Maxwell; disagreements between the Hamilton and Maxwell would become, in fact, a feature of the upcoming campaign.

Even more problematic, Hamilton found, was the complete unwillingness on the part of McMahon or Maxwell to censor the Egyptian press. As British and French ships and troops poured into Alexandria, Hamilton discovered, to his dismay, that the *Egyptian*

---

<sup>283</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 53.

<sup>284</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 53.

<sup>285</sup> Nigel Steel & Peter Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1994): 33.

<sup>286</sup> Cited in Steel & Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, 33.

*Gazette* was reporting on every arrival, and worse still, speculating on the destination that the troops were bound for.<sup>287</sup> Maxwell refused to do anything about the problem of the *Gazette*, insisting that it was McMahon's preserve rather than his own.<sup>288</sup> McMahon, for his part, informed Hamilton that while the general was free to spread false information to counteract the stories in the *Gazette*, the paper itself could not be subject to censorship as Egypt was not party to the war effort.<sup>289</sup> The fiction that Egypt was not a part of the war, meant to prevent a Muslim uprising, was now actively hurting Hamilton's chances of success at Gallipoli. Confiding his anger to his diary on April 2, Hamilton wrote that "The *Gazette* continues to publish full details of our actions and my only hope is that the Turks will not be able to believe in folly so incredible."<sup>290</sup>

Whether or not the Ottomans were reading the *Egyptian Gazette*, any chance of achieving strategic or operational surprise had long been lost. The aborted naval-only attack on the Dardanelles had alerted the Sultanate's leadership to the Entente's intentions, and the Anglo-French military build-up in Egypt, so soon after de Roebeck's failure, could only have one realistic target. On March 24, a day before Hamilton's departure for Egypt, a thoroughly worried Enver Pasha activated the brand new Ottoman Fifth Army.<sup>291</sup> Commanded by German General Otto Liman von Sanders, the Fifth Army comprised Esat Pasha's III Corps (containing the 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> Divisions), German Colonel Erich Weber's XV Corps (containing the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Divisions), and the independent 5<sup>th</sup> Division under German Colonel Eduard von Soderstern.<sup>292</sup> Control of

---

<sup>287</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 44.

<sup>288</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 43.

<sup>289</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 49.

<sup>290</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 49.

<sup>291</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 43.

<sup>292</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 45.

the region was passed from Cevat Pasha and the Fortress Command, which had traditionally been responsible for the defence of the straits, to Liman von Sanders and his new army, granting the German officer and his Ottoman subordinates full authority over the peninsula.<sup>293</sup> Additional machine guns, cannon, howitzers, and barbed wire were funnelled to the peninsula as Liman von Sanders, Esat Pasha, and Weber sought to make Gallipoli as impregnable as possible. Writing after the war, Liman von Sanders claimed that “the British gave me four full weeks before their great landing. They had sent part of their troops to Egypt and perhaps also to Cyprus. The time was just sufficient to complete the most indispensable arrangements and to bring the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division under Colonel Nicolai from Constantinople.”<sup>294</sup>

In a diary entry on March 30, Hamilton bemoaned the fact that, unlike their German counterparts the British General Staff did not keep tabs on the names or abilities of notable enemy officers. “We,” he commented, “only attempt anything of that sort with burglars.”<sup>295</sup> Hamilton knew next to nothing of the strength or disposition of the Ottoman troops and less still about their commanders.<sup>296</sup> Had he been better informed his already jaded attitude might well have taken a turn for the blacker still. While Liman von Sanders had no combat experience himself, the majority of the Ottoman officers under his command had served in either the Libyan War or the Balkan Wars, as had many of their troops.<sup>297</sup> Perhaps even more importantly, all the key German and Ottoman commanders were staff college graduates, and thus thoroughly trained in the management of a

---

<sup>293</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 43.

<sup>294</sup> Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, 58.

<sup>295</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 60.

<sup>296</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 60.

<sup>297</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 95-98.

campaign on the operational scale.<sup>298</sup> Esat Pasha, for example, had graduated from both the Ottoman War Academy and the Prussian War Academy, achieving high marks at both.<sup>299</sup>

On the British side, the officers were nowhere near as qualified. In the whole of the British Army there were only four hundred forty-seven staff college graduates, with most officers, including the Secretary of War himself, Lord Kitchener, having never attended.<sup>300</sup> Among Hamilton's operational level commanders, only Sir Aylmer Hunter-Weston had graduated from the staff college.<sup>301</sup> Likewise, while all the MEF's generals, including Hamilton, had seen action in colonial campaigns, only Hunter-Weston had served in a modern war, officering a brigade on the Western Front in 1914.<sup>302</sup> In some respects the command staff of the MEF resembled a Boer War reunion more than anything else, with Hamilton, Birdwood, and Hunter-Weston all having served with Kitchener during that conflict.<sup>303</sup> Most of the units under their control, while well-trained, were new formations, created since the start of the war, with only the 29<sup>th</sup> Division being made up of British regulars.<sup>304</sup> When Kitchener expressed the opinion that the Ottoman forces would be "ill-officered" and "ill-led" he might more accurately have been talking about the MEF, whose leaders, while certainly brave, lacked the training and experience for an operation the scale of which they were being asked to lead. This is not to suggest, however, that a different set of British generals might have been better suited to the task. Not only were staff college graduates rare in the British Army, but no officer, however

---

<sup>298</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 95-98.

<sup>299</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 96.

<sup>300</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 81, 86.

<sup>301</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 88.

<sup>302</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 88.

<sup>303</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 86-88.

<sup>304</sup> Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *The First World War in the Middle East*, (London: C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd, 2014): 83.

brilliant and however well-prepared, can be expected to succeed at a task that has never been attempted before. The last time the British had attempted an amphibious operation on this scale had been in 1814 against Napoleon Bonaparte, prior to the advent of machineguns, rapid-fire artillery, and trench warfare.<sup>305</sup> In effect, the British Army had never done this before, and to try it for the first time at Gallipoli, against a well-prepared adversary who knew they were coming, was the sheerest of folly. Yet forward the operation went, in the name of preserving British prestige. Kitchener and his colleagues in the War Council had invested too much in the expedition to turn back now.

Hamilton, for his part, was fully aware of the risks that the British were running. In his diary he cursed the War Office for not having had a plan ready to go in advance and for granting the Ottomans so much time to prepare.<sup>306</sup> He damned Maxwell and McMahon for allowing details of his plans to make it into the papers, and the failed naval assault for robbing him of surprise on all but the tactical level. He worried endlessly about his lack of knowledge as to the terrain and the Ottomans' numbers and the nature of their defensive works. To read his diary is to read the account of a man trying to reassure himself that victory is possible, despite the odds. In the end, however, Hamilton could not say no to Lord Kitchener. He was Kitchener's protégé, Kitchener's friend, and Kitchener's man, and when the Secretary of War gave him his marching orders, Sir Ian Hamilton would execute them, whatever his misgivings.

\*

The scheme that finally emerged from Hamilton's troubled planning period called for the French and Naval Divisions to make diversionary strikes along the length of the

---

<sup>305</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 116.

<sup>306</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 33.

peninsula while the 29<sup>th</sup> Division and the two divisions of the Anzac Corps landed at Cape Helles and north of Gaba Tepe respectively.<sup>307</sup> The feints would hopefully draw Liman von Sanders' attention away from the 29<sup>th</sup> and Anzac beachheads, where the British, Australian, and New Zealand infantry would, with their superior man-for-man fighting skills, force the Ottomans from the beaches, and enable a breakthrough to the plateau beyond.<sup>308</sup> It was an inherently risky plan, but one that was, considering the short time Hamilton had had to work on it and the total lack of any doctrinal experience that he had to go upon, remarkably workable.

Hamilton has often been criticized for deploying all of his units and leaving himself without an operational reserve to reinforce success or stopper failure, but the truth is that he had few options. With all strategic and operational surprise lost after March 18 and the Ottomans well-aware that an attack was coming, Hamilton's only hope of success was to achieve tactical surprise by landing in a place that the enemy did not expect. For this to work, the Ottomans had to be unsure which of the landing beaches the main effort was being made at, hence the diversionary attacks that ate up Hamilton's reserve.

Hamilton had done his best to solve his men's problems at the tactical level, but there were some things that were beyond his control. He had insufficient artillery for one thing, and no way to get what artillery he did have ashore during the initial phase of the assault.<sup>309</sup> During the crucial first days of the expedition, his troops would have to rely on the supporting fire of de Roebeck's armada which had already proven incapable of fully suppressing mobile Ottoman artillery batteries. An absence of dedicated naval landing

---

<sup>307</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 82.

<sup>308</sup> Ulrichsen, *The First World War in the Middle East*, 83.

<sup>309</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 85.

craft only worsened Hamilton's difficulties, leaving him apprehensive about whether the men would even be able to get ashore.<sup>310</sup> In the end they managed to, but it was a very near run thing.

From the start of the landing attempts on April 25, little went right for the British. The Anzacs managed to get lost, coming ashore not at their designated beach, but at Ari Burnu.<sup>311</sup> In the end this may have actually saved the Australian and New Zealanders some casualties, as Liman von Sanders and Esat Pasha had anticipated the beach they were supposed to land at and positioned much of the Fifth Army's artillery on the cliffs above it.<sup>312</sup> At Ari Burnu, the Anzacs found themselves opposed by only a single regiment, the 27, under Mehmed Sefik. Sefik nonetheless resisted fiercely, and more importantly still, requested reinforcements from not only his immediate superior, Halil Sami Bey of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division, but from Mustafa Kemal Bey of the 19<sup>th</sup> Division, which was located closer to his position.<sup>313</sup>

It was here that the British, entirely unbeknownst to themselves, first encountered the two traits that, in Erickson's opinion, made the professional Ottoman Army so effective: its bottom-up reporting system, and its tactical flexibility. Ottoman officers, unlike their British counterparts, were required to read reports from their subordinates, take them seriously, and pass any important information along to their own superiors.<sup>314</sup> Within two hours of the Anzacs appearing off the coast of Ari Burnu, the reports of Entente activity had not only reached Sami Bey and Kemal Bey, but had been passed up

---

<sup>310</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 59.

<sup>311</sup> Steel & Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, 57.

<sup>312</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 50.

<sup>313</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 49-50.

<sup>314</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 90.

the chain of command to Esat Pasha, Liman von Sanders, and Enver Pasha himself.<sup>315</sup> This rapid reporting system, at least by First World War standards, frequently enabled Ottoman officers to act within the British decision cycle. In the time that it took Hamilton, trapped aboard the *Queen Elizabeth*, to make one decision, Liman von Sanders and his subordinates were able to make two and three decisions of their own.<sup>316</sup>

Even more important was Ottoman flexibility regarding unit cohesion and chain of command. Faced with a landing at Ari Burnu, and another immediately in front of him at Cape Helles, Sami Bey, initially charged with defending both beaches, realized he could not effectively do so.<sup>317</sup> Transferring command of the 27 Regiment to Kemal Bey, Sami instructed Sefik to treat Kemal as his new commander and to grant the men of the 19<sup>th</sup> Division all the assistance that he could.<sup>318</sup> With Kemal now responsible for the defence of Ari Burnu, Sami was able to focus all of his attentions and reinforcements on the 29<sup>th</sup> Division's landing at Cape Helles.

Esat Pasha, upon finding out about Kemal and Sami's arrangement, not only confirmed it, but also took this reorganization a step farther. Designating Kemal the "Ari Burnu Front Commander" and Sami the "Cape Helles Front Commander" Esat began feeding reinforcements to both officers, with the understanding that any units arriving at one of the beaches were to subject themselves to the instructions of the Front Commander.<sup>319</sup> The creation of these kinds of *ad hoc* formations was rare in the British military, but was second nature to Esat, whose Balkan War experiences had taught him to

---

<sup>315</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 134.

<sup>316</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 58, 182.

<sup>317</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 52.

<sup>318</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 135.

<sup>319</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 136.

think outside the box.<sup>320</sup> Liman von Sanders, for his part, recognized Ari Burnu and Cape Helles as the places of most import to Hamilton's plan and committed two of his remaining divisions to reinforcing Esat Pasha, Kemal Bey, and Sami Bey's defensive efforts.<sup>321</sup> Enver Pasha, kept abreast of developments by both Liman von Sanders and Fifth Army chief of staff Kazim Bey, a multilingual officer who had been a War Academy classmate of Enver's, was more than willing to meet the German general's requests for reinforcements. By the end of the first week, elements of the 4<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 16<sup>th</sup> Divisions were inbound for Gallipoli.<sup>322</sup>

By May 1, Hamilton's drive up the beaches had ground to a resounding halt. Stiff Ottoman resistance, coupled with nighttime counterattacks had sapped the morale of the Entente soldiers who were now, in the face of oncoming Ottoman reinforcements, forced to dig in themselves.<sup>323</sup> Confronted by an enemy who was far more professional and prepared than Lord Kitchener and the War Council had anticipated, neither Hunter-Weston nor Birdwood could advance any farther and there was little that Hamilton, still based aboard the *Queen Elizabeth*, could do to make them move. Aware that the men could not attack again for the meantime, and relieved to have simply gotten off the ships, Hamilton issued his now famous order to "dig, dig, dig."<sup>324</sup> The plan to take Gallipoli and open the road to Istanbul was, for the moment at least, on hiatus.

\*

The fighting at Gallipoli would continue on for months with little change.

Hamilton and his subordinate commanders have received their fair share of critique for

---

<sup>320</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 136.

<sup>321</sup> Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, 67.

<sup>322</sup> Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, 75.

<sup>323</sup> Ulrichsen, *The First World War in the Middle East*, 83.

<sup>324</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 85.

this, but the problems of this period lie outside the scope of this study. Following the failure to get off the beaches, the Gallipoli front assumed much the same character as that in Flanders, with the men failing to advance not because of colonial attitudes, but because of the difficulties of trench warfare, which were endemic to all fronts in the First World War. Hamilton, Birdwood, and Hunter-Weston, like Sir John French and Sir Douglas Haig in France, had no easy answers to the problems of trench warfare. Liman von Sanders, Esat Pasha, Kemal Bey and Sami Bey had no easy answers either, and both sides would spend the lives of thousands of soldiers attempting to break the deadlock.

That the expedition bogged down in the trenches, however, was something that could be ascribed to the colonialist expectations of Kitchener, Churchill, and the other members of the War Council. Despite all the criticism that has been levelled at him over the last century, Sir Ian Hamilton's plan of assault was not a bad one. Given that the British Army and Navy had never attempted an operation of this sort, the fact that Hamilton was able to get his men ashore with their units largely intact is a tribute to his qualities as a general. Edward Erickson, in his book *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, notes "that the officers and men involved in the Gallipoli landings achieved such successes as they did was a monumental achievement undertaken in almost impossible circumstances."<sup>325</sup> Comparing Hamilton's attempt to take Gallipoli with a similarly sized operation undertaken by Sir Douglas Haig in Flanders that March, Erickson observes that Haig's men were better supplied and supported by artillery and were attacking across a narrow front from positions they had occupied for months. Despite these advantages,

---

<sup>325</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 117.

