PUBLICATIONS

OF THE

NAVY RECORDS SOCIETY

Vol. 161

THE NAVAL ROUTE TO THE ABYSS

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THE NAVAL ROUTE TO THE ABYSS

The Anglo-German Naval Race 1895–1914

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First published 2015 by Ashgate Publishing

eBook distributed by Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2023

This volume is dedicated to Roderick Suddaby (1946–2013),
Keeper of the Department of Documents at the Imperial War Museum,
a great help to all historians and a long-time friend of the Navy Records
Society.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES ON GERMAN SOURCES

Editorial Practice

The German documents in this publication are – with very few exceptions – presented in their original form, omitting later corrections and marginal notes. In many instances the English translation is only for an extract whereas the German text – again with very few exceptions – is reproduced at full length. Emphasis within the text is printed in italics. Smaller type sizes have been used in order to adapt the information provided to tabular size or to follow the pattern of the original or to indicate headings that are positioned in the margin in the original.

Titles and Ranks Cited in German as well as in English

a) Titles of government office holders:

Fürst	– Prince
Graf	– Count
Reichskanzler	– Chancellor
Staatssekretär	– State Secretary / Secretary of State

b) Official titles of civil servants serving in the Imperial Navy Office:

Geheimrat	– Privy Councillor
Geheimer Oberbaurat	– Senior Privy Construction Councillor
Marinebaurat	– Naval Construction Councillor
Marineoberbaurat	– Senior Naval Construction Councillor

c) British and German naval ranks occurring in this volume:

Großadmiral (Grand Admiral)	– Admiral of the Fleet
Admiral	– Admiral
Vizeadmiral	– Vice Admiral

Kontreadmiral (Konteradmiral)	– Rear Admiral
Kapitän zur See	– Captain
Fregattenkapitän	– Commander
Korvettenkapitän	– Lieutenant Commander
Kapitänleutnant	– Lieutenant
Oberleutnant zur See/Leutnant zur See	– Sub-Lieutenant

Displacement Tonnage

Usually, British and German displacement figures are based on a different measurement as the German metric ton does not exactly match the British ton (=1.016kg). Yet, at least the reference works Roger Chesneau and Eugène M. Kolésnik (eds), *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships, 1860–1905* (London 1979), and Robert Gardiner and Randal Gray (eds), *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships, 1906–1921* (London 1985), apparently provide figures for both navies based on the same measurement.

In order to allow for a somewhat easier comparison the editorial notes concerning the displacement of German ships are taken from these reference works. Where figures for full load and normal displacements are given (from 1905 onwards) the latter figure is cited.

Branches of the Imperial Navy Office

In this volume the Imperial Navy Office with several of its branches is quoted by the organisational abbreviated designation in accordance with the usage observed in the sources:

A   General Navy Department [Allgemeines Marinedepartement], to which the Military Division (A I) [Militärische Abteilung] was subordinated,

B   Engineering Department [Technisches Departement], from 1905 onwards designated as Yard Department [Werft-Departement],

C   Administrations Department [Verwaltungs-Departement],

E   Budget Division (from 1905 till 1914 subordinate to the Administrations Department (E or CE) [Etats-Abteilung], from 1914 onwards Budget Department [Etats-Departement],

H   Nautical Division [Nautische Abteilung], from 1908 onwards Nautical Department [Nautisches Departement],

K   Drawing Division [Konstruktionsabteilung], from 1905 onwards Drawing Department [Konstruktions-Departement],

M   Central Department [Zentralabteilung],

N   News Bureau [Nachrichtenbüro],
W   Weapons Division [Waffenabteilung], from 1906 onwards
      Weapons Department [Waffen-Departement].

The biographical information concerning German naval officers usually draws on Hans H. Hildebrand and Ernest Henriot (eds), *Deutschlands Admirale 1849–1945*, 3 vols (Osnabrück, 1988–90).

INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the Volume

The Anglo-German naval race, as its name implies, had two participants, both of whom were equally important to the events that unfolded. Despite this, many of the accounts of this, probably the most totemic of all modern armaments competitions prior to the Cold War, analyse it largely from the viewpoint of one or other of its principal actors. Rarely, in such studies, are both contestants the equal focus of attention.

There are, to be sure, many good reasons for this tendency. Without doubt, the naval policies of Britain and Germany were both significant undertakings in their own right, worthy of detailed individual scrutiny and capable, within their exclusive national contexts, of revealing much about the political progress taking place in their particular settings. Indeed, that the growth of the German navy can best be understood not as a military or foreign policy tool, but rather in a domestic setting, as a policy response to the difficulties faced by the autocratic German political elite to the demands for greater political pluralism on the part of the wider population has long been a mainstay of the 'Kehrite' school of German history, a point that will be elaborated later in this introduction. In this context, giving equality of focus to Britain, the other player in the naval race, would make little sense.

In addition to the strong pull of such domestic contexts, it is also true that many of the leading players in the saga of the naval race were colourful characters that merit serious and close personal study on their own terms without the encumbrance that comes from intruding a wider international context. That one might examine the life and policy judgements of a Fisher or a Churchill without equal reference to their German counterparts is not, in this sense, a matter of great surprise. Equally, that a historian might chose to write about Tirpitz or Kaiser Wilhelm II without conterminously putting the British dimension on display in terms of absolute equality is clearly not an invalid approach.