“Haig’s attack collapsed in three days, while after three days Hamilton was just getting started.”<sup>326</sup>

The inability of the Entente forces to break out from the beaches lay not with Hamilton, Birdwood, or Hunter-Weston, who while certainly guilty of tactical errors, were doing their best with what they had to work with. The failure, rather, lay with Kitchener and the War Council, who had set the unprepared and outgunned MEF on a collision course with a competent, highly professional adversary, who had had a full month to prepare. In waiting until March 12 to give Hamilton the job, and refusing Churchill access to sufficient army support before that, Lord Kitchener put his unfortunate friend in the unenviable position of launching a hastily prepared assault with insufficient men and artillery against an enemy who knew that he was coming. The task was, from the start, impossible, something that Hamilton suspected but that Kitchener, still secure in his belief that the sight of the Union Jack would send the Ottomans running, did not.

As a military concept, the Gallipoli expedition was, in effect, dead on arrival. It was an unworkable idea, based on notions of Ottoman military prowess that had been handily disproven on March 18. The plan to take Gallipoli, like the plan to force the straits before it, relied on the Ottoman Army being incompetent, and any plan that relies on the enemy making mistakes is almost destined to be stillborn. As Secretary of War, Kitchener failed Hamilton and every soldier under his command, allowing his search for a recognizable colonial conflict to override his perceptions of reality, inaugurating a campaign in which victory could not, by virtue of the resources available, be achieved. Hamilton, Birdwood, and Hunter-Weston all made tactical mistakes, certainly, but they

---

<sup>326</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 117.

made them in an effort to extricate themselves and their men from the strategic and operational trap into which Kitchener and Churchill had so blithely pushed them.

## Chapter 5: Acknowledging Failure

Neither Lord Kitchener nor Enver Pasha was prepared to let their men sit idle on the Gallipoli peninsula. The Ottoman Minister of War wanted the MEF thrown into the sea, while his British counterpart still hoped to open a path to Istanbul. In Kitchener's case, there was the added motivation of needing to restore British prestige in the Middle East, which the War Council assumed to have been badly tarnished following the disasters of March 18 and the stalemate of April 25 to May 1. Originally meant to earn the Entente an easy victory and knock the Ottomans out of the war, the Gallipoli campaign was now becoming, in the minds of Kitchener and the War Council, a life-and-death struggle to prevent the Empire's Muslim subjects from rising in revolt. Rather than withdrawing from a theatre in which advancing had become impossible, Kitchener doubled down on failure and continued to pressure Hamilton to break free of the beaches and take Istanbul.

Both sides flooded Gallipoli with reinforcements. On the Ottoman side, this soon required another operational reorganization. With the withdrawal of French troops from Kum Kale on the Asian side of the peninsula, Liman von Sanders was able to bring Erich Weber's XV Corps to the European side to support Esat Pasha's hard-pressed III Corps.<sup>327</sup> Taking a leaf from Esat's playbook, Liman von Sanders created two *ad hoc* formations to control the action at Ari Burnu and Cape Helles and enable Kemal Bey and Sami Bey to return to their divisional duties.<sup>328</sup> The Northern Group, under Esat, was given responsibility for Ari Burnu, or Anzac Cove to the British, and its environs, while

---

<sup>327</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 93.

<sup>328</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 93.

the Southern Group assumed command over the fighting at Cape Helles.<sup>329</sup> Initially headed by Eduard von Soderstern of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division, the Southern Group was later handed off to Erich Weber and his XV Corps staff, and then in July to Mehmed Vehip Pasha.<sup>330</sup> Vehip Pasha was Esat Pasha's younger brother, and had served as his chief of staff during the Balkan Wars, where their Yanya Corps had held out for several months against the Greek Army of Epirus.<sup>331</sup> The commander of the Second Army in spring of 1915, Vehip brought its staff with him when he succeeded to the position of Southern Group commander.<sup>332</sup> Additional corps and army staffs were transferred to the Northern Group and to Liman von Sanders, improving the Fifth Army's ability to manage the fighting.<sup>333</sup>

In addition to reinforcing the command groups with staff officers, Enver Pasha also dispatched additional men to the front lines. The 4<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 16<sup>th</sup> Divisions had been sent to Gallipoli within the first few weeks, and Enver followed them with the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Divisions over the course of the spring and summer.<sup>334</sup> Enver also authorised Cevat Pasha to release several batteries of guns from the Fortress Command for Fifth Army use.<sup>335</sup> Though these reinforcements did not make up for all the casualties that Liman von Sanders had suffered, they did keep the Fifth Army in combat-ready condition.<sup>336</sup> Officers who showed signs of mental and physical exhaustion were also replaced. Not only did Vehip Pasha replace Erich Weber as Southern Group commander, but Hasan Basri took over 5<sup>th</sup> Division from Eduard von Soderstern, and

---

<sup>329</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 93.

<sup>330</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 99, 129.

<sup>331</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 97.

<sup>332</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 129.

<sup>333</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 114.

<sup>334</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 154.

<sup>335</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 161.

<sup>336</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*, 161.

German Colonel Hans Kannengiesser relieved 9<sup>th</sup> Division's Halil Sami Bey, who had been in action for forty-four days straight.<sup>337</sup> While the presence of German officers was nowhere near as vital to the Ottoman victory as many British historians would later claim, the apparent inter-changeability of German and Ottoman leaders does speak volumes about the flexibility of the Ottoman Army's command structure.

Hamilton too, received his share of reinforcements. The 29<sup>th</sup> Indian Brigade, which he had asked Maxwell for during his stay in Egypt, and which Maxwell had sought to deny him, was ordered by Kitchener to embark for Gallipoli, arriving on May 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>338</sup> Finally realising that Maxwell had hidden his prior telegram from Hamilton, Kitchener telegraphed the MEF commander and informed him that, "if you want more troops from Egypt Maxwell will give you any support from Egyptian garrison that you may require."<sup>339</sup> Upon receipt of this message, Hamilton immediately asked that the 42<sup>nd</sup> Division be sent from Egypt, a move to which Kitchener convinced Maxwell to assent.<sup>340</sup> After its arrival, the 42<sup>nd</sup> deployed to Cape Helles where at Hamilton's request and with Kitchener's permission, it, the 29<sup>th</sup> Division, and the Royal Naval Division were reorganized into the new VIII Corps under Hunter-Weston.<sup>341</sup> The French government also arranged for an additional division to be dispatched to supplement the one already at Gallipoli, transforming France's *Corps Expéditionnaire d'Orient* into a genuine army corps.<sup>342</sup>

---

<sup>337</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 114.

<sup>338</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 94.

<sup>339</sup> Cited in Steel & Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, 147.

<sup>340</sup> Steel & Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, 147.

<sup>341</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*,

<sup>342</sup> Steel & Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, 147.

In exchange for these reinforcements, Hamilton was expected to once more take action against the Ottomans. At a War Council meeting in May, Kitchener granted that from a purely military perspective, a withdrawal from Gallipoli was sensible but that, for political reasons, it could not be done.<sup>343</sup> At his insistence the 52<sup>nd</sup> Division was also sent to the Dardanelles.<sup>344</sup> When these troops still proved insufficient in the face of Ottoman tenacity, Kitchener ordered that the new IX Corps, comprising the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mounted Division, and the 53<sup>rd</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup> Territorial Divisions, and led by The Honourable Sir Frederick Stopford, also be shipped to Gallipoli to take part in Hamilton's upcoming August offensive.<sup>345</sup> As on the Ottoman side, worn out or incapable British officers were replaced with fresh ones; most notably Hunter-Weston was relieved in July by W. Douglas and then Sir Frances Davies.<sup>346</sup> The reasons for Hunter-Weston's relief have never been entirely clear, but according to Hamilton, he was suffering from sunstroke.<sup>347</sup>

As for Hamilton himself, he was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the War Council and War Office's expectations of him and his men. As early as May 5, he wrote that "the War Office urge me to throw my brave troops yet once more against machine guns in redoubts; to do it on the cheap; to do it without the shell that gives the attack a sporting chance."<sup>348</sup> "The War Office," he added, "stand convicted of having been hopelessly wrong in their estimates and preparations. For we must have been held up somewhere, surely; we must have fought *somewhere*. I suppose even if we had forced

---

<sup>343</sup> Steel & Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, 168.

<sup>344</sup> Steel & Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, 168.

<sup>345</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 164.

<sup>346</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 229.

<sup>347</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 229.

<sup>348</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 111.

the Straits—even if we had taken Constantinople without firing a shot, we must have fought somewhere! Otherwise, a child’s box of tin soldiers sent by post would have been just the thing for the Dardanelles landing!”<sup>349</sup> It was not the advice, he said, that angered him but, “the fact that people who have made a mistake, and should be sorry, slur over my appeal for the stuff advances are made of and yet continue to urge us on as if we were hanging back.”<sup>350</sup>

Hamilton returned to this theme several times in his diary. On June 2, after German submarines chased much of the Royal Navy from the straits he sneered: “What a change since the War Office sent us packing with a bagful of hallucinations. Naval guns sweeping the Turks off the Peninsula; the Ottoman Army legging it from a British submarine waving the Union Jack; Russian help in hand; Greek help on the *tapis*. Now it is our Fleet which has to leg it from the German submarine; there is no ammunition for the guns; no drafts to keep my Divisions up to strength; my Russians have gone to Galicia, and the Greeks are lying lower than ever.”<sup>351</sup> It was a bitter, sarcastic denunciation of the campaign thus far. Still, Hamilton was a loyal soldier, and at the urging of Kitchener and the War Council he dutifully planned the August offensive that would prove to be the last great phase of the Entente’s attempt to take Gallipoli.

\*

Perhaps no other battle of the Gallipoli campaign better encapsulates the failures of the British high command than Hamilton’s August offensive. The plan called for simultaneous attacks at Cape Helles and Ari Burnu, coupled with a landing at Suvla Bay

---

<sup>349</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 111.

<sup>350</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 111.

<sup>351</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 144.

by Stopford's new IX Corps.<sup>352</sup> The creation of a Suvla beachhead, it was hoped, would draw Ottoman troops away from Cape Helles and especially Ari Burnu, which would then enable the Anzac Corps, which had been struggling in recent months, to achieve a breakout from their cramped position.<sup>353</sup> Unfortunately, for Hamilton and his staff, while Kitchener had provided an entire corps' worth of reinforcements, they still did not outnumber the well-entrenched Ottomans by anything like the numbers necessary for success. Worse still, continued shortages of cannon and howitzer ammunition and water transport ensured that the troops at Suvla would be coming ashore without sufficient artillery support or drinkable water.<sup>354</sup>

Further complicating the situation, the IX Corps was not a veteran formation, but a New Army unit, formed largely of recent recruits and headed by an untested commander. Sir Frederick Stopford might have been an experienced soldier, with service in Egypt, Sudan, Nigeria, and South Africa under his belt, but he had always been an aide de camp, adjutant, or secretary, rather than a leader.<sup>355</sup> Approaching retirement, Stopford's last major posting had been a ceremonial one as the Lieutenant of the Tower of London, which had not exactly prepared him for high-intensity modern combat.<sup>356</sup> Stopford had certainly not been Hamilton's first choice for the job, with the MEF commander originally requesting the services of either Sir Henry Rawlinson or Sir Julian Byng, both of whom were serving with distinction on the Western Front.<sup>357</sup> Kitchener had refused this suggestion, however, on the basis that Sir Bryan Mahon would be

---

<sup>352</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 244.

<sup>353</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 244.

<sup>354</sup> Travers, *Gallipoli*, 208.

<sup>355</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 88.

<sup>356</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 88.

<sup>357</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 164.

heading up the IX Corps' 10<sup>th</sup> Division, and that any general placed in command must be senior to Mahon.<sup>358</sup> Given the choice between Mahon himself, whom Hamilton considered an incompetent, Sir John Ewart, who was in ill-health and not up to the rigours of fighting at Gallipoli, and Stopford, Hamilton chose Stopford, under the logic that an unknown quantity was better than a known bad one.<sup>359</sup> To Stopford's credit he arrived at Gallipoli well ahead of his slowly assembling corps, which gave Hamilton the chance to give him some on-the-job training, placing Stopford in charge of VIII Corps between Hunter-Weston's relief, and the arrival of both the IX Corps and General Douglas' temporary promotion.<sup>360</sup> Stopford performed adequately in this role, which alleviated some of Hamilton's concerns.

There was a world of difference, however, between commanding the veteran men of the VIII Corps during a comparative lull in the fighting, and running an amphibious landing with untried troops. While Stopford successfully landed the men of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Divisions at Suvla Bay, he was unable to get them to advance in a timely manner, with sniper attacks from German Major Wilhelm Willmer's battalion causing a great deal of confusion and hesitation among the men on the beachhead.<sup>361</sup> Communications among the British soldiers were as erratic and low-quality as ever, as evidenced by the fact that Major-General Frederick Hammersley of the 11<sup>th</sup> Division was, at one point, able to contact Sir William Birdwood at Anzac HQ, but not his own CO, Stopford.<sup>362</sup> These problems, together with the lack of water and artillery shells, and Stopford's caution, perhaps to be expected in a man launching his first ever offensive, enabled Willmer, with

---

<sup>358</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 166.

<sup>359</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 155, 166.

<sup>360</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 227.

<sup>361</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 158.

<sup>362</sup> Steel & Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, 249, 261.

around 3000 men, to hold up the better part of two British divisions until reinforcements arrived.<sup>363</sup>

The Ottoman reporting system worked as quickly as ever, and ensured swift responses at Cape Helles, Ari Burnu, and the new Suvla Bay front. Ahmed Fevzi's XVI Corps was marched from its base at Saros Bay to positions near Suvla and Ari Burnu, while Liman von Sanders ordered the establishment of a new *ad hoc* Anafarta Group to guard against the overlapping danger zones of the Suvla landing and the attempted Anzac breakout.<sup>364</sup> At Liman von Sanders' urging, Kemal Bey was once more pulled from divisional command and put in charge of the Anafarta Group, with orders to contain both the Anzacs and the IX Corps.<sup>365</sup> Perhaps few things better symbolized the inherent problems and assumptions of the Gallipoli expedition than the idea of Stopford, an elderly colonial soldier with no real leadership experience, going up against Kemal Bey, a modern soldier, future national hero, and veteran of the Libyan War and both Balkan Wars. Opposed by an adversary who understood the terrain better than they ever could, neither Stopford's IX Corps nor Birdwood's Anzacs could break free of the beachheads.