If existing studies of the Anglo-German naval race thus tend to be studies of British naval policy or of German naval policy, or alternatively biographical evaluations of Fisher or of Tirpitz, this is entirely

understandable and justifiable. Nevertheless, this is an approach that this volume intends to abjure. The naval race that will be illuminated through documentary evidence here will be both a British one and a German one. Placed side by side with each other in chronologically organised chapters will be a selection of primary sources from both participants that allow a direct comparison to be drawn between them. This will illustrate not only what Britain and Germany intended to achieve in their management of naval affairs, but also how they regarded each other and the extent to which their policies were reactive responses to what their potential adversary was doing. The documents will cover a wide range of issues. At the top level will be documents revealing the grand strategy, insofar as there was one, pursued by the two naval powers. This will be particularly relevant to Germany given the influence that the so-called 'Tirpitz Plan' had on the long-term unfolding of German naval shipbuilding and fleet formation. The fact that the Tirpitz Plan was underpinned by a strategic concept – the *Risikoflotte* idea (of which more will be said later) – and had a broad aim of supporting the Reich government's wider policy agenda gives added weight to this. Underneath this level, are numerous documents explaining the conception of future war that existed in the upper echelons of the British and German navies. These documents are surprisingly diverse. Naturally, the two sides planned for a fleet engagement and each thought long and hard about the circumstances most propitious for bringing this about in the manner most favourable for themselves. They also considered economic warfare in both its offensive and defensive forms. Ways of undermining the opponent's economy as well as protecting one's own commercial interests were frequently discussed, with signs of development evident across time. Tactical matters also frequently appear in the documentation. The capabilities of the prospective enemy, evaluations of different weapons systems, considerations of different types of deployment, and berthing and basing arrangements were all matters of concern and reveal much about the dynamic that kept the naval race active.

The British Sources

The documents are drawn from a wide range of places. In the case of Britain, the Admiralty papers at the National Archives are the main source of records on naval policy. As has frequently been observed, these are not an easy set of papers to use. There are two main reasons for this: the manner in which they are organised and the fact that a very large number of them were destroyed a long time ago. A discussion of these points will help set the matter in context.

In the pre-First World War era the Admiralty was divided for administrative purposes into different divisions, departments and branches, each of which was responsible for the management of its own records in its own registries. Many of these branches (which, rather unhelpfully, changed their names from time to time in the various reorganisations so beloved of ministers and civil servants) dealt with matters that did not directly bear upon the naval race. Not much of the business of the Victualling Branch or the Medical Director General's Department, for example, was focused on naval arms competition between the two leading European maritime states. This is probably just as well because one of the consequences of the devolved branch registry system was that the branches themselves decided, within certainly loosely determined bounds, what to do with their own records once they were finished with them. This encompassed which of their papers to destroy and which to send to the central Admiralty Record Office for more prolonged retention. Very few of the branches outside of the Admiralty Secretary's Department saw much purpose in the long-term preservation of their papers. The result of this was that, with the notable exception of those few papers originating in these outlying branches that were sent to the Admiralty for a decision – and, hence, made executive – very few of their records now survive. For naval historians in general this is a tragedy. For historians of the naval race it is potentially less of a problem, as the main source of papers relating to this topic originated in Military Branch ('M Branch' for short). As this was one of the branches of the Secretary's Department, most of its papers did go to the Admiralty Record Office when the branch had finished with them. Unfortunately, for reasons that will be explained below, that did not necessarily ensure their survival to this day.

The Admiralty Record Office, not being blessed with limitless space, did not keep all of the records that were sent to it. Instead, it selectively 'weeded' the documents in its possession to reduce their number and make the whole more manageable. The process was undertaken in stages. Fifteen years after their receipt, the documents in the Record Office were examined. At this stage all routine papers were destroyed. These routine papers, it should be said, constituted no less than 93 per cent of the total. The residue from this cull (7 per cent of the original total) was then re-examined twenty-five years later, when it was further whittled down to a mere 2 per cent of the original total. The theory behind this rather savage selection process was that all documents of temporary need and transient value would be destroyed. However, anything with long-term political, financial, administrative, legal or historical significance would be retained permanently. The reality, of course, did not live up to this promise. As was probably inevitable with any system that kept a mere 2 per cent of

the original files, numerous documents of considerable importance were destroyed by this weeding process. The Record Office digest, in which – theoretically, at least – were listed all the papers that were sent to the Record Office, is filled with entries for files of enormous historical significance on all aspects of the naval race that no longer exist due to overzealous weeding. The selection of British Admiralty documents for this volume is, therefore, partly (and adversely) shaped by the seemingly arbitrary decisions taken by the Record Office clerks between 1958 and 1961 when they undertook the final 'weeding' of the pre-1914 papers in their care.

If M Branch was the main source of papers on the strategic deployment of the navy, the originator of many British appreciations of the German navy was the Naval Intelligence Department. Unfortunately, this was one of those departments that rarely deposited its papers in the central Admiralty Record Office. The result is that not only are the Royal Navy's assessments of the German fleet harder to find than might have been anticipated or desired, but there are not even full lists of the missing papers in the Admiralty digest because they were never sent there in the first place. Even guessing what has been lost is, thus, hard in this instance.

Some of the deficiencies in the Admiralty papers can be made up in other ways. One of these is to look at the records of other government departments. Naturally enough, the Admiralty engaged in correspondence with those other branches of government that operated in the spheres of foreign and defence policy. Crucial letters and memoranda missing from the Admiralty's own records can be found in the papers of the Foreign Office (FO), Committee of Imperial Defence (CAB), and the Secret Service (HD). An additional official source of naval papers is the Admiralty Library. One of the oldest of the great libraries of state, its collection contains record copies of some of the printed Admiralty books and pamphlets that were distributed for information to the fleet. In the pre-First World War era, many of these had a considerable bearing on the naval race. So, too, do the records of the Admiralty Controller's Department. While most of the regular files of this department have long been lost, those files that specifically related to the design and construction of particular warships were bound together in so-called 'Ships' Covers'. Within these volumes are sometimes to be found the intelligence appreciations or tactical requirements that led to a particular design being adopted. During the naval race, German intentions and capabilities were key factors and so the Ships' Covers can provide vital information on these points.

In addition to such official sources outside of the main Admiralty records, private papers can also provide considerable insights into the

gaps within the main primary source base. Numerous politicians and naval officers kept up a vigorous private correspondence or retained copies of state papers sent to them. These are frequently essential augmentations to the main records, but even more frequently they tell a tale that would otherwise be entirely unknown. To this end, documents have been included here from the private papers located in London, Oxford, Cambridge and Portsmouth.

A final source of crucial information is the writing of the American naval historian Arthur J. Marder. By a mixture of luck and perseverance, Marder managed to persuade the Admiralty to allow him access to their closed records in both 1938 and 1956.[1] Marder's two visits to the Record Office were providential. It was not simply that he saw documents that would not become available to other historians for several years, though, of course, this did happen; rather, the crucial point is that he saw documents that were later destroyed in the weeding process.[2] His tantalising use of quotations from these documents – all of which were vital papers that should never have been pulped – is the only reason that we know anything at all about the actual texts of these records.

The piecing together of this jigsaw of sources allows a systematic, if frustratingly incomplete, picture of British naval policy to be produced. The chapters on the Royal Navy that are included here provide just that. They chart the growing awareness of the German naval challenge in all its various forms, the internal debate over how serious this was, and the development of different policies for dealing with it.

The German Sources

Set alongside these British chapters are chapters on the German navy covering exactly the same period. The story of the German naval records is different to the British experience, but is no less intriguing. In this case,

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[1] The story is ably recounted in Barry M. Gough, *Historical Dreadnoughts: Arthur Marder, Stephen Roskill and Battles for Naval History* (Barnsley, 2010).

[2] It has recently become fashionable in certain circles to denigrate Marder's important and pioneering work by implying that he saw fewer primary documents than was once believed – the object presumably being to contest his mastery of the archival sources and thereby to cast doubt upon his interpretations. In the absence of a definitive list of what he was shown in the Admiralty Record Office, it is difficult to calculate the precise extent of his researches there. However, there are ways of producing a reasonable estimate. For example, many surviving Admiralty dockets still contain the Record Office vouchers from 1938 and/or 1956 indicating that they were once issued to Marder; hence we can be sure that a considerable number of dockets now in ADM 1 were used by him during his visits. Equally, we also know from his quotations from documents that are now sadly missing that he also saw many important files that no longer exist. Collectively, this proves that he was provided with a not inconsiderable number of original dockets, a fact that renders attempts to minimize his research as at best unwarranted and misplaced.

war-time accident was a major factor in bequeathing to us the records we have today.

The Imperial Navy certainly lost the arms race (and the subsequent war, defeat in which eventually initiated the overthrow of the existing order), but it did not lose its files. As early as 1912, facing political bankruptcy of his plan, Tirpitz had started collecting documents for his own autobiography. In 1916, the Imperial Navy Office decided to write its history of the naval war at sea. Following this decision, officers began collecting all documents relating to the navy's policy during the war as well as naval operations. However, the volume dealing with the pre-war era was never written, for it seemed more urgent to defend the navy's actions during the war and thus make clear that it had at least tried to contribute successfully to Germany's war effort. Instead, it was Tirpitz himself who, for many years, influenced the debate on Germany's naval policy before 1914. In the autumn of 1919 he published his *Memoirs* in both German and English versions. These *Memoirs*, which were presented to the public in Germany and in Britain on the very same day, not only contained his 'story' of past events, but also included many important documents on his policy, which had never before been made public. In addition to these *Memoirs*, Tirpitz continued publishing more important documents in 1923/24, first in an article in the *Marinerundschau*, then in a mixture of autobiographical and documentary work (*Politische Dokumente: Der Aufbau der deutschen Weltmacht*). Both editions aimed at defending his policy against his own critics within the navy as well as against members of the Foreign Office. In the early 1920s the latter had begun to publish a 40-volume compendium of documents on German foreign policy in the years 1871–1914 entitled *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette, 1871–1914*.[1] The correspondence therein dealing with the build-up of the Imperial German Navy as well as the Anglo-German naval race was full of harsh criticisms of his attitude.