Hamilton was livid with Stopford, whom he would blame for the overall collapse of the offensive.<sup>366</sup> With Kitchener's permission, he sacked Stopford, replacing him first with Sir Henry de Beauvoir De Lisle of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division, and then with Sir Julian Byng, whom he had wanted for the job in the first place.<sup>367</sup> Mahon, whose seniority had caused so much trouble, refused to serve under De Lisle and tendered his resignation; shortly afterwards Hamilton also rid himself of the 11<sup>th</sup> Division's Hammersley, whose

---

<sup>363</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 158.

<sup>364</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 153.

<sup>365</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*, 157.

<sup>366</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 273.

<sup>367</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 274.

performance at Suvla had been less than satisfactory.<sup>368</sup> It was too late, however, to turn the tide of the battle. Against fresh Ottoman forces, strongly entrenched in their new positions, and commanding the high ground, none of Hamilton's generals could advance without a serious advantage in numbers. In an August 17 letter to Kitchener, Hamilton admitted as much, stating that "My British Divisions are at present 45, 000 under establishment, exclusive of about 9, 000 promised or on the way. If this deficit were made up, and new formations totalling 50, 000 rifles sent out to us as well, these, with the 60, 000 rifles which I estimate I shall have at the time of their arrival, should give me the necessary superiority, unless the absence of other enemies allows the Turks to bring up large additional reinforcements."<sup>369</sup> By the end of August, Hamilton had called off the attack. There would be no more to follow it.

The Suvla Bay landings and the August offensive as a whole had been a catastrophe for the same reasons that had made the March naval assault and the initial army landings in April a catastrophe. Throughout the entirety of the campaign, Kitchener and the War Council had never let go of their notion of winning victories on the cheap against an enemy they did not respect and viewed through a strictly colonial lens. Unwilling to grasp that their men could not advance in the face of fierce Ottoman opposition, the War Council continued to ask Hamilton to do the impossible, while denying him access to the men and supplies that he would have required to stand a fighting chance. After months of bloodshed, the loss of a third of the Mediterranean fleet and more than a quarter million casualties, Kitchener and his colleagues were still reluctant to accept what Hamilton had known since May and reiterated in his August 17

---

<sup>368</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 274.

<sup>369</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 280.

letter, namely that, “we are up against the Turkish Army which is well commanded and fighting bravely.”<sup>370</sup>

\*

With Hamilton admitting that further advances were impossible, one might have expected that a decision to either withdraw from the peninsula or massively reinforce the MEF would be made. A swift decision, however, was not forthcoming from the British political leadership. A reshuffling of the Cabinet had seen the old War Council subdivided into smaller parts, including the War Committee, which oversaw general strategy, and the Dardanelles Committee, which had responsibility for the Gallipoli operation itself, and subsequently, operations against the Ottomans in general. What had not changed, however, were the Committees’ perceptions of the campaign, and of the possible political repercussions of a withdrawal from Gallipoli. Rather than sound the retreat, the War Committee and Dardanelles Committee wasted six months debating the potential ramifications of pulling back, leaving the soldiers under Sir Ian Hamilton’s command to suffer on. While Hamilton had no intention of launching any further offensives, casualties still mounted from disease, skirmishes, and Ottoman snipers.

The debate over abandoning Gallipoli divided Britain’s political and military leadership. HH Asquith was prepared to entertain the possibility of a retreat, as were a number of prominent military figures, including future Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir William Robertson.<sup>371</sup> Among those opposed were Winston Churchill, demoted to Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster but still an influential voice in the Cabinet, Arthur Balfour, promoted to Churchill’s old job as First Lord of the Admiralty, and Lord

---

<sup>370</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 280.

<sup>371</sup> Steel & Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, 391.

George Curzon, former Viceroy of India and current Lord Privy Seal. Kitchener, undoubtedly the most important minister involved in the discussion, was indecisive, aware that an evacuation made military sense, but fearing the political consequences for British prestige in the Islamic world and beyond. Kitchener's indecision was worsened by Sir John Maxwell, who informed him in no uncertain terms that the evacuation of the Dardanelles, if not countered by a renewed offensive elsewhere, would trigger unrest and revolt in Egypt.<sup>372</sup> Kitchener, ever willing to believe Maxwell, dutifully reported to the War Committee that Egypt was in imminent danger from the Ottomans, a fact he would continue to cite throughout October, November, and December of 1915.<sup>373</sup>

As usual, it is hard to pinpoint exactly what was fuelling Maxwell's fears. The first of the Senussi raids into the Western Desert had commenced, but they were small-scale, pinprick attacks, rarely involving more than a few hundred men and requiring only a capable, mobile force to fend off.<sup>374</sup> The raids would irritate Maxwell throughout his time as Egypt's Commander-in-Chief, but never seriously threatened the British protectorate. By May of 1916 the Senussi had been successfully driven back into Libya.<sup>375</sup> In the Sudan, Sir Reginald Wingate had begun making preparations for the invasion and annexation of Darfur, whose Sultan, Ali Dinar, had once been an ally of the Mahdi.<sup>376</sup> Ali Dinar, Wingate reported, had been in contact with both Ottoman and

---

<sup>372</sup> Maurice Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, November 20, 1915," November 20, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/5/17): 4.

<sup>373</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, November 20, 1915," 5.

Maurice Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, December 1, 1915," December 1, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/6/1): 8.

Maurice Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, December 15, 1915," December 15, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/6/8): 4.

<sup>374</sup> Hadaway. *Pyramids and Fleshpots*, 104.

<sup>375</sup> Hadaway. *Pyramids and Fleshpots*, 114.

<sup>376</sup> Daly, *Empire on the Nile*, 177.

German agents, and was preparing to launch an invasion of the Sudan.<sup>377</sup> Wingate, never one to let the enemy strike first, began assembling an army to depose Ali Dinar, an operation that he would successfully carry out in March of 1916.<sup>378</sup> Even in the face of these real, if minor threats, however, Maxwell's overarching paranoia is hard to credit. Ali Dinar's army numbered only 10 000 men, and Wingate would need only 5000 British regulars to crush him and bring Darfur into the Sudanese protectorate.<sup>379</sup> The Senussi raids were even smaller, capable of little more than annoying Maxwell's command.<sup>380</sup> As Hamilton observed, "Maxwell has never had less than 70, 000 troops in Egypt, a country which might have been held with 10, 000 rifles."<sup>381</sup> Yet in his letters to Kitchener, Maxwell demanded 200 000 additional men to defend against a 400 000 man Ottoman army that he claimed was gathering to assault Egypt and provoke an uprising among the Arab nationalists.<sup>382</sup> In December he went even further, requesting fourteen extra divisions to defend the Egyptian frontier against unspecified adversaries.<sup>383</sup> That these enemies seemingly existed only in Maxwell's mind was something that Kitchener either did not realize, or did not care to inform the War Committee of, and Maxwell's horror of an Egyptian revolt would continue to colour the War Committee's debate over the withdrawal from Gallipoli, and the subsequent campaign in Mesopotamia.

Sir Ian Hamilton was also opposed to a retreat, though for more practical reasons than Maxwell. Convinced that the War Office would execute the retreat with the same

---

<sup>377</sup> Daly, *Empire on the Nile*, 177.

<sup>378</sup> Daly, *Empire on the Nile*, 180.

<sup>379</sup> Daly, *Empire on the Nile*, 181.

<sup>380</sup> Hadaway, *Pyramids and Fleshpots*, 104.

<sup>381</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 350.

<sup>382</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, November 20, 1915," 5.

<sup>383</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, December 1, 1915," (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/6/1): 9.

level of competence that it had shown in prosecuting the campaign, Hamilton feared that he would lose a majority of his troops evacuating the beaches.<sup>384</sup> Hamilton's opinion, however, was not to count for much longer. The War Committee, looking for a scapegoat for the failures of the operation to date, determined that Hamilton had lost the trust of the men and had him replaced with Sir Charles Monro.<sup>385</sup> This decision was to prove a mistake, however, on the part of those committed to continuing operations at Gallipoli. Monro had no sooner arrived at the Dardanelles than he had sent Kitchener a letter recommending immediate evacuation. Monro was roundly mocked by Kitchener and his allies, especially Churchill who claimed that, "he came, he saw, he capitulated," and was replaced by Sir William Birdwood of the Anzac Corps.<sup>386</sup> Birdwood, however, proved no more compliant than Monro, informing Kitchener that if the War Office was not prepared to send him more troops he could not advance.<sup>387</sup> Most of Birdwood's subordinates, including Davies and Byng, shared his assessment. Kitchener, finally moved to action, visited Gallipoli in November and, after touring the frontlines alongside Monro and Birdwood, came to the conclusion that they had been right.<sup>388</sup> Reluctantly, and convinced of the destruction the decision would wreak upon British prestige in the Middle East, Kitchener recommended to the Cabinet that the British evacuate most of their positions at Gallipoli.<sup>389</sup>

Unfortunately, even with Kitchener and the whole of the British military establishment now in favour of cutting their losses, the War Committee and Dardanelles

---

<sup>384</sup> Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 350.

<sup>385</sup> Maurice Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 14, 1915," October 14, 1915. (Catalogue ref: 42/4/9): 5.

<sup>386</sup> Steel & Hart, *Defeat at Gallipoli*, 375.

<sup>387</sup> Travers, *Gallipoli*, 277.

<sup>388</sup> Travers, *Gallipoli*, 277.

<sup>389</sup> Travers, *Gallipoli*, 277.

Committee proved less than easy to convince. Asquith might have been willing to listen, but Churchill, Balfour, and Lord Curzon were not. Churchill, in an October memorandum, insisted that the position at Gallipoli was salvageable, and that the terrain, contrary to all reality, in fact favoured the British over the Ottomans.<sup>390</sup> Even with Bulgaria's entry into the war and Serbia's imminent defeat, Churchill was sure the Ottomans would never be able to import enough ammunition from Germany and Austria-Hungary to defeat the British.<sup>391</sup> That the Ottomans had already fought the British to a draw with the ammunition on hand was something that would appear to have evaded Churchill's notice. Arthur Balfour, writing on November 19, four days after Kitchener's tour of the front, took things a step farther, arguing that it did not matter whether military success could be obtained at the Dardanelles.<sup>392</sup> To Balfour, the political cost of leaving Gallipoli trumped the casualties that the military would sustain in continuing to try and hold it.<sup>393</sup> "By such an abandonment," he wrote, "we should lose credit in our own eyes, in those of our enemies, and in those of our friends. Quite apart from its effect on our prestige in the East (about which so much has been said in Cabinet), we have a character to lose in the West. To Russia the blow would be staggering. Even those who rate at the lowest our military organisation and training have never denied us the qualities of tenacity and courage. What will they say when they see us deserting without a struggle a position so important and so hardly won?"<sup>394</sup> That there had already been a struggle and

---

\* The author's grandfather, a veteran of the WWII Italian campaign, often swore that Churchill, who dubbed Italy "the soft underbelly of Europe" was incapable of recognizing the concept, let alone the existence, of a mountain. The author is beginning to suspect that his grandfather may have been onto something.

<sup>390</sup> Winston S. Churchill, "Gallipoli," October 7, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 37/135/11): 3.

<sup>391</sup> Churchill, "Gallipoli," 2.

<sup>392</sup> Arthur J. Balfour, "Gallipoli," November 19, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 37/137/36): 1.

<sup>393</sup> Balfour, "Gallipoli," 1.

<sup>394</sup> Balfour, "Gallipoli," 1.

that the British had already lost it, was not something Balfour seemed prepared to admit. All that mattered to him was maintaining an illusion of British invincibility, to reassure Russia and France and keep Britain's Muslim possessions in a state of servitude.

Lord George Curzon, writing on November 25, took Balfour's argument to its most extreme conclusion. As a former Indian Viceroy, Curzon was widely regarded as an expert on "Asiatics" and on Islam in particular.<sup>395</sup> A major proponent of intellectual Orientalism, Curzon had joined forces with Lord Cromer in 1909 in a departmental committee that advocated for the creation of the London University School of Oriental and African Studies.<sup>396</sup> Cromer and Curzon had pushed for the establishment of such a school not out of pure academic interest, but with the intention of properly training the next generation of British colonial administrators; Oriental studies were, in Curzon's words, "the necessary furniture of Empire."<sup>397</sup> Now, Lord Curzon brought all of his supposed expertise to bear in a memorandum that was frankly remarkable in its concentration and encapsulation of every paranoid British fantasy concerning the Islamic world. Denigrating the Ottoman ability to force the British from Gallipoli, Curzon proceeded to dismiss any military concerns that the army chiefs had as unimportant; what mattered was not manpower losses, but the tarnishing of Britain's prestige.<sup>398</sup> A withdrawal, he said, would have the effect of "setting the Mohammedan world ablaze" and would hand Egypt to the Ottomans.<sup>399</sup> Citing Kitchener's, and Maxwell's, terror of the Arabs uniting behind the Ottomans and the British being driven from Egypt and the Sudan by Islamic revolt, Curzon took his analysis even farther, claiming that "the

---

<sup>395</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 237.

<sup>396</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 237.

<sup>397</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 237.

<sup>398</sup> George Curzon, "The Evacuation of Gallipoli," November 25, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 37/138/12): 1.

<sup>399</sup> Curzon, "The Evacuation of Gallipoli," 5.

Moslems in Egypt, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Persia, Afghanistan have been kept more or less quiet by the assumption that the Turks would be expelled from Europe, that the dynasty of Othman [sic] was doomed, and that another Khalifate would before long be set up in its place.”<sup>400</sup> In Curzon’s worldview, the entirety of the Muslim world, Shi’a and Sunni alike, was eager to join the Ottomans’ war against Britain, and was kept in check only by the apparent invincibility of the British Army. That the collapse of the naval campaign, the inability of the British to take Gallipoli, and the simultaneous defeat of the Indian Expeditionary Force at Ctesiphon earlier that November, had already demonstrated that Britain was not invincible and that falling back from the Dardanelles could hardly worsen the Empire’s international image, was something Curzon does not seem to have considered.

Continuing to indulge in his fantasies of Muslim uprisings and the collapse of Entente rule over the Islamic world, Curzon reiterated that Afghanistan and Persia were now certain to side with the Germans, that the loss at Ctesiphon meant there was no longer a way for the British to make up for lost prestige, and that there would be “serious disturbances in Egypt; extending to Tunis, Algiers, and Morocco,” if Britain withdrew from Gallipoli.<sup>401</sup> India too would be endangered, both by internal dissent and perhaps even an invasion from Afghanistan.<sup>402</sup> The only way to protect Egypt and the Raj, Curzon swore, was to remain at Gallipoli where the strain of the fighting must surely, despite all appearances to the contrary, cause the Ottomans to capitulate.<sup>403</sup> Demonstrating that he had absorbed no lessons from the stalemate of the last nine months, Lord Curzon

---

<sup>400</sup> Curzon, “The Evacuation of Gallipoli,” 9.

<sup>401</sup> Curzon, “The Evacuation of Gallipoli,” 9.

<sup>402</sup> Curzon, “The Evacuation of Gallipoli,” 10.