Tirpitz's death in 1930 and the rise of the Nazi Party to power in Germany more or less put an end to all serious research into German naval policy. Although the Marinearchiv continued collecting documents and interviewing members of Germany's pre-1914 naval leadership, the archives themselves remained closed to historians apart from very few exceptions. In some ways it was an irony of fate that in 1944, when defeat was imminent again, the navy resumed its work on writing a history of the 'Importance of Seapower for Germany', hoping to pave the way for a new navy in later years. Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, one of Tirpitz's

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[1] J. Lepsius, et al., *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette, 1871–1914*, 40 vols (Berlin, 1922–7).

most loyal defenders, now even wanted to write the history of the pre-1914 Imperial German Navy himself. Nothing came of this project as, instead, Raeder was tried at Nuremberg as a war criminal and spent ten years in the Allied prison at Spandau. However, for naval historians, Raeder's intentions proved a stroke of luck for it meant that the majority of naval files were transferred from Berlin to Tambach near Coburg to enable naval historians to write the history of their own service. Safe in the Bavarian countryside, they escaped the Allied bombing of Potsdam that destroyed nearly all of the German army's records. No less serendipitously, the military personnel guarding these files ignored the order to burn them should capture prove imminent, using the wood and petrol provided for this purpose to ameliorate the cold winter instead.

Following Germany's defeat in May 1945, the navy's records were captured by the Allies and transferred to Britain. There they remained in the care of the Admiralty – ironically, looked after somewhat better than the Admiralty's own records – until the mid-1960s, when they were handed back to the Germans.[1] It was only then that German as well as historians from many other countries could start writing their studies – now free from all restrictions.

This volume presents a selection of the most important documents dealing with the 'Tirpitz-Era', which started in the mid-1890s. When Tirpitz was appointed Secretary of State, the Imperial Navy Office became the most powerful institution within the naval establishment. Accordingly, the bulk of the documents printed in this volume, originate from the desks of Tirpitz's 'ministry'. Following the dissolution of the High Command of the Navy, the Admiralty Staff became the next most prominent naval authority. This staff planned naval operations in the event of war against France, Russia, and, of course, Great Britain. These plans were updated every year according to changes in international politics and changing threat perceptions. Most important in this respect was Germany's reaction to developments in Britain. Eventually, some documents deal with Tirpitz's view of events.

All in all, these crucial documents leave no doubt that the Imperial German Navy deliberately challenged the Royal Navy. Tirpitz certainly did not want a war before the navy was ready, which he hoped it would be in the 1920s. Even then, he would probably have preferred a strategy of political blackmail which would in the end have forced Britain to make concessions to grant Germany its 'place in the sun'. Definite answers regarding his final aims are, however, impossible. Even one of his close

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[1]Before this was done, a large number were microfilmed for the British and American governments.

associates in the build-up of the Imperial German Navy had to admit in the early 1920s that Tirpitz never disclosed them to him despite their good relationship.[1]

The complexities of handling the sources go some way to explaining the diversity of opinions that exist about the naval history of the period. In the case both of British and of German naval policy there are complex historiographies marked by, among other things, extremely divergent opinions about how best to explain the unfolding pattern of events. These historiographies bear examination in detail.

The British Historiographical Context

In the British case, the orthodox explanation was established in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. Memoirs and other auto-biographical writings composed retrospectively, first by important Edwardian Admirals[2] and then by leading figures in the pre-war British governments of Arthur J. Balfour, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and Herbert Henry Asquith, although not in accord on every point, did present a clear picture of what had occurred and of why.[3] This was that Britain had been reluctant to enter into naval competition with Germany, but had been compelled to do so by the decision of Germany to embark upon a major naval shipbuilding programme, a policy that actively threatened British security. Of course, as with all memoirs, the suspicion was ever present that the passage of time or a self-interested desire to present oneself in the best possible light or a combination of both of these factors might have influenced the message they contained. Authenticity, however, was lent to the story by the progressive publication, starting in 1926 and continuing into the late 1930s, of the British Foreign Office papers relating to the origins of the First World War.[4] Although a series of considerable scope, with documents that covered a wide range of diverse issues and geographical areas, the question of Anglo-German naval relations inevitably loomed large in them; and the selection of documents on this topic that they contained essentially validated the message of the memoirs: the naval race began with a German challenge to which Britain had no option but to respond.

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[1] Admiral (ret.) Eduard von Capelle to Vice Admiral (ret.) Carl Hollweg, 23 Dec 1925, BArch, RM 3/11679.

[2] For example, Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, *Memories* (London, 1919) and *idem*, *Records* (London, 1919).

[3] For example, Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis 1911–1918*, 2 vols (London, 1938).

[4] G. P. Gooch and Harold Temperley (eds), *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914*, 11 vols (London, 1926–38).

The first scholarly investigations into British naval policy, while filling in many additional details and offering some interesting nuances, did not differ markedly from this position. The picture painted remained that of an action/reaction cycle begun by Germany. This was also the essence of books published by E. L. Woodward in 1935 and by Arthur Marder in 1940.[1] The core of their argument merits some elaboration and will be described below.