<sup>403</sup> Curzon, “The Evacuation of Gallipoli,” 9.

continued to hold out hope that the Ottoman losses at Gallipoli would trigger a coup in Istanbul that would dethrone Enver Pasha, Cemal Pasha, and Talaat Pasha and bring the Sultanate to the bargaining table.<sup>404</sup> Closing out his memorandum on a near hysterical note, Curzon wailed that his colleagues would have to justify themselves “to our countrymen and to posterity for what may turn out to be an indelible blot upon the British name.”<sup>405</sup>

In the end, Winston Churchill, Arthur Balfour, and Lord Curzon were overruled by the rest of the War Committee who, at the urging of Lord Kitchener and the military brass, agreed that it was finally time to pull back from Gallipoli.<sup>406</sup> Under the direction of Sir William Birdwood and Sir Julian Byng, the beaches at Ari Burnu and Suvla Bay were evacuated on December 19 and 20, with Cape Helles following on January 8 and 9.<sup>407</sup> The Gallipoli operation, which had wasted so many lives and so much time to so little benefit was finally over. Yet, in a sense, Curzon and his allies had won the argument. Through the summer and fall of 1915, as the realization that Gallipoli would have to be evacuated sank in, British concerns about their prestige in the Islamic world had climbed to new heights. In order to try and recoup their loss of face, the War Committee and Dardanelles Committee, consumed by Maxwell, Kitchener, and Curzon’s fears for Egypt and India, would spend the fall of 1915 inaugurating a new campaign against the Ottoman Sultanate, a campaign that, even as the last British soldier stepped off the beach at Gallipoli, was already on its way to its own disastrous conclusion.

---

<sup>404</sup> Curzon, “The Evacuation of Gallipoli,” 9.

<sup>405</sup> Curzon, “The Evacuation of Gallipoli,” 12.

<sup>406</sup> Travers, *Gallipoli*, 277.

<sup>407</sup> Travers, *Gallipoli*, 277-278.

## Chapter 6: “Where Are We Going to Stop in Mesopotamia?”

If the Gallipoli expedition was a monument to bad planning, the Mesopotamia expedition, which ran concurrently to it, was a monument to no planning. Initially conceived of as little more than a holding action to protect British oil interests in Aden, operations in Mesopotamia grew as the War Council and its successors sought cheap, easy triumphs to counterbalance their losses elsewhere. With victory proving elusive on the Western Front and at the Dardanelles, Asquith’s cabinet went searching for success wherever and however they could find it. While British soldiers were present in Mesopotamia long before Churchill and Kitchener had begun to work out their scheme for forcing the Dardanelles, the subsequent bloating of the campaign into a full scale attempt at taking Baghdad was the direct result of the catastrophe at Gallipoli. When Sir Ian Hamilton failed to take Istanbul and knock the Ottomans out of the war, the Dardanelles Committee, eager to preserve British prestige in the Muslim world, tried to compensate by turning a backwater campaign into a dagger thrust into the heart of the Ottoman Sultanate, with predictably disastrous results.

Many of the same players who bore responsibility for the Dardanelles fiasco would repeat their roles in Mesopotamia. Once again, Lord Kitchener would try to attempt to alleviate the strain of running a global conflict by seeking out a familiar colonial war against a people he thought he understood. Once again, Arthur Balfour, Winston Churchill, and Sir Edward Grey, whatever their personal misgivings about Kitchener’s leadership, would give him their unstinting support in his efforts to do so. Once again, Lord Curzon and Sir John Maxwell would do everything in their power to convince the Cabinet that an Islamist uprising in Egypt and India was imminent, and that

military steps had to be taken to prevent it. Nobody, it seemed, save perhaps for David Lloyd George, had learned any lessons from Gallipoli.

In addition to this familiar cast of characters, however, the Mesopotamia campaign would also be subject to the strategic whims and colonial ambitions of the Indian Raj. Both Viceroy Lord Charles Hardinge and his representative in London, Secretary of State for India Austen Chamberlain, made it clear that they saw the Mesopotamian expedition as an Indian project, meant to expand the Raj's influence in the Muslim world. Working through the War Committee and Dardanelles Committee, as well as their subordinates, Sir Beauchamp Duff and Sir John Nixon, Hardinge and Chamberlain did everything they could to keep the Indian Expeditionary Force in Mesopotamia under their control. Far more so than Gallipoli, Mesopotamia would become a truly colonial campaign, waged not only for the sake of British prestige, but with the intent of increasing the territory subject to the Raj. Conducted to assuage the War Committee's fears and the Viceroyalty's drive for colonial expansion, the Indian Army's Mesopotamia campaign would accomplish neither, and would leave the Indian Expeditionary Force's 6<sup>th</sup> Division and its commander, Sir Charles Townshend, trapped in a strategic and operational mess that was not of their own making. In this respect, as in so many others, the 1915-16 Mesopotamia expedition was a repeat of the Dardanelles campaign that came before it.

\*

Indian Expeditionary Force D (IEFD), commanded by Sir Arthur Barrett, first entered Ottoman territory in November 1914, after landing at Aden. Barrett was tasked by the Viceroy and by Indian Army chief Sir Beauchamp Duff with seizing the city, and

eventually the administrative region, of Basra, which bordered on Britain's ally and protectorate in Kuwait.<sup>408</sup> While the Raj presented this as a largely defensive move, meant to protect Anglo-Indian oil interests in Persia and Kuwait, the reality was quite different. As Sir Edmund Barrow, military secretary to the India Office, wrote, the operation was "Ostensibly to protect the oil installation but in reality to notify the Turks that we mean business and to the Arabs that we are ready to support them."<sup>409</sup> Barrow was far from the only member of the Indian establishment to see the Mesopotamian operation this way. For Lord Hardinge and his compatriots in the India Office, capture of Basra was the first step in an expedition meant to bring Mesopotamia under colonial occupation by the Raj and prevent the Arabs of Mesopotamia and the Arabian Peninsula alike from rallying to the Ottomans.<sup>410</sup> Sir Percy Cox, Secretary to the Government of India and eventual British commissioner in Mesopotamia, made his agreement with Hardinge's colonial ambitions clear when, in a telegram to the Viceroy, he declared that, "...Turkish troops recently engaged with us were completely panic-stricken and very unlikely to oppose us again...Effect of the recent defeat has been very great, and if advance is made before it wears off and while the cool season lasts Baghdad will in all probability fall into our hands very easily...After earnest consideration of the arguments for and against I find it difficult to see how we can well avoid taking over Baghdad."<sup>411</sup>

Barrett's easy capture of Basra, and his subsequent advance to Qurna that December fed into British narratives, as of yet untested at Gallipoli, about the Ottoman

---

<sup>408</sup> Davis, *Ends and Means*, 44.

<sup>409</sup> Cited in Davis, *Ends and Means*, 31-32.

<sup>410</sup> Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *The First World War in the Middle East*, London: C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd, 2014.

<sup>411</sup> "Cox to Viceroy." November 22, 1914. Cited in Patrick Crowley, *Kut 1916: Courage and Failure in Iraq*, (Briscombe Port Stroud: Spellmount, 2009): 17.

inability to fight back against a modern, Western army, and fuelled Hardinge and Cox's dreams of imperial expansion at the cost of the Ottoman Sultanate.<sup>412</sup> What none of Cox, nor Hardinge, nor the Cabinet in London seemed to understand was that the troops deployed in Mesopotamia were far from the best soldiers that the Ottoman Army had to offer.<sup>413</sup> Despite Baghdad's historical significance as the Abbasid caliphal capital, a significance that would often blind the British to modern realities, Mesopotamia was an administrative, economic, and military backwater.<sup>414</sup> There were only a few thousand Ottoman soldiers in the entire region, most of them poorly paid Arab conscripts led by second line officers and supported by what irregular levies the local Arab tribes were prepared to raise.<sup>415</sup> Enver Pasha's choice of regional commander did not help matters any, as Suleiman Askeri Bey, while undoubtedly a brave soldier, was primarily a guerrilla fighter and not an army commander.<sup>416</sup> Having fought alongside the Senussi in the Libyan War, Askeri Bey had subsequently joined Enver's Special Organization, and was a true believer in the notion of an anti-British jihad.<sup>417</sup> Focusing the brunt of his efforts on raising the Arabs against the British invaders, Askeri Bey met with disappointment after disappointment, culminating in the Battle of Shaiba in April 1915.<sup>418</sup> Here, the Arab levies that he had so depended upon turned on his regulars when the tide of the battle seemed to be going Britain's way, resulting in a crushing defeat.<sup>419</sup> While Charles Meliss, the British commander who bested Askeri Bey, was sympathetic

---

<sup>412</sup> Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *The Logistics and Politics of the British Campaigns in the Middle East, 1914-1922*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 35.

<sup>413</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 28.

<sup>414</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 28.

<sup>415</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 28.

<sup>416</sup> Uyar & Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans*, 254.

<sup>417</sup> Uyar & Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans*, 255.

<sup>418</sup> Uyar & Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans*, 256.

<sup>419</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 90.

to his Ottoman adversary, complementing him on a dogged defence, Askeri Bey did not share this opinion and committed suicide in disgrace, leaving the Ottoman Army in Mesopotamia without a commanding general.<sup>420</sup>

To the British, however, the poor performance of the Ottoman Army and the treachery of the Arab levies, was evidence that their deeply held prejudices had been correct all along. The Ottoman Army could not fight, while the local Arab populace could not be trusted and would have to be placated through a succession of military victories. That December, when Barrett contemplated falling back from Qurna, Lord Crewe, in a letter to Lord Curzon, expressed horror at the idea, stating that, “we should have to slink back towards the Gulf, which would be humiliating and quite destructive of our credit locally.”<sup>421</sup> In general, the Indian Army leadership, and the Cabinet in London, shared a belief that any retrograde motion on the part of the Expeditionary Force would result in an Arab uprising that would see Force D annihilated and the whole of the Arab world united behind the Ottomans.<sup>422</sup> This pessimism about Arab loyalty extended down through the officer corps, with Bedouin and Marsh Arabs alike being regarded by the British and Indian troops as a pack of savages. Aubrey Herbert, an intelligence officer on Force D’s staff, described the Marsh Arabs as being, “like ghouls, swarming on every battlefield, killing and robbing the wounded on both sides.”<sup>423</sup> Barrow, pressing for an advance in November of 1914, expressed much the same opinion about the fickle loyalties of not only the Arabs, but of Britain’s Indian Muslim subjects, claiming that, “a policy of passive inactivity is to be deprecated if we are to continue to impress the Arab

---

<sup>420</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 90.

<sup>421</sup> “Crewe to Curzon”, December 4, 1914, (Catalogue ref: IO/L/EUR.MSS/F112/106). Cited in Davis, *Ends and Means*, 60.

<sup>422</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 18.

<sup>423</sup> Aubrey Herbert, *Mons, Anzack, and Kut*, (East Yorkshire: Oakpast Ltd, 2011): 143.

and Indian world with our ability to defeat all designs against us.”<sup>424</sup> The British in truth understood very little about the local Arab populace as evidenced by the fact that, among other things, they believed the Sunni/Shia divide, which continues to bedevil Iraq to this day, was little more than a curiosity.<sup>425</sup> Barrow, Hardinge, Cox, Duff, and the other Indian luminaries of the day saw the Arabs through the same lens that they saw the Afghans and the Sudanese: as violent, untrustworthy religious fanatics who might be raised to jihad against Britain on a moment’s notice.

This concern about Arab uprisings of course meant that once the British had taken Basra they were bound, sooner or later, to try to take all of Mesopotamia in order to impress the Arabs with their military prowess and, according to the logic of imperial prestige doctrine, thereby hold their gains.<sup>426</sup> In early 1915, Force D was reorganized into a new corps level unit under Sir John Nixon. The new 12<sup>th</sup> Division under Sir George Goringe was dispatched to Mesopotamia, and Arthur Barrett, who balked at serving under Nixon, was replaced at the head of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division by Sir Charles Vere Ferrers Townshend.<sup>427</sup> Nixon was well known as “a thruster”, and the replacement of the cautious Barrett with such an aggressive officer marked the zenith of Lord Hardinge’s colonial hopes for Mesopotamia.<sup>428</sup> Over the course of the spring and summer of 1915, Nixon had Townshend and Goringe advance several hundred miles into Mesopotamia, taking the towns of Aziziya, Amara, Nasiriyeh, and Kut-al-Amara.<sup>429</sup> By September of 1915, the IEFD was only a hundred miles from Baghdad, to the joy of not only Hardinge

---

<sup>424</sup> EG Barrow, “minute”, November 27, 1914, (Catalogue ref: WO/106/877): 10-11. Cited in Davis, *Ends and Means*, 56.

<sup>425</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 55.

<sup>426</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 56.

<sup>427</sup> Ulrichsen, *The Logistics and Politics of the British Campaigns in the Middle East*, 96.

<sup>428</sup> Davis, *Ends and Means*, 68.

<sup>429</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 106.

and Cox, but the Cabinet in London.<sup>430</sup> As it became increasingly clear that the Gallipoli campaign was going nowhere but bad, British officials were refocusing their interests on Mesopotamia, where it was hoped that Nixon's string of victories over the Ottomans would counterbalance the quagmire at the Dardanelles.<sup>431</sup> In a letter, Hardinge made his own belief in this principle clear, arguing that, "if we are unable, for a long time to come, to force the Dardanelles, it becomes a question whether we should not strike a blow somewhere, and we could do this quite easily by taking Baghdad."<sup>432</sup>

Despite the appearance of success, however, Force D was, in truth, beset by problems. No one understood this better than 6<sup>th</sup> Division commander Sir Charles Townshend, a veteran of fighting in South Africa, the Sudan, and along India's Northwest Frontier.<sup>433</sup> Townshend is not an easy man to like, and his memoirs, written in the 1920s, only make him more unlikable, putting his arrogance and faith in his own Napoleonic brilliance on full display. He was, however, a competent and experienced officer, and understood something that Sir John Nixon, Sir Beauchamp Duff, and Lord Charles Hardinge appeared not to, namely that the advance in Mesopotamia was unsustainable.<sup>434</sup> The expedition had not been designed to be one of conquest, and even following its 1915 expansion, Force D lacked the men and resources to continue advancing indefinitely. The IEFD lacked sufficient water transport to keep the men supplied with food, ammunition, and other basic necessities, and the terrain made transport by land a long and difficult proposition.<sup>435</sup> As the Expeditionary Force occupied

---

<sup>430</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 106.

<sup>431</sup> Ulrichsen, *The First World War in the Middle East*, 127.

<sup>432</sup> "Hardinge to Nicolson", September 23, 1915, (Catalogue ref: FO/800/379). Cited in Davis, *Ends and Means*, 114.

<sup>433</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 95.

<sup>434</sup> Davis, *Ends and Means*, 115.