The starting point for the Woodward–Marder analysis was the late nineteenth century. For most of this period, Britain's geopolitical position was remarkably clear. Russia posed a danger along the Indian frontier; France clashed with Britain in much of the rest of the colonial world. As Russia and France were allies, Britain naturally focused, above all else, on meeting the threat from these two nations. In this context, Germany, although sometimes troublesome, was viewed more as a potential ally than as a likely enemy. It, too, had issues with France and Russia and, thus, co-operation between Britain and Germany was logically in the interest of both countries. Then, in 1898, under the direction of Rear Admiral Tirpitz, Germany embarked upon a major fleet-building programme. Progressively extended in 1900, 1906, 1908 and 1912, it led to the construction of a huge force of battleships stationed in bases adjacent to the North Sea. What were these vessels for? The German government maintained that they were for the protection of Germany's overseas trade and colonial empire. Given that the German fleet consisted largely of battleships with an operational range that did not extend much beyond the North Sea, this was an implausible assertion. Segments of the British press quickly concluded that they were a deliberate challenge to Britain's naval supremacy and the harbinger of a planned invasion.

What did Britain do in response? The answer, according to the orthodox historiography, was simple. Faced with this unexpected menace, Britain ended its self-imposed diplomatic isolation, concluding an alliance with Japan and ententes with France and Russia, new-found friendships that helped to contain Germany. It also shored up its defences. The army, which had been found badly wanting in the war in South Africa, was remodelled into a small but well-equipped expeditionary force geared for continental warfare. Meanwhile, under the energetic leadership of First Sea Lord Admiral Sir John Fisher, the Royal Navy instituted major reforms. It pulled back its scattered forces from overseas stations and rearranged them into a formidable fighting force in home waters. Then it embarked upon a building programme to ensure supremacy over the

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[1]E. L. Woodward, *Great Britain and the German Navy* (Oxford, 1935); Arthur J. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880–1905* (New York, 1940).

growing German fleet. This superiority was not just to be measured in quantitative terms; it also had a qualitative dimension. Fisher deliberately ordered ever larger and more powerful warships, a process of 'plunging' designed to confound rivals, such as Germany, that would have to tear up carefully formulated construction plans if they wished to keep up. That Germany took up the challenge was held to reveal beyond doubt her hostile intent. The result was a decade-long Anglo-German 'Cold War', the dominant motif of which was the frenzied construction of ever greater numbers of dreadnought battleships.

This analytical framework quickly became a very familiar one. Its influence was further extended by a considerable body of additional research undertaken by Marder himself, all of which strongly reinforced his original ideas.[1] Other historians then built on the edifice that Marder had created. Particularly influential was the work of Paul Kennedy, whose penetrating analyses of the Anglo-German antagonism in general, and of British and German naval policy in particular, pointed in the same direction as Marder and Woodward and added further layers of sophistication to their earlier works.[2] In addition, highly successful popular histories, such as Peter Padfield's *The Great Naval Race* and Robert Massie's *Dreadnought* further propagated the orthodox position, disseminating it across a much wider readership.[3]

Yet, for all its familiarity, beginning in the 1980s the orthodox position has become a much contested narrative. New research into a wide range of different facets of British foreign and defence policies has led to almost every element of the orthodox historiography coming under scrutiny and being declared wanting.

To begin with, revisionist diplomatic historians – in the vanguard of whom was Keith Wilson – have challenged the notion that Britain's abandonment of 'splendid isolation' had anything to do with the German threat for the simple reason that they do not believe there was one.[4] Instead, they maintain that the idea that Germany represented a danger

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[1] Arthur J. Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone. Volume 2: Years of Power, 1904–1914* (London, 1956); *idem*, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow, Volume I: The Road to War, 1904–1914* (Oxford, 1961).

[2] Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London, 1976); *idem*, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism 1860–1914* (London, 1980).

[3] Peter Padfield, *The Great Naval Race: The Anglo-German Rivalry 1900–1914* (London, 1974); Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany, and the Coming of the Great War* (London, 1991).

[4] Keith M. Wilson, *The Policy of the Entente: Essays on the Determinants of British Foreign Policy, 1904–1914* (Cambridge, 1985); Niall Fergusson, 'The Kaiser's European Union: What if Britain had stood aside in August 1914?', in *idem* (ed.), *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (London, 1997).

was invented by the Foreign Office to justify appeasing France and Russia, the two powers that Britain actually had reason to fear. As surrendering in public to traditional rivals was an unpalatable prospect, but reaching an accommodation with them to fight a new and dangerous foe was eminently saleable, the German menace was forged, in both senses of the word, as the 'public relations' cover for this policy.

Revisionist naval historians – the most prominent of whom are Jon Sumida and Nicholas Lambert – have also attacked the familiar narrative, offering an alternative explanation that is equally dismissive of the idea that Germany was a major influence on British policy.[1] The key to their interpretation is the belief that Fisher brought to the Admiralty an entirely new way of assessing foreign threats. Fisher's predecessors had assessed threats mechanistically and conceived national security numerically – i.e. in Britain having more warships that its rivals. By contrast, Fisher's yardstick was operational capability. The acid test was whether the Royal Navy could stop other powers from invading the British Isles or from starving Britain of vital imports of food and raw materials.

For Fisher, preventing invasion was, it is argued, very straightforward. In his view, the growing range and power of the torpedo had made large armoured warships dangerously vulnerable to attack from submarines and destroyers, especially in narrow waters where they could not easily decline action or manoeuvre to avoid being struck. As the English Channel and North Sea were apparently just such waters, Fisher believed that an invasion force approaching the British Isles could be easily dispatched by what revisionist historians have termed 'flotilla defence'.[2] So sure, apparently, were Fisher and his successors of this idea that it has even been argued that in 1914 they planned to replace with submarines two of the battleships due to be ordered under the forthcoming naval estimates, vessels that would be stationed along the British coast to counter the invasion threat.