<sup>435</sup> Ulrichsen, *The Logistics and Politics of the British Campaigns in the Middle East*, 40-43.

more and more territory, the supply lines only became longer, and the dearth of communications or quartermaster troops meant Townshend had to detail his own men to man them.<sup>436</sup> Even if Force D had suffered no casualties, its effective strength still fell with each advance, as Townshend and Gorrington had to detach men to garrison towns and run the supply network.<sup>437</sup> The lack of medical arrangements meant that men who were wounded had to be evacuated to India for rest cures, further diminishing the pool of soldiers that Townshend could call upon.<sup>438</sup> For all his confidence in his own abilities, the 6<sup>th</sup> Division general was increasingly worried.

To make matters worse, there were signs that Ottoman resistance was stiffening. Nureddin Bey, who replaced Suleiman Askeri Bey in April 1915, was an experienced soldier who had served in the 1897 Greek War and the Balkan Wars.<sup>439</sup> Initially left with nothing more than the battered remnants of Askeri Bey's army, Nureddin was reinforced throughout the summer, and by the time Townshend marched on Kut-al-Amara, was able to run the British general close.<sup>440</sup> Writing to his superiors, Townshend, alarmed by Nixon's plans of constant advancement asked, "where are we going to stop in Mesopotamia?"<sup>441</sup> During a convalescent trip to India, Townshend put this question directly to Lord Hardinge, who gave him no definite reply.<sup>442</sup> Sir Beauchamp Duff, however, assured Townshend that, "not one inch shall you go beyond Kut unless I make

---

<sup>436</sup> Charles Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, (London: Thornton Butterworth Limited, 1920): 47-48.

<sup>437</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 84.

<sup>438</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 92.

<sup>439</sup> Edward J. Erickson, *Gallipoli & The Middle East 1914-1918*, (London: Amber Books Ltd, 2008): 133.

<sup>440</sup> Roger Ford, *Eden to Armageddon: World War I in the Middle East*, (New York: Pegasus Books, 2010): 36.

<sup>441</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 84.

<sup>442</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 10.

you up to adequate strength.”<sup>443</sup> This reassurance from the Indian Army’s Commander-in-Chief calmed Townshend’s mind. Nixon, however, was still determined to try to advance on Baghdad, while back in London, events at Gallipoli were about to take the decision out of the Indian Army’s hands entirely.

\*

On October 21, 1915, a special meeting of the Dardanelles Committee was called by Lord Crewe with the sole intention of discussing whether an advance to Baghdad should be undertaken.<sup>444</sup> From the start, the result was almost a foregone conclusion. Townshend might have had misgivings about advancing further, but Sir John Nixon did not, and in a recent series of telegrams had strongly advocated for capturing the city.<sup>445</sup> In Nixon’s view, the Ottomans were too weak and too demoralized to put up a fight, and the proximity to Baghdad would, somehow, increase desertions, as soldiers fled the frontlines for their homes.<sup>446</sup> That the Ottoman troops might, in fact, fight harder to defend the city was a possibility that apparently did not occur to Nixon. Nixon had also reminded his superiors that any retreat, or even a lengthy halt, would almost certainly result in the Arabs turning on the British.

Nixon had the trust of Lord Hardinge, and Lord Hardinge had the trust of the Dardanelles Committee. Hardinge had endorsed Nixon’s positions, contending that Nureddin Bey had, at most, 8500 rifles available with which to oppose Townshend’s

---

<sup>443</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 10.

<sup>444</sup> Hankey, “Secretary’s Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915,” 1.

<sup>445</sup> “Official and Private Telegrams Relating to General Sir John Nixon’s Advance in Mesopotamia (in continuation of those circulated on 4<sup>th</sup> October)” October 7, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 37/135/12): 1.

<sup>446</sup> “Official and Private Telegrams Relating to General Sir John Nixon’s Advance in Mesopotamia (in continuation of those circulated on 4<sup>th</sup> October),” 1.

assault.<sup>447</sup> Hardinge had also written of the need to counteract the bad impression that the failing Dardanelles operation had created in the Muslim world.<sup>448</sup> By taking Baghdad, he contended, the British would counteract recent German moves in Persia and Afghanistan, ensuring tranquility on the Northwest Frontier and keeping the Persians out of the war.<sup>449</sup> The effect of Baghdad's fall throughout the Arab world, he said, "would be striking", and would virtually guarantee Britain's future control over the region.<sup>450</sup>

Furthering Hardinge and Nixon's sway over the Committee was the fact that the October 21 meeting was dominated from the beginning by Austen Chamberlain, Secretary of State for India, and in effect, Hardinge's representative on the Committee. Chamberlain had some misgivings about the notion of taking Baghdad, fearing the potential ramifications if the British had to retreat because they lacked the men to hold the city after conquering it.<sup>451</sup> However, these concerns, which he admitted to early in the meeting, were overruled by his fears about the consequences of not marching on Baghdad.<sup>452</sup> Dreading the possibility of Persia or Afghanistan joining the war, Chamberlain insisted that taking Baghdad was the only means of keeping them neutral that was currently available.<sup>453</sup> In this, Chamberlain was supported not only by Nixon and Hardinge's claims, but by an Interdepartmental Report released on October 16. The

---

<sup>447</sup> "Official and Private Telegrams Relating to General Sir John Nixon's Advance in Mesopotamia (in continuation of those circulated on 4<sup>th</sup> October)," 3.

<sup>448</sup> "Official and Private Telegrams Relating to General Sir John Nixon's Advance in Mesopotamia (in continuation of those circulated on 4<sup>th</sup> October)," 2.

<sup>449</sup> "Official and Private Telegrams Relating to General Sir John Nixon's Advance in Mesopotamia (in continuation of those circulated on 4<sup>th</sup> October)," 2..

<sup>450</sup> "Official and Private Telegrams Relating to General Sir John Nixon's Advance in Mesopotamia (in continuation of those circulated on 4<sup>th</sup> October)," 3.

<sup>451</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915," 2.

<sup>452</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915," 2.

<sup>453</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915," 2.

report alleged that the capture of Baghdad would permanently and significantly alter the balance of power in the Islamic world, with the fall of the former Abbasid capital overawing the Persians and Afghans.<sup>454</sup> That the Persians were Shia and unlikely to care about who controlled the former Sunni Caliphal seat, was once more ignored. If Baghdad did not come under British control, the Report and Chamberlain both insisted, the net effect of the Dardanelles disaster and the recent German seizure of Warsaw would be to bring Persia into the war and spark an Afghani jihad on Britain's Northwest Frontier.<sup>455</sup>

Chamberlain was supported at the meeting by a majority of those assembled. Lord Curzon favoured an advance to Baghdad and then beyond, with the intent of cutting German communications with Persia.<sup>456</sup> Secretary for the Colonies, Andrew Bonar-Law, believed that the prestige of taking Baghdad would outweigh any possible military repercussions of an advance.<sup>457</sup> Winston Churchill saw annexing Baghdad as the key to keeping Persia out of the war.<sup>458</sup> Sir Edward Grey, Foreign Secretary and the man most concerned with the actions of other powers, believed the time had arrived to separate the Arabs from the Ottomans by seizing Baghdad and making it into the capital of a new, British-influenced Arab state.<sup>459</sup> Sir Edmund Barrow, military secretary to the India Office, believed that concerns about Britain's inability to hold the city were overblown, that the Ottomans could not move against Baghdad once it had fallen, and that the

---

<sup>454</sup> "Report of an Inter-Departmental Committee on the Strategical Situation in Mesopotamia," October 16, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/4/12): 16.

<sup>455</sup> "Report of an Inter-Departmental Committee on the Strategical Situation in Mesopotamia," 17. Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915," 7.

<sup>456</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915," 4.

<sup>457</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915," 5.

<sup>458</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915," 5.

<sup>459</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915," 81.

political ramifications of capturing it would be positive and lasting.<sup>460</sup> Only Lord Kitchener expressed concerns about the operation, citing Townshend's relative weakness and likely inability to hold Baghdad in the face of Ottoman reinforcements.<sup>461</sup> Still dealing with the ramifications of the failure at Gallipoli, and concerned about a possible uprising in Egypt, Kitchener was extremely reluctant to part with additional troops to hold Baghdad. However, he was also unwilling to nix the possibility of taking the city, advocating instead for a raid on the Ottoman positions.<sup>462</sup>

In the end, Kitchener was won over by Sir Edward Grey, who insisted that the impending withdrawal from the Dardanelles would leave them "bankrupt of prestige" and endanger all future operations in the area.<sup>463</sup> A telegram from Viceroy Hardinge further played on Kitchener's worries about India, and persuaded the Secretary of War that an advance to Baghdad had to be sanctioned.<sup>464</sup> Kitchener also authorised the transfer of two additional divisions to Mesopotamia, with the intention of reinforcing Force D after Townshend had captured Baghdad.<sup>465</sup> In the meantime, Townshend was to make his way to Baghdad with his one under-strength division. In a fascinating display of hubris, not one member of the Dardanelles Committee so much as raised the possibility that the Ottoman defences, anchored on the ancient city of Ctesiphon, just south of Baghdad,

---

<sup>460</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915," 5.

<sup>461</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915," 3.

<sup>462</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915," 3.

<sup>463</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915," 7.

<sup>464</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915," 9.

<sup>465</sup> Davis, *Ends and Means*, 126.

might prove too much for Townshend and the 6<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>466</sup> The entire discussion was concerned not with how to capture Baghdad, but with whether it should be captured in the first place. In the end, the vote was unanimous.

It was a remarkably poor showing from Lord Kitchener, who had once dominated the committee meetings. With his personal prestige on the wane, the Secretary of War acquiesced to Chamberlain and Hardinge's scheme without ever truly examining whether it was practicable. Worse still, in his indecision, Kitchener neither prevented the operation from being launched, nor provided sufficient troops to make it a success. The other committee members, and particularly Lord Curzon, had made it clear they would not sanction the attack without Kitchener's approval.<sup>\*467</sup> By withholding it, Kitchener could have stopped Townshend from marching against an enemy whose strength was unknown. Alternately, had Kitchener fully endorsed the plan, he might have altered the timetable, enabling Townshend to go forward after the arrival of his reinforcements. Instead he tried to split the difference between the two options and ensured that Townshend would be ordered to attack but would not have the men to achieve success.

\*

The Battle of Ctesiphon, fought from November 22 to 25, proved an unmitigated disaster for the British. Townshend, with 14 000, of whom perhaps 11 000 were truly in fighting condition, was instructed to advance against Nureddin Bey's well-entrenched, well-prepared army.<sup>468</sup> Unbeknownst to the British, Nureddin had been

---

<sup>466</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915," 1-9.

\* Lord Curzon had stated in the same meeting that while he dearly wanted to take Baghdad he needed to be convinced that the army could hold it. If the army could not hold the city his advice was, "don't go."

<sup>467</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915," 4.

<sup>468</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 155.

steadily reinforced over the last month, and now had in the neighbourhood of 18 000 men available.<sup>469</sup> The Ottoman 35<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> Divisions, shattered over the course of the past year's fighting, had been supplemented by the arrival of the 45<sup>th</sup> Division from Anatolia, while the newly arrived and highly experienced 51<sup>st</sup> Division was being held in reserve.<sup>470</sup> Nureddin had been preparing his new position for a month, and if the Arab conscripts of the 35<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> had been badly shaken by the last several months, the presence of the 45<sup>th</sup> and 51<sup>st</sup> had a stiffening effect on their morale.<sup>471</sup> For the first time since Sir Arthur Barrett captured Basra a year previously, the odds were in the Ottomans' favour. Holding the advantage in numbers, reinforced by veteran formations, holed up in strong defensive positions, and led by a capable officer, the Ottomans were finally prepared to give Townshend a fight.

Townshend, however, remained unaware of this. Nixon carefully monitored any and all intelligence reports, passing along only that information that meshed with his preconceived notions. When Nixon was handed a report about Ottoman reinforcements massing at Baghdad, he withheld this data from Townshend; when forced to pass it along by his superiors, Nixon attached a note, warning Townshend, "not to believe a word," of the report.<sup>472</sup> Townshend's own ability to gather information was frustrated by a dearth of officers fluent in the local languages, and the fact that the entire IEFD had only six reconnaissance aeroplanes available.<sup>473</sup> It was not until November 21 that Townshend was able to order a recon flight over Nureddin's position. The first mission, flown over the trench line at Ctesiphon, reported no deviations from their prior information. The

---

<sup>469</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 155.

<sup>470</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 112.

<sup>471</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 112.

<sup>472</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 155.

<sup>473</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 155-156.

second flight, over Baghdad, was shot down, with the pilot, one Major Reilly, captured by Arab irregulars friendly to Nureddin and the Sultanate.<sup>474</sup> Two more aircraft were subsequently destroyed, and the final two were grounded until after the attack had begun.<sup>475</sup> Consequently, Townshend was never made aware that the 51<sup>st</sup> Division had not only arrived in Baghdad, but was on its way to Ctesiphon.<sup>476</sup>

For his part, Townshend believed he was up against only 11 000 Ottoman soldiers at most, from divisions he had previously bested.<sup>477</sup> Even so, he would have had more than enough cause for concern. His division was under strength, decimated by both the fighting and a recent outbreak of beriberi.<sup>478</sup> One of his Indian Muslim brigades had been ordered back to Basra due to a high rate of desertion, brought on, Townshend thought, by the proximity of the tomb of Salman the Persian, one of the Prophet Muhammad's companions.<sup>479</sup> Yet Nixon had ordered Townshend to attack, and like Sir Ian Hamilton before him, Sir Charles Townshend was a loyal soldier. Early in the morning of November 22, Townshend launched a night attack into the Ottoman lines.

The fighting went relatively well for the first couple of days, with Townshend's men managing to seize a part of the Ottoman frontline. Concentrating the bulk of his division against what he called the "Vital Point", or "VP", in the Ottoman fortifications, Townshend tore into Nureddin's defences, and occupied much of the Ottoman forward position.<sup>480</sup> The Ottoman 38<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup> Divisions, already depleted by months of hard fighting, lost so many men that they ceased to function as units, causing Nureddin to take

---

<sup>474</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 170.

<sup>475</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 156-157.

<sup>476</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 157.

<sup>477</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 160.

<sup>478</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 144.

<sup>479</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 143.

<sup>480</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 173.

the unorthodox, at least by British standards, step of merging the two units on November 23.<sup>481</sup> An Ottoman counterattack, led by the 45<sup>th</sup> Division, and supported by the 51<sup>st</sup>, halted Townshend's advance, though at the cost of nearly fifty percent casualties among the men of the 45<sup>th</sup>, whose commander informed Nureddin that he no longer had a division.<sup>482</sup>

Nureddin, shocked by the ferocity of the Anglo-Indian assault, assumed that Townshend must have been reinforced significantly, and began withdrawing to a secondary defensive position closer to Baghdad.<sup>483</sup> However, by this point Townshend had himself suffered so many casualties that he was also forced to fall back and, Nureddin, realizing the true strength of Townshend's force, advanced once again.<sup>484</sup> Casualties on both sides were horrendous, and the IEF was effectively a spent force.

By November 25, Townshend had suffered more than fifty percent casualties.<sup>485</sup> This included the loss of 130 out of 371 British officers and 111 out of 255 Indian officers.<sup>486</sup> Worse still, what minimal advances he had made had been checked by Nureddin, who had finally taken the 6<sup>th</sup> Indian Division's measure, and who was due to receive relief in the form of the Ottoman 52<sup>nd</sup> Division, advance elements of which were already arriving.<sup>487</sup> With no real chance of bludgeoning his way through Nureddin's defences, and the prospect of further loss staring him in the face, Townshend ordered a retreat to Aziziya. He had "1, 305 sabres, 39 guns and 7, 411 bayonets," to his name, nowhere near enough to contend with Nureddin, who was now commanding the advance

---

<sup>481</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 161.

<sup>482</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 162.

<sup>483</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 34.

<sup>484</sup> Ulrichsen, *The First World War in the Middle East*, 134.

<sup>485</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 35.

<sup>486</sup> Nikolas Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014): 81.

<sup>487</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 114.

guard of the newly inaugurated Ottoman Sixth Army.<sup>488</sup> He retreated to Aziziya, and then to Kut-al-Amara, with Nureddin dogging his heels.

Townshend would claim after the war that he could have taken Ctesiphon and then Baghdad if the War Office had given him just a few more men.<sup>489</sup> Whether this is true or not will never be known. What is clear, however, from both Townshend's complaints and the Dardanelles Committee minutes, is that Kitchener, Chamberlain, Hardinge, and Nixon had instructed Townshend to do the virtually impossible by assaulting Baghdad with his one division. In their search for easy victories to counter the fiasco of Gallipoli, the Dardanelles Committee and the Indian Raj had instead procured for themselves another humiliating defeat.

---

<sup>488</sup> Cited in Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 35.

<sup>489</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 161.

## Chapter 7: Besieged and Disgraced

The question that Sir Charles Townshend had once put to Sir Beauchamp Duff had finally been answered: courtesy of Nureddin Bey and the defences at Ctesiphon, the British had, at long last, been stopped in Mesopotamia. Still more unbelievably, at least from the British perspective, the 6<sup>th</sup> Division was on the retreat, with the Ottoman Sixth Army in hot pursuit. At a meeting of the War Committee on November 25, Austen Chamberlain disavowed any and all responsibility for the reverse at Ctesiphon, claiming, before a room of men who all knew better, that he had never wanted to advance on Baghdad in the first place.<sup>490</sup> According to Chamberlain, the failure rested entirely on Nixon, who had failed to properly inform the Committee of the strength of Nureddin's forces, an idea he would revisit in a memorandum written sometime afterwards.<sup>491</sup> The Indian Secretary went on to request new drafts for Indian Army units on the Northwest Frontier, to defend India from the Afghani incursions that were surely imminent.<sup>492</sup>

Chamberlain was far from alone in responding this way. Arthur Balfour was convinced that the retreat from Ctesiphon, coupled with the impending withdrawal from Gallipoli, would bring Persia into the war on the side of Germany and the Ottomans.<sup>493</sup> Sir Edward Grey feared the entire Middle East would rise against the British.<sup>494</sup> None of the luminaries on the War Committee were prepared to examine how their own

---

<sup>490</sup> Maurice Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, November 25, 1915," November 25, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/5/22): 1.

<sup>491</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, November 25, 1915," 1.

Austen Chamberlain, "Mesopotamian Operations," July 17, 1916, (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/16/7): 10-13.

<sup>492</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, November 25, 1915," 2.

<sup>493</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, November 25, 1915," 3.

<sup>494</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, November 25, 1915," 2.

assumptions and presuppositions had doomed Townshend's march to Baghdad, preferring to blame Nixon and Townshend for their predicament. Only David Lloyd George had the courage to break with the Committee's consensus, castigating his colleagues for having underestimated the Ottomans again, and demanding an accounting for how this had repeatedly happened, first at Gallipoli, and now in Mesopotamia. "We were now pressing in the Persian Gulf," Maurice Hankey recorded Lloyd George as saying, "and apparently had underestimated our enemy—as we always did."<sup>495</sup>

Lloyd George's warnings went unheeded, as *they* always did. Despite the clear danger to Townshend's 6<sup>th</sup> Division, and the very real possibility that the British would be driven from Mesopotamia, the British and Indian establishments' delusions remained unbroken. Lord Hardinge, in a series of telegrams, asserted that plans for an attack on Baghdad must quickly be revived, lest the Persians, Afghans, or Muslim Indians get any ideas about British weakness.<sup>496</sup> In "An Appreciation of the Situation in Mesopotamia," authored on November 29, Sir Edmund Barrow asserted that the Ottomans were still in disarray after Ctesiphon, and could not possibly pursue Townshend far beyond the environs of Baghdad.<sup>497</sup> More importantly, Barrow insisted, the Ottomans would not dare attack without at least a two-to-one advantage in numbers, and after the arrival of the two extra divisions in January, Nixon would have 18 000 men available.<sup>498</sup> Kitchener, for his part, continued to obsess over Egypt throughout December, informing the War Committee that any divisions withdrawn from Gallipoli should be sent to Egypt to help

---

<sup>495</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, November 25, 1915," 3.

<sup>496</sup> Charles Hardinge, "From Viceroy, 30<sup>th</sup> November, 1915," November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 37/138/21): 1

<sup>497</sup> EG Barrow, "An Appreciation of the Situation in Mesopotamia," November 29, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/5/26): 1.

<sup>498</sup> Barrow, "An Appreciation of the Situation in Mesopotamia," 1.

Maxwell fight the threat of the Senussi.<sup>499</sup> Informed once more by Maxwell's paranoia, Kitchener also announced that he expected a full scale Turco-German invasion of Egypt come January, though where this invasion force would come from he did not say.<sup>500</sup> When it was suggested that the British might work with the Italian authorities in Libya to suppress the Senussi, Kitchener dismissed the notion saying that the Italians were not respected by the Arabs and that working with them would injure British prestige.<sup>501</sup> That Townshend surrendering would be a far greater loss to British prestige did not, apparently, factor into Kitchener's considerations.

In the meantime, on the ground, British expectations continued to be confounded. In December, German Field Marshal Colmar von der Goltz arrived in Baghdad to take command of the entire Mesopotamian theatre.<sup>502</sup> Seventy-two years old in 1915, Goltz had been deployed to the Ottoman Sultanate before in the 1880s, when he had helped reform the then-failing Ottoman Army.<sup>503</sup> Goltz Pasha as he was known in the Sultanate was something of a hero to the younger generation of Ottoman officers, and his appointment provided the Ottomans with an important morale boost.<sup>504</sup> More importantly, he brought with him significant Ottoman reinforcements. The troops under his command were reorganized into the Sixth Army, comprising the XIII and XVIII

---

<sup>499</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, December 1, 1915," 9.

Maurice Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, December 6, 1915," December 6, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/6/4): 17.

Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, December 15, 2915," 4.

<sup>500</sup> Maurice Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, December 28, 1915," December 28, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/6/14): 6.

<sup>501</sup> Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, December 1, 1915," 9.

Hankey, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, December 15, 2915," December 15, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/6/8): 4.

<sup>502</sup> McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame*, 269.

<sup>503</sup> Erickson, *Gallipoli & the Middle East*, 146.

<sup>504</sup> Liman von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, 133.

Corps. With Nureddin Bey acting as field commander, the Sixth Army set off after Townshend.<sup>505</sup>

Sir Edmund Barrow might have thought that the Ottomans could not pursue Townshend far beyond Baghdad, but Nureddin Bey proved him wrong. Catching up with Townshend, Nureddin forced the British general to retire from the town of Lajj, retreating to Aziziya, which he reached on November 28.<sup>506</sup> With Nureddin still approaching, Townshend again withdrew downriver, heading for Kut-al-Amara by way of Umm-at-Tabul.<sup>507</sup> On December 1, Nureddin and the Sixth Army caught up to Townshend again and nearly flanked him at Umm-at-Tabul, putting the 6<sup>th</sup> Division commander in the unenviable position of having to make a fighting retreat.<sup>508</sup> On December 3, Townshend reached Kut-al-Amara and retreated inside.<sup>509</sup> Believing his men to be too exhausted to march any further, Townshend called a halt, and prepared for a siege.<sup>510</sup> On December 7, leading elements of the Ottoman 51<sup>st</sup> Division had reached Kut.<sup>511</sup> By December 8 they had fully invested the city.<sup>512</sup> Goltz Pasha himself arrived at Nureddin Bey's headquarters on December 12, and by December 23 Townshend was surrounded by 25 000 Ottoman troops.<sup>513</sup> On Christmas Eve, Nureddin launched an assault on the city and was repelled by the defenders with about 1000 casualties.<sup>514</sup> This was to prove the one bright moment in Sir Charles Townshend's December. With no ability to break out of the ring that

---

<sup>505</sup> Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*,

<sup>506</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 188.

<sup>507</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 191.

<sup>508</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 193.

<sup>509</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 199.

<sup>510</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 209.

<sup>511</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 75.

<sup>512</sup> Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, 242.

<sup>513</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 77.

<sup>514</sup> Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, 245.

Nureddin Bey and Goltz Pasha had erected around him, Townshend had little choice but to sit tight and wait for relief.

\*

As December 1915 became January 1916, the War Committee and the Indian Raj made it clear that they still had not learned any lessons from the losses at the Dardanelles and at Ctesiphon. The two divisions that had been earmarked to reinforce Townshend after the capture of Baghdad were reorganized into the new Tigris Corps under Sir Fenton Aylmer.<sup>515</sup> Aylmer was a decorated soldier who had won the Victoria Cross while serving on the Northwest Frontier in India.<sup>516</sup> In 1895, when Townshend had been besieged at the fort of Chitral, Aylmer had been a part of the expedition that rescued him.<sup>517</sup> Now he was expected to rescue Townshend again, but in the face of far greater opposition. Aylmer had never been to Mesopotamia before, and had little knowledge of either the country or the enemy he would be up against.<sup>518</sup> He also suffered, as had Townshend before him, from a long, weak supply line and a lack of sufficient reinforcements.

In theory, Aylmer's Tigris Corps comprised not only the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Indian Divisions, but also Sir George Goringe's 12<sup>th</sup> Division, which was already present in Mesopotamia.<sup>519</sup> However, transportation in Mesopotamia was largely distinguished by its shoddiness, which meant that Aylmer was unable to assemble his entire corps with any sort of alacrity. Sir John Nixon had, in fact, actively opposed the construction of proper port facilities at Basra, seeing it as a waste of time, a decision which seriously

---

<sup>515</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 53.

<sup>516</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 53.

<sup>517</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 53.

<sup>518</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 53.

<sup>519</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 53

hampered Aylmer's ability to offload his men.<sup>520</sup> Even more problematically, the reckless advances of the previous year had left Gorringe's 12<sup>th</sup> Division twelve miles north of Nasiriya and far from Kut, a position they would not be recalled from until February 7.<sup>521</sup> By early January, Aylmer's Tigris Corps mustered 19 000 men and 42 guns, numbers which were still wanting in the face of Nureddin Bey's 25 000.<sup>522</sup> Waiting any longer was not, however, an option so far as Aylmer was concerned, and on January 6, he ordered the 7<sup>th</sup> Division under Sir George Younghusband, a veteran of the Second Anglo-Afghan War, Mahdist War, and Second Anglo-Boer War to attack an Ottoman defensive position at Sheikh Saad.<sup>523</sup>

Younghusband's troops succeeded in pushing the Ottomans from their trenches after three days of heavy fighting.<sup>524</sup> A pursuit, however, proved impossible. Heavy rains had turned the Mesopotamian plains to mud, impeding any rapid movement.<sup>525</sup> Even if this had not been the case, Younghusband's men were exhausted. Aylmer, for no discernable reason save perhaps British doctrine regarding Islamic armies, had expected to suffer only 300 or so casualties.<sup>526</sup> He took 3790, of whom 417 were killed.<sup>527</sup> These losses were then compounded by the fact that the 7<sup>th</sup> Division, a makeshift unit comprising twelve battalions that had never worked together before, had advanced without signalling equipment, ambulances, stretchers, wound dressings, drugs, firewood, tents, clothing, or adequate rations.<sup>528</sup> Moving in haste, the 7<sup>th</sup> Division had deprived

---

<sup>520</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 195.

<sup>521</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 116.

<sup>522</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 198.

<sup>523</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 199.

<sup>524</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 200.

<sup>525</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 74.

<sup>526</sup> Townshend, *Desert Hell*, 201.

<sup>527</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 100.

<sup>528</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 94.

itself of any ability to treat the wounded, and the number of wounded had vastly exceeded Aylmer and Younghusband's expectations. With so many injured and the swampy terrain bogging down any attempt at giving chase, Aylmer and Younghusband had to halt, allowing the Ottoman defenders to withdraw to the next defensive position with the bulk of their units intact.

On January 13, Aylmer tried again, this time attempting to bludgeon his way through the Ottoman defensive emplacements at the Wadi. Instead of the frontal assault that he had attempted at Sheikh Saad, Aylmer attempted to outflank the Ottoman position which was manned by troops of the XIII Corps under Enver Pasha's uncle, Halil Bey.<sup>529</sup> The attack initially saw some success, with the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade under Sir George Kemball capturing the Ottoman frontal positions. Unfortunately, these entrenchments were still 3000 yards from Halil's main defensive line.<sup>530</sup> Kemball, growing impatient, refused to await the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which was moving up to support him, and instead charged across open ground, directly into the teeth of Halil's machineguns.<sup>531</sup> Subjected to withering Ottoman fire, the 28<sup>th</sup> not only failed to dislodge Halil and the XIII Corps, but did not succeed in crossing the Wadi itself, taking 648 casualties, including the commanding officers of three out of its four battalions.<sup>532</sup> These casualty figures were typical across Aylmer's Relief Force, which had now lost upwards of 6000 men.<sup>533</sup> With Tigris Corps now reduced to 9000 effectives, Aylmer had to withdraw; Halil Bey did the same, retreating to another defensive line at Umm-el-Hannah.<sup>534</sup>

---

<sup>529</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 104.

<sup>530</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 78.

<sup>531</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 78.

<sup>532</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 79.

<sup>533</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 79.

<sup>534</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 79.