However, protecting British trade would not be so simple. Recent innovations in propulsion and armour plate had created a major new threat in the form of the armoured cruiser. These vessels had the range to capture merchantmen in distant waters, were fast enough to evade warships stronger than them, and were powerful enough to deal with the small

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[1]Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy: Finance, Technology and British Naval Policy 1889–1914* (London, 1989); Nicholas A. Lambert, *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution* (Columbia, SC, 1999).

[2]Nicholas A. Lambert, 'Admiral Sir John Fisher and the Concept of Flotilla Defence, 1904–1909', *The Journal of Military History*, 59 (1995), 639–60. The term 'flotilla defence' did not originate with Lambert. For example, Julian Corbett uses it in his classic 1911 study *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*. However, whereas Corbett discusses it largely in relation to the prevention of invasion, Lambert sees it as a fiscal as well as a defence strategy.

cruisers normally assigned to trade protection duties. They were, thus, tailor made for attacking shipping on the high seas and their existence made cutting off Britain from global commerce and starving her into submission a realistic plan for any power possessing sufficient armoured cruisers.

The belief that Britain could easily be rendered invulnerable to invasion but was extremely susceptible to economic warfare yielded particular results when used as a basis for evaluating the country's naval needs. First, it suggested that Britain had little reason to fear Germany. The latter's navy had very few armoured cruisers; therefore the prospect of being starved into submission did not apply to war with Germany. As for its battleships, these would have to traverse the confined waters of the North Sea to pose any threat to Britain and this could easily be prevented by flotillas of torpedo craft.

However, if Germany appeared unthreatening, France and Russia did not. Given their many armoured cruisers, easy access to the world's oceans, and numerous bases from which to launch raids, both possessed the capability to harry Britain's lines of supply. Although they were currently friends of Britain, they had recently been her enemies and it was not hard to conceive of them becoming so again. Accordingly, Fisher's strategic priority was to prepare for this very dangerous and not implausible eventuality. And this, it is said, is exactly what Fisher did. He devised a system for hunting down foreign armoured cruisers based upon a new and revolutionary type of warship, the *Invincible*-type large armoured cruiser, later known as the battle cruiser. Powered by steam turbines – a new technology that Fisher readily embraced – these vessels could outrun any existing armoured cruiser. Equipped with the latest wireless telegraphy installations – another new technology – they could be remotely vectored to their targets. Provided with a heavy main armament linked to the latest mechanical fire-control device – Arthur Hungerford Pollen's aim correction system – they could pulverise their adversaries before they even got close enough to reply. In short, they were the perfect answer to the armoured cruiser menace. And this was not their only notable attribute. Their ability to hit hard and at long range also provided an additional advantage, namely the ability to lie in the line of battle and take part in a fleet action. If this option were fully utilised, the need for fleets of expensive battleships might even disappear, allowing for considerable cost savings. Accordingly, ensuring Britain had enough of these invaluable multi-purpose vessels became Fisher's overriding goal.[1]

[1] Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr, 'The Origins of the *Dreadnought* Revolution: A Historiographical Essay', *The International History Review*, 12 (1991), 246–72.

The implications of the revisionist perspective for interpreting the naval race were potentially profound. If correct, it meant that five major changes were needed to the general understanding of British naval policy in this era.

First, the German challenge was a very peripheral consideration in determining British naval policy. Given the force structure it adopted, the German navy posed none of the threats that worried Fisher and so did not cause him any concern. Second, and the natural corollary of this, Fisher's reforms had nothing to do with countering Germany; insofar as they were aimed at particular nations, France and Russia were the ones concerned. Third, although Fisher's name is inseparably linked to battleships of the *Dreadnought* type, his actual aim was to equip the Royal Navy with battle cruisers. The idea that he sought to contain Germany through the building of dreadnoughts is not only false, it is misleading. Far from orchestrating a race in them, Fisher actually opposed their construction. Fourth, on this basis it is questionable if there was even an Anglo-German naval race at all. With France and Russia the focus of Admiralty planning under Fisher, the earliest date that Germany could have supplanted them would have been 1910, the year of Fisher's retirement. In fact, according to Nicholas Lambert, Germany did not become a strategic priority until 1912, and even then 'the Admiralty kept a wary eye on its Russian and French allies'.[1] Finally, this poses the question of why Germany was so prominent in the contemporary public discourse. The revisionist answer is that, although Fisher may not have believed in the reality of a German threat, highlighting such a possibility was the best means of extracting resources from the Treasury. As Nicholas Lambert puts it, Fisher 'exploited public perceptions of a challenge for political and budgetary advantage'.[2] In this light, the naval race, if it existed at all, was more Iraq War than Cold War, the prospectus on which it was sold being decidedly 'dodgy' and deliberately 'sexed up'.

Since it first appeared some three decades ago, the revisionist interpretation, although controversial, has come close to establishing itself as the new orthodoxy. However, in recent times, it has come in for some sustained criticism. One important area of reconsideration has been the nature of British assessments of foreign naval threats. Investigations by a number of historians into the way in which Britain's Naval Intelligence Department evaluated the capabilities of its overseas adversaries have

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[1]Nicholas A. Lambert, 'Transformation and Technology in the Fisher Era: The Impact of the Communications Revolution', *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 27 (2004), 272–97, at 293.