With the disintegration of Aylmer's first offensive, there was a pause in the fighting while both the Anglo-Indian and Ottoman Armies took stock of the situation. On January 19, Sir John Nixon, who had ordered Townshend not to support Aylmer's attack via an attempted breakout, in direct contravention of Aylmer's own recommendation, was replaced by Sir Percy Lake, who was more inclined to work with Aylmer and Townshend.<sup>535</sup> On the Ottoman side, Nureddin Bey was sent to take command of the provisional Ottoman Third Army, while control of the Sixth Army fell to his XIII Corps commander, Halil Bey.<sup>536</sup> Halil's appointment undoubtedly stemmed from nepotism on the part of Enver Pasha, who wanted to ensure that the coming victory over the British would be forever associated with himself and his family. Halil was both Enver's uncle and one of his favourite bagmen, having murdered, by his own account, upwards of 300 000 Armenians on his nephew's orders.<sup>537</sup> That being said, Halil was a capable career soldier, with a history of distinguished service in Libya and the Balkans and, for the most part, he did not alter Nureddin Bey and Goltz Pasha's operational concept, which was already succeeding so well.<sup>538</sup>

On January 21, Aylmer resumed the offensive, attacking Halil Bey's position at Umm-el-Hannah. Aylmer was not enthusiastic about the concept, claiming that taking the Hannah position was "impossible".<sup>539</sup> Yet like Hamilton and Townshend, Aylmer was not willing to disobey a direct order, and despite his belief that the assault could not be

---

<sup>535</sup> Davis, *Ends and Means*, 153.

<sup>536</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 162.

<sup>537</sup> Halil Kut, *Bitmeyen Savas*, ed. M.T. Sorgun (Istanbul: Yedigun, 1972). Cited in Dadrian, Vahakn N. "The Armenian Genocide: an interpretation," in *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915* ed. Jay Winter, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 65.

<sup>538</sup> Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, 162.

<sup>539</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 108.

undertaken “without losing half the force” he went ahead.<sup>540</sup> The attack was another disaster for the British. Wading through boggy ground with little cover from Ottoman fire, Tigris Corps once again dashed itself to pieces against a strong Ottoman defensive position.<sup>541</sup> The relief force incurred 2741 casualties, a third of its remaining strength.<sup>542</sup> Thanks to the Tigris Corps’ poor degree of medical equipment, many of these men could not be easily patched up. In the words of one British soldier it was, “A twentieth century battle with eighteenth century medical arrangements.”<sup>543</sup> When Aylmer raised the subject of continuing the offensive on January 22, his brigade and divisional commanders informed him in no uncertain terms that it could not be done. Sir Percy Lake encouraged Aylmer to resume the attack despite this, but Aylmer told him he could not.<sup>544</sup> Depressed, and unable to fully process what had happened, Aylmer began to entertain the notion that the offensive had failed not because of his own inability or Ottoman competence, but because the Indian Muslims in his brigades were unwilling to fight against the Ottomans. Writing to Lake, Aylmer claimed he had grave suspicions about “very extensive self-mutilations” among the Indian troops, though these suspicions were not borne out by reality.<sup>545</sup>

With Tigris Corps in ruins, the attempt to relieve Townshend had stalled. Aylmer would spend the next month recouping his losses and trying to find a way to circumvent Halil Bey’s defences. In the meantime, Townshend and the soldiers of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division would be left to fend for themselves.

---

<sup>540</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 108.

<sup>541</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 111.

<sup>542</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 84.

<sup>543</sup> Edmund Candler, *The Long Road to Baghdad*, (London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1919): pages 101-102. Cited in Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 85.

<sup>544</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 111.

<sup>545</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 111.

\*

In Kut, the situation was growing increasingly desperate. After occupying the town, Townshend had declined to expel any of its citizens, leaving him with the responsibility of feeding not only his own troops, but also the 7000 townsfolk.<sup>546</sup> Townshend's initial estimate that he could hold out for only a month had proven low, especially after a search of the town uncovered a sizeable store of additional supplies.<sup>547</sup> Unfortunately, mismanagement on the part of Townshend and his officers would destroy what few gains the 6<sup>th</sup> Division had made from this discovery.

Townshend had served for much of his career in the Indian Army that Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener had built, and the innate prejudices of that army influenced his thinking. From early on, colonial soldiers like Townshend were taught that any insult to the sepoys' religious beliefs might result in a revolt, similar to the Great Mutiny of the 1850s.<sup>548</sup> Officers were instructed to respect the religious sentiments of the Hindu and Muslim soldiers no matter the cost, and the limited understanding that most officers possessed ensured that social customs were often misconstrued as religious in nature.<sup>549</sup>

Townshend already suffered from a deep distrust of his Indian troops. He believed that his Muslim sepoys in particular had refused to fight as hard as they could have at Ctesiphon, and that this, more than anything else, had resulted in his defeat.<sup>550</sup> Early in the campaign, Townshend had even gone so far as to excuse Muslim Pathan recruits of firing on their own comrades for religious reasons.<sup>551</sup> Aghast at the prospect of a mutiny

---

<sup>546</sup> Gardner, "British Prestige and the Mesopotamia Campaign," 277.

<sup>547</sup> Gardner, "British Prestige and the Mesopotamia Campaign," 276.

<sup>548</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 124.

<sup>549</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 124.

<sup>550</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 212.

<sup>551</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 46.

among the Muslim troops, Townshend believed that any additional pressure from him might result in his Muslim companies deserting for the Ottoman lines en masse.<sup>552</sup> This belief, rooted in the colonial outlook of the Indian Army, caused an untold amount of damage to 6<sup>th</sup> Division's fighting ability as supplies of meat ran low.

Out of tinned meat, Townshend and his officers began to butcher the division's horses, distributing the horseflesh to the British units in the division.<sup>553</sup> They did not, however, give horsemeat to the Hindu or Muslim sepoy, fearing that since horse was not a traditional dish of either religious group, its distribution might lead to discontent and even mutiny.<sup>554</sup> Instead, the sepoy were issued additional rations of grain, further emptying the already depleted stores.<sup>555</sup> Worse still, the declining reserves of grain meant that the horses and mules could not be fed, and had to be killed faster than they could be eaten. As the division's chief supply officer reflected in April: "If the Indians had eaten meat in January there would have been no need to kill off animals and by shortening the Indian grain ration our grain would have lasted longer."<sup>556</sup>

In reality, Townshend had little to worry about. Horsemeat was not a traditional Indian dish, and social custom, which forbade requesting food that had never been eaten before, stopped the Hindu and Muslim soldiers from requesting it. As Captain WA Phillips of the 24<sup>th</sup> Punjabis observed, "There is no doubt that all casts (sic) were very greatly prejudiced against eating horseflesh and that, not so much from religious motives

---

<sup>552</sup>Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 259.

<sup>553</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 120.

<sup>554</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 123.

<sup>555</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 123.

<sup>556</sup> "Notes on Rations etc," (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/92 TNA). Cited in Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 123.

as from the reason that it had never been done before.”<sup>557</sup> However, when Townshend at last lost patience that April and ordered the troops to dine on horseflesh there were few, if any objections, since there was no prohibition on horse in either Hindu or Muslim doctrine.<sup>\*558</sup> By April 14, most objections from the troops had been overcome, and 10 000 of the 11 000 Indian troops were willingly eating horsemeat, something Townshend was more than happy to try and claim credit for.<sup>559</sup> Unfortunately, by this point a majority of the sepoys were so malnourished and so ill from diseases like scurvy, that they gained little benefit from the addition to their diet.<sup>560</sup> Once more, ill-informed colonial views of “Asiatics” had damaged the British campaign in Mesopotamia.

\*

Aylmer returned to the offensive in early March. With Tigris Corps reinforced to 24 000 men, Aylmer at last had parity with Halil Bey’s section of the Sixth Army.<sup>561</sup> On March 8, Aylmer assaulted the Dujaila Redoubt, directing 19 000 of his men against 11 000 of Halil’s.<sup>562</sup> On paper, this plan might have favoured Tigris Corps, but Aylmer’s refusal to give any latitude to his commanders in the field, coupled with an overly complex battle plan doomed the operation. The plan required Tigris Corps to advance at night, across unfamiliar terrain and then launch simultaneous attacks despite a near total lack of radio communications or signalling equipment.<sup>563</sup> The attack quickly ran into trouble, and despite some initial progress by the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Brigades, bogged down in the

---

<sup>557</sup> WA Phillips, “Resume of the Siege,” (Catalogue ref: CAB 45/93). Cited in Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 124.

\* Islam prohibits the eating of pork, Hinduism the eating of beef.

<sup>558</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 155.

<sup>559</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 321.

<sup>560</sup> Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 321.

Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 155.

<sup>561</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 127.

<sup>562</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 118.

<sup>563</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 119.

face of determined Ottoman counterattacks. By the end of March 9, Aylmer had called off the assault, after Tigris Corps sustained over 3700 casualties.<sup>564</sup>

On March 11, Aylmer was dismissed and replaced by Sir George Goringe, formerly commander of the 12<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>565</sup> A veteran of the Mahdist War and the Second Anglo-Boer War, Goringe was an experienced, but uninspired officer, with a typical colonial record. Goringe, convinced that the lack of British soldiers was the problem, waited until April to try to break Halil Bey's lines, anticipating the arrival of the 13<sup>th</sup> Division under Sir Frederick Stanley Maude.<sup>566</sup> The first all-British unit to deploy to Mesopotamia, the 13<sup>th</sup> Division was assumed to be inherently better than its Indian counterparts, despite the fact that most of its soldiers were new, recruited after the division's losses at Gallipoli.<sup>567</sup> Goringe took great pains to hide the fact that the 13<sup>th</sup> had arrived, not wishing to alert the Ottomans to the presence of British troops.<sup>568</sup> These attempts failed however, and Halil Bey withdrew from the Umm-el-Hannah and Dujaila defensive lines to Sannaiyat, six miles to the west.<sup>569</sup>

Goringe had not drafted a plan for assaulting Sannaiyat. Time was running out however, with Lake having instructed Goringe to free Townshend no later than April 15.<sup>570</sup> So Goringe put whatever doubts he might have had on the backburner and attacked anyway. By April 9, Maude's 13<sup>th</sup> Division was entrenched 400 yards from the Sannaiyat position.<sup>571</sup> In the process, though, Maude's division alone lost 3500 men.<sup>572</sup>

---

<sup>564</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*,

<sup>565</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 128.

<sup>566</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 134.

<sup>567</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 134.

<sup>568</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 144.

<sup>569</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 147.

<sup>570</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 149.

<sup>571</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 152.

<sup>572</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 152.

The attack was paused, while Gorringe reorganized his forces. On April 17, the British 3<sup>rd</sup> Division seized Bait Isa in the Sannaiyat line.<sup>573</sup> By April 18 the Ottomans had recaptured Bait Isa, inflicting another 1500 casualties on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division in the process.<sup>574</sup> A final attack was made by Sir George Younghusband's 7<sup>th</sup> Division on the morning of April 22. 1300 casualties were taken to no avail; in the aftermath Gorringe reported to his superiors that Tigris Corps was spent.<sup>575</sup> With thirty-three percent of the relief force injured, sick, or dead, no further operations to relieve Townshend could be undertaken.<sup>576</sup>

\*

On April 29, 1916, Sir Charles Townshend surrendered his beleaguered and starving division to Halil Bey, who, with the April 19 death of Goltz Pasha, was now commander of all Ottoman forces in Mesopotamia. He did so in the face of strong objections from members of the War Committee, including Lord Kitchener, Arthur Balfour, and Austen Chamberlain. Kitchener had previously written to Sir Percy Lake in March, informing him that "I sincerely hope that you Lake and all the Generals under you realise that it would forever be a disgrace to our country if Townshend's force surrenders and, moreover, that our prestige in the East would undoubtedly be gravely prejudiced by such a disaster."<sup>577</sup> Kitchener's attitude had not changed, and he continued to warn that Townshend's surrender would destroy Britain's prestige in the East, all while doing his

---

<sup>573</sup> Crowley, *Kut 1916*, 156.

<sup>574</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 158.

<sup>575</sup> Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 161.

<sup>576</sup> "Despatch by Lieutenant-General Sir G.F. Gorringe," (Catalogue ref: L/MIL/17/15/109). Cited in Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*, 161.

<sup>577</sup> Kitchener to Lake, tel. no. 14587, 26 March 1916. (Catalogue ref: IO/L/MIL/5/755/-16428). Cited in Davis, *Ends and Means*, 164.

utmost to ignore the fact that he himself had refused to make sufficient troops available to rescue Townshend.

Kitchener's fears were echoed by Sir Edmund Barrow, who authored a memorandum predicting dire consequences for the Indian Raj.<sup>578</sup> The Afghans, he wrote, were now certain to enter the war on the side of the Germans and Ottomans, and their declaration of jihad would raise the border tribes of the Northwest Frontier as well.<sup>579</sup> Seven infantry divisions and five cavalry brigades would be needed, he insisted, to hold off the Afghans and their Pathan allies, before advancing to Jellalabad.<sup>580</sup> Similar sentiments were voiced by other members of the War Committee, who continued to fear Persian and Arab intervention in the war, despite a complete lack of evidence that such a thing was possible.

To the end the War Committee remained convinced that there must be a way out. A secret mission, headed up by TE Lawrence, was dispatched to Mesopotamia with authorisation to try to bribe Halil Bey into letting Townshend and his men go.<sup>581</sup> Halil, while a mass murderer and war criminal was neither corrupt nor a traitor, and contemptuously refused the insulting offer.<sup>582</sup> In the end, those opposed to the surrender were given no choice but to acquiesce and, by April 30, the 6<sup>th</sup> Indian Division was in Ottoman captivity.

It was the largest surrender of British troops since Yorktown. Whether it could have been avoided is a question that will never be answerable. From the start, the British

---

<sup>578</sup> EG Barrow, "Minute by the Military Secretary, India Office," March 25, 1916. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/12/12): 2.

<sup>579</sup> Barrow, "Minute by the Military Secretary, India Office," 2.

<sup>580</sup> Barrow, "Minute by the Military Secretary, India Office," 2.

<sup>581</sup> Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, 265.

<sup>582</sup> Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, 265.

campaign in Mesopotamia was an *ad hoc* affair, undertaken not in the pursuit of real policy goals, but for the sole purpose of maintaining imperial prestige after the disaster at Gallipoli. With each setback on another front, the operational goals were expanded, even as Kitchener and the War Committee refused to make sufficient troops to achieve those goals available. The incompetence, and at times, the outright mendacious nature of Sir John Nixon, only worsened the situation, ensuring that neither the War Committee nor Sir Charles Townshend had appropriate information to work with. Once the advance to Ctesiphon had failed, there was no avoiding a retreat to Kut or the subsequent siege, and with the War Committee lacking the will to make Townshend's freedom their main priority, there was no way for Townshend to break out of the trap into which Goltz Pasha, Nureddin Bey, and Halil Bey had pushed him.

For the Mesopotamian campaign to end in a British victory would have required a functioning operational plan. It would have required that different decisions be made at every step along the way. It would have required that Lord Kitchener, Lord Hardinge, Sir Beauchamp Duff, Sir John Nixon, and Secretary Austen Chamberlain be very different men than they were, or be replaced altogether. Above all else, it would have required that the British stop trying to view the Ottomans through a colonial lens and take them seriously as the professional military threat that they were. None of these things happened, and in the end, Townshend and the 6<sup>th</sup> Division paid for it.