[2]Nicholas A. Lambert, 'Review of *Spies in Uniform*', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 18 (2006), 609.

revealed some striking conclusions. First of all, while it is certainly true that, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Admiralty recognised that France and Russia were Britain's main diplomatic and imperial rivals, this did not mean that they had a high opinion of those nations' naval capabilities. Evaluations of Russia's naval forces were particularly scathing. As some impressive scholarship by Nicholas Papastratigakis has shown, at the start of the twentieth century the Russian navy was regularly depicted as the artificial creation of a nation lacking any seafaring tradition, a second-rate force dependent upon poor materiel and manned by inadequate and uncommitted officers and unwilling and poorly trained crews.[1] The chances of it being capable of taking on the Royal Navy in a fleet engagement with any prospect of success were rated as negligible to the extent that the fear of Russia's fleet declining to offer battle caused more anxiety in London than the prospect that it might come out and fight. To be sure, the French navy was not subject to such sharp or dismissive criticism. On the contrary, it was widely understood that the French ships were good, their crews were smart and their officers dedicated and professional; but none of this, of necessity, made for an effective fighting force. The problem lay with the direction (or rather the lack of direction) set by the republic's politicians. Unable to decide whether they wished to prepare their naval forces for a fleet engagement with Britain or to attempt to starve Britain into submission by waging a *guerre de course*, the French naval leadership constantly oscillated between these two options and inevitably ended up preparing for neither. The Naval Intelligence Department, being well aware of this indecision and the crippling effects it had on French naval preparations, drew the obvious conclusion that France would be a less formidable foe than might otherwise have been the case. Thus, neither individually nor in combination – assuming that the French and Russian navies could actually work together, which was a doubtful proposition given that they rarely exercised together and had made only the most limited provision for such collaboration – did the fleets of the Dual Alliance cause all that much anxiety. The Admiralty was convinced that, should war come, they would be beaten.[2]

   If the French and Russian battle fleets were less threatening than has sometimes been made out, Britain's naval leadership was no less confident

[1]Nicholas Papastratigakis, *Russian Imperialism and Naval Power: Military Strategy and Build-up to the Russo-Japanese War* (London, 2010); *idem*, 'British Naval Strategy: The Russian Black Sea Fleet and the Turkish Straits, 1890–1904', *The International History Review*, 32 (2010), 643–59.

[2]Matthew S. Seligmann, 'Britain's Great Security Mirage: The Royal Navy and the Franco-Russian Naval Threat, 1898–1906', *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 35 (2012), 861–86.

when it came to the menace to British floating trade posed by French and Russian armoured cruisers. This, too, they believed could easily be contained. The reason for this conviction was that an obvious counter-measure existed. An enemy armoured cruiser could always be hunted down by one or more British ones and, as the Royal Navy consistently built more (and better) armoured cruisers than France and Russia, it had the means and wherewithal to adopt such an approach. This was neither an imaginative policy nor a cheap one, but the Admiralty were sure that it would enable them to neutralize any prospective Franco-Russian *guerre de course*. Indeed, so assured were the Admiralty on this point that plans drawn up in 1905 for a naval war against France assumed that, while Britain would be able to force the French merchant marine entirely off the seas with relative ease, British shipping would be able to ply its regular trade largely unaffected.[1]

If, upon closer inspection, the danger posed by the Dual Alliance was considerably less severe than the revisionist interpretation maintains, the suggestion that the expansion of German maritime power was viewed in London with equanimity is also open to serious question. For one thing, while it is certainly true that Tirpitz and the Imperial Navy Office did not regard an ability to wage economic warfare as the main goal of their shipbuilding programme, and therefore, did not invest heavily in armoured cruisers, this did not mean that Germany lacked the ability to undertake an assault on British trade. Germany possessed the world's second largest merchant marine. Unfortunately, in the event of war with Britain, it would be impossible for these vessels to continue with their regular commercial activities as the Royal Navy was certain to seek to drive the German flag from the oceans. What should these merchant vessels do? Logic dictated that, rather than becoming a prize of war or lying idle in a neutral harbour, at least some of these ships would be converted into auxiliary cruisers and sent out to attack British shipping. In a small way, the German Admiralty Staff intended to do just that. Guns were set aside for the conversion in German home ports of certain selected merchantmen. At the same time, provision was made for German cruisers on overseas stations to arm and supply other German vessels on the high seas. These plans were always relatively modest, but that was not how they looked from London, where the prospect of such German action caused consternation. The British naval authorities were especially worried that Germany would arm its fast transatlantic liners and use them to conduct a vigorous trade war. The reason this caused such profound anxiety can be found in the great speed

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[1]Memorandum by Ottley, undated [before 12 July 1905], TNA: ADM 116/3111. These documents are often cited as evidence that the Admiralty was still considering war with France in 1905. It is less frequently mentioned how untroubled they were by this prospect.