### Conclusion: Whom to Blame?

The first two years of Britain's campaign against the Ottoman Sultanate were a fiasco, and at times, an unmitigated disaster. The world's greatest imperial power was humiliated time and again by a so-called fossilized state long regarded as one of the weakest in Europe. At the Dardanelles Straits, the Çannakale Fortress Command fought off a combined Anglo-French fleet, and sank or crippled a third of it. At Gallipoli the Ottoman Fifth Army bested the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and forced the British to evacuate on a front where they had been sure of victory. At Ctesiphon and at Kut, the Ottoman Sixth Army bested and then captured the 6<sup>th</sup> Indian Division, a defeat unequalled in scope since the American Revolutionary War. At every phase of the campaign, British misconceptions and overconfidence met with Ottoman tenacity and professionalism, resulting in loss after loss for the British military. In the aftermath, the Dardanelles Commission and Mesopotamia Commission would be created to determine just how this had happened.

It is tempting to apportion blame among the British officials and officers who oversaw these catastrophes. Certainly there is a great deal of blame to go around. Lord Horatio Kitchener and Winston Churchill's belief that the navy could break through the Dardanelles on its own was directly responsible for the failure of the land campaign that followed. Lord Charles Hardinge and Austen Chamberlain's desire to expand the Raj sank the Indian Expeditionary Force into the quagmire of Mesopotamia, while Sir John Nixon's refusal to face reality ensured that Townshend's pleas for help fell on deaf ears. These men are easy villains to identify, and their hubris and belief in the invulnerability of British arms saw thousands of unnecessary casualties incurred.

Yet, these men can hardly bear sole responsibility for the twin calamities of Gallipoli and Kut. HH Asquith, Sir Edward Grey, Arthur Balfour, Andrew Bonar-Law, and Lords Curzon and Crewe all, at one time or another, lent their support to Kitchener and Churchill's schemes for the Dardanelles. So too did they grant their favour to Hardinge and Chamberlain's plans for taking Baghdad, using the advance in Mesopotamia to cover for their bad decisions at Gallipoli. Sir Edmund Barrow and Sir Beauchamp Duff gave Hardinge and Chamberlain's ideas a veneer of military respectability, while Sir John Maxwell and Sir Reginald Wingate played to Kitchener's terror of an Egyptian uprising, hamstringing both operations in the process. One might even blame Sir Ian Hamilton and Sir Charles Townshend for recognizing the impossibility of their orders, yet refusing to tell their superiors that their objectives could not be met. With the possible exception of David Lloyd George, no one involved in the decision-making process emerged from the Ottoman campaigns untainted by guilt.

In the end, however, the problem did not lie with any specific individuals. The problem lay with the British government and military's institutional inability to take a Muslim army seriously. Conditioned by decades of colonial experience and an Orientalist academic tradition, the British establishment believed that Muslims could not be forged into a modern army capable of competing with Europeans. At the same time, the institutional memory of religious uprisings in Afghanistan, India, and the Sudan haunted British planners, who learned to fear the fanaticism that Islamic tribesmen were supposedly capable of. That many of these revolts were not, in fact, religiously motivated mattered little to the British government, which structured its Indian and Egyptian governments and armies on the principle that Muslim religious sentiment must be

carefully controlled. With this in mind, the British establishment entered the war against the Ottomans with the notion that the Ottoman military was no threat to their troops, but must be quickly defeated lest a wave of Islamic zealotry inspire revolt in Egypt, Sudan, or India, or worse yet, bring Afghanistan and Persia into the war on the side of the Central Powers. Sultan Mehmed V's proclamation of jihad, coupled with the efforts of Enver Pasha's Special Organization to stir up trouble on the Muslim periphery of the Empire only worsened British paranoia, conjuring images of a worldwide Islamic revolution against the Triple Entente. That the Muslim world was not a monolith, and that the Sultan's Caliphal title was recognized by a very few Muslim rulers or clerics did not enter into Great Britain's calculations, and did not effect their equation: namely that the decaying Ottomans had to be beaten and beaten swiftly to preserve imperial prestige and keep the Muslims of the world friendly to Britain.

These presuppositions died a slow and painful death against the highly professional, capably officered Ottoman Army. The Sultanate might have lacked the ability to properly arm, equip, clothe, and at times even feed its troops, but the army was trained to the European standard and led by veteran soldiers. Men like Esat and Vehip Pasha, and Kemal, Sami, Nureddin, and Halil Bey, trained along German lines and experienced in modern warfare, frequently proved far more able than their British counterparts, who were on average fifteen to twenty years older. Unlike Britain's colonial soldiers, who had little concept of the kind of war they were attempting to fight, Ottoman veterans of the Libyan and Balkan Wars knew exactly what they were getting into, and used that knowledge to their advantage throughout the conflict, regularly outperforming hidebound British commanders like Sir Frederick Stopford and Sir Fenton Aylmer. While

individual British generals like Sir Ian Hamilton and Sir Charles Townshend might display flashes of brilliance, the British officer corps was, as a whole, mired in colonialist thinking and was regularly stunned by the tactics their Ottoman adversaries displayed. While the presence of German officers like Otto Liman von Sanders and Colmar von der Goltz was not essential to the Ottoman victory, despite the claims of some British historians, the ease with which German and Ottoman commanders cycled in and out of units at Gallipoli and Mesopotamia points to both a high degree of cooperation between allies and the essential professionalism of both armies. In contrast, the British military was regularly consumed by internal difficulties, as officers squabbled over seniority and men like Sir John Nixon and Sir Beauchamp Duff ignored the concerns of their subordinates, while distrust towards Indian soldiers frequently handicapped Townshend and Aylmer's efforts in Mesopotamia. At the highest levels of command, Ismail Enver Pasha, whatever his failings as a human being, proved a better war leader than Lord Kitchener. Enver provided Liman von Sanders and Goltz Pasha with the resources they needed to actually accomplish their goals, while Kitchener, still convinced he was waging a colonial war, withheld needed men from Hamilton, Townshend, and Aylmer alike.

The sad part was that the evidence of Ottoman ability was there if the British had cared to look. The Ottomans had once been the most powerful state in the Mediterranean, boasting an imperial project that embraced Southeast Europe, North Africa, and most of the Middle East. While the Sultanate had long since declined from this imperial zenith, its military had never crumbled into irrelevance, and its performance in the 1877-78 Russo-Turkish War, the 1897 Thirty Days' War against Greece, the 1911-12 Italo-Ottoman War for Libya, and the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 should have given the British some idea of

what they were up against. While the Ottomans had been defeated in all but the Thirty Days' War, their ability to hold out against numerically greater, technologically superior adversaries was on full display in these conflicts, and should have acted as a warning to Britain. The War Council and its successors, however, chose to focus on the Ottomans' win/loss ratio, rather than their actual prowess in combat, with only David Lloyd George paying any mind to how hard the Ottomans had fought and how long they had held out. Rather than learning from the Ottoman war record, Kitchener and his colleagues in the Cabinet chose to ignore all but its most superficial aspects, preferring to fit the Ottoman Army and the nation that it served into the same colonial mould they reserved for other Muslim countries and peoples. Obsessively refighting fictionalised versions of the Anglo-Afghan Wars, the Indian Mutiny, and the Mahdist War, the British leadership ignored the enemy that was actually in front of them until it was too late.

No institution, and certainly no army, can ever fully escape its past. During the first two years of WWI, the British military proved that point. Bogged down by colonial expectations, the British repeatedly underestimated the abilities of their Muslim adversaries, then refused to learn from their mistakes. From November of 1914, through to April of 1916, the same set of preconceptions and errors cost the British dearly, destroying careers and taking thousands of lives. It took the twin blows of both Gallipoli and Kut before the British high command could finally accept something that the soldiers on the ground had known for months—that their Muslim enemy was every bit as professional as they were, and was determined to make a fight of it.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

- Balfour, Arthur J. "Gallipoli." November 19, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 37/137/36).
- Baring, Evelyn. "Memorandum by Lord Cromer Respecting the Steps to be Taken in Event of War with Turkey." October 27, 1914. (Catalogue ref: 37/121/124).
- Barrow, EG. "An Appreciation of the Situation in Mesopotamia." November 29, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/5/26)
- Barrow, EG. "Minute by the Military Secretary, India Office." March 25, 1916. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/12/12)
- Chamberlain, Austen. "Mesopotamian Operations." July 17, 1916. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/16/7).
- Churchill, Winston S. "Gallipoli." October 7, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 37/135/11).
- Curzon, George. "The Evacuation of Gallipoli." November 25, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 37/138/12)
- Hamilton, Ian. *Gallipoli Diary*. New York: George H. Doran Company, 1920.
- Hankey, Maurice. "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 14, 1915." October 14, 1915. (Catalogue ref: 42/4/9)
- Hankey, Maurice. "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, October 21, 1915." October 21, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/4/15)
- Hankey, Maurice. "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, November 20, 1915." November 20, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/5/17)
- Hankey, Maurice. "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, November 25, 1915." November 25, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/5/22)
- Hankey, Maurice. "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, December 1, 1915." December 1, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/6/1)
- Hankey, Maurice. "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, December 6, 1915." December 6, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB

- 42/6/4)
- Hankey, Maurice. "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, December 15, 1915." December 15, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/6/8)
- Hankey, Maurice. "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Committee Held at 10 Downing Street, December 28, 1915." December 28, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/6/14)
- Hankey, Maurice. "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, November 25, 1914." November 25, 1914. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/1/4)
- Hankey, Maurice. "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, January 13, 1915." January 13, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/1/16)
- Hankey, Maurice. "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, January 28, 1915." January 28, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/1/26)
- Hankey, Maurice. "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 19, 1915." February 19, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/1/36)
- Hankey, Maurice. "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 24, 1915." February 24, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/1/42)
- Hankey, Maurice. "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, February 26, 1915." February 26, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/1/47)
- Hankey, Maurice. "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, March 3, 1915." March 3, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/2/3)
- Hankey, Maurice. "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the War Council Held at 10 Downing Street, March 19, 1915." March 19, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/2/14)
- Hardinge, Charles. "From Viceroy, 30<sup>th</sup> November, 1915." November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 37/138/21)
- Herbert, Aubrey. *Mons, Anzack, and Kut*. East Yorkshire: Oakpast Ltd, 2011.
- Kipling, Rudyard. "Fuzzy Wuzzy." In *Departmental Ditties, Barrack Room Ballads and*

- Other Verses*. New York: United States Book Company, 1890.
- Liman von Sanders, Otto. *Five Years in Turkey*. East Sussex: The Naval & Military Press, Ltd, 1927.
- “Note by the Aga Khan and M.A. Ali Baig on the Situation in Egypt.” January 12, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 37/123/25)
- “Report of an Inter-Departmental Committee on the Strategical Situation in Mesopotamia.” October 16, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 42/4/12).
- “Official and Private Telegrams Relating to General Sir John Nixon’s Advance in Mesopotamia (in continuation of those circulated on 4<sup>th</sup> October)” October 7, 1915. (Catalogue ref: CAB 37/135/12).
- Roberts, Frederick. *Forty-One Years in India* volumes 1 & 2. London: Richard Bentley, 1897.
- Townshend, Charles. *My Campaign in Mesopotamia*. London: Thornton Butterworth Limited, 1920.
- Wingate, Francis Reginald. *Mahdiism and the Egyptian Sudan: Being an Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahdiism and of Subsequent Events in the Sudan to the Present Time*. London: MacMillan, 1891.

#### Secondary Sources

- Barfield, Thomas. *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Clews, Graham T. *Churchill’s Dilemma*. Saint Barbara: Praeger, 2010.
- Crowley, Patrick. *Kut 1916: Courage and Failure in Iraq*. Briscoe Port Stroud: Spellmount, 2009.
- Daly, MW. *Empire on the Nile*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Davis, Paul K. *Ends and Means: The British Mesopotamian Campaign and Commission*. London: Associated University Press, 1994.
- Erickson, Edward J. *Gallipoli & The Middle East 1914-1918*. London: Amber Books Ltd, 2008.
- Erickson, Edward J. *Gallipoli: Command Under Fire*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2015.
- Erickson, Edward J. *Gallipoli: The Ottoman Campaign*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2010.

- Erickson, Edward J. *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001.
- Farwell, Byron. *Queen Victoria's Little Wars*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972.
- Ford, Roger. *Eden to Armageddon: World War I in the Middle East*. New York: Pegasus Books, 2010.
- Gardner, Nikolas. "British Prestige and the Mesopotamia Campaign." In *Historian* 77, no. 2 (June 2015): 269-289.
- Gardner, Nikolas. *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014.
- Green, Dominic. *Three Empires on the Nile*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007.
- Hadaway, Stuart. *Pyramids and Fleshpots: The Egyptian, Senussi, and Eastern Mediterranean Campaigns, 1914-16*. Briscoombe Port Stroud: Spellmount, 2014.
- Hibbert, Christopher. *The Great Mutiny: India 1857*. New York: The Viking Press, 1978.
- Hooton, ER. *Prelude to the First World War*. Oxford: Fonthill Media, 2014.
- Hopkirk, Peter. *The Great Game*. London: John Murray Publishers Ltd, 1990.
- Lewis, David Levering. *The Race to Fashoda*. New York, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1987.
- Lewis, Bernard. *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2, 000 Years*. New York: Scribner, 1995.
- Lockman, Zachary. *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Massie, Robert K. *Castles of Steel: Britain, Germany, and the Winning of the Great War at Sea*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2004.
- Meyer, Karl E. & Shareen Blair Brysac. *Tournament of Shadows*. Washington: Counterpoint, 1999.
- McMeekin, Sean. *The Ottoman Endgame*. New York: Penguin Press, 2015.
- Preston, Diana. *The Dark Defile*. New York: Walker Publishing Company Inc, 2012.

- Rogan, Eugene. *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East*. New York: Basic Books, 2015.
- Royle, Trevor. *The Kitchener Enigma*. London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1985.
- Rudenno, Victor. *Gallipoli: Attack from the Sea*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, 1978.
- Steel, Nigel & Peter Hart. *Defeat at Gallipoli*. London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1994.
- Streets, Heather. *Martial Races*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.
- Stephenson, Charles. *A Box of Sand: The Italo-Ottoman War 1911-1912*. Ticehurst, Tattered Flag Press, 2014.
- Townshend, Charles. *Desert Hell: The British Invasion of Mesopotamia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Travers, Tim. *Gallipoli*. Stroud: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2001.
- Waller, John H. *Beyond the Khyber Pass*. New York: Random House, 1990.
- Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. *The First World War in the Middle East*. London: C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd, 2014.
- Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. *The Logistics and Politics of the British Campaigns in the Middle East, 1914-1922*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Uyar, Meysat & Edward J. Erickson. *A Military History of the Ottomans: From Osman to Atatürk*. Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2009.
- Van Der Vat, Dan. *The Dardanelles Disaster: Winston Churchill's Greatest Failure*. New York: The Overlook Press, 2009.