of these German vessels. This was an asset that would enable them to run down any British merchantman afloat and evade any British cruisers sent to destroy them. Unlike the French and Russian armoured cruiser threat, for which Britain had a matching capability that could neutralise it, this was not something for which the Royal Navy possessed any ready and existing countermeasures. Until these were developed and were known to be effective, anxiety over the presumed German plan to attack British trade was always going to be high.[1]

If recent research has shown that German commerce warfare capabilities loomed large in London, thus undermining one plank of the revisionist argument, other research has contested the idea that the Admiralty ever believed that the German battle fleet could easily be contained by torpedo-armed flotilla craft. One fundamental problem was geography. Flotilla defence might have been a viable solution to an assault by France, because the obvious crossing point, the English Channel, was small and narrow and the Royal Navy had an excellent infrastructure of defended harbours along the south coast that would allow for the basing, refuelling and replenishing of submarines and destroyers there. In the context of a French cross-Channel invasion attempt it was at least feasible to imagine filling these waters with a swarm of flotilla craft that could be launched against the invaders.[2] However, replicating this strategy in the North Sea was an altogether different matter. For one thing, the network of defended harbours that existed along the south coast found no equivalent on Britain's North Sea littoral; basing sufficient warships there would be problematic in the extreme. Yet, even if this were achieved, there was the difference in size between these two bodies of water to be considered. Covering approximately 290,000 square miles, the North Sea was ten times larger than the English Channel. It was simply impossible, with the limited number of available vessels, to distribute them over so extensive an area in such a way as to guarantee even meeting an invasion fleet let alone rendering this vast expanse of water impassable to armoured warships. The distance of the German ports from Britain and the limited range of most flotilla vessels accentuated this problem. A destroyer sent deep into the North Sea in order to deny some part of it to the enemy could

[1]Matthew S. Seligmann, *The Royal Navy and the German Threat, 1901–1914: Admiralty Plans to protect British Trade in a War against Germany* (Oxford, 2012). It is to be noted that French and Russian merchant vessels did not match the speed of their faster German counterparts and so did not pose this threat.

[2]Even this has not gone uncontested. See Richard Dunley, 'Fighting the Enemy Within: Political Intrigue and Inter-Service Rivalry in the Invasion Debates, 1903–5', paper at Empire in Peril Workshop, Queen Mary University of London, 14 November 2013. This argues that flotilla defence was not a genuine strategy at all, but an expedient that disappeared after serving its immediate purpose.

only keep station for a limited period before needing to return for refuelling. Thus, of the total number of flotilla craft available, only half at most could be at sea at any one time. The obvious solution to this particular problem was to keep the flotilla craft in British waters, close to their bases, and wait for the enemy to come to them. However, this approach, while certainly addressing the refuelling issue, created its own problems. Not only did it pass the initiative to the enemy, something the Admiralty was not eager to do, but it would also have required the distribution of 150 or so flotilla vessels along more than 600 miles of coastline. If this were done evenly, with a small number of craft dotted every few miles, it was a recipe for being weak everywhere and was certain to preclude anything even remotely resembling a swarm from meeting a German attack. Yet, if the ships were more concentrated, this would create gaps in the defensive network that an invader could exploit.

Given these problems, it is hardly surprising that none of the British war plans from this period relied upon flotilla defence for security against German invasion. Instead, all the surviving war plans from prior to 1912 were predicated on a system of observational blockade. This entailed sending destroyers out to the German coasts where they would mount a watch on the exits to the German naval ports. Should the German fleet come out, either on its own or as the escort to an invasion convoy, the destroyers would provide the warning that would allow the British Home Fleet, established by Fisher for this purpose, to intercept it. After 1912, as fears over the strength of German countermeasures grew, the observation forces began to pull back from the German littoral and move closer to the British Isles, but their essential purpose of providing a warning that German forces had put to sea did not change. Two principal points are notable in this analysis. First, the main role of the destroyers in such schemes was observation not aggressive action – not that the latter was precluded. Second, the main defence against invasion rested with armoured warships – principally battleships – not flotilla craft.[1]

Reinforcing this line of argument is Christopher Bell's examination of Admiralty policy under Winston Churchill. Bell strongly contests the notion, advanced by Nicholas Lambert in support of the theory that flotilla defence was central to British strategy, that Churchill proposed to replace two of the 1914 battleships with submarines for the purposes of defending the British Isles. As Bell explains, for Churchill a cardinal point was

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[1]Shawn T. Grimes, *Strategy and War Planning in the British Navy, 1887–1918* (Woodbridge, 2012); David Morgan-Owen, '"History is a Record of Exploded Ideas": Sir John Fisher and Home Defence, 1904–1910', *The International History Review*, 36 (2014), 550–72; Christopher M. Buckey, 'Forging the Shaft of the Spear of Victory: The Creation and Evolution of the Home Fleet in the Prewar Era, 1900–1914' (PhD, University of Salford, 2013).

having the strongest possible force in the main theatre. To this end, he was willing to make concessions in secondary theatres. Hence, he was quite willing to withdraw armoured warships from the Mediterranean and to rely instead on destroyers and submarines to protect British interests there. However, it did not follow from this that he was willing to accept the same idea in British waters. On the contrary, in this, the primary theatre in any Anglo-German conflict, Churchill insisted on the strongest possible force of battleships that he could muster. Nothing could have been further from his mind than placing any reliance on flotilla craft, without the support of a greatly superior force of armoured warships, for the defence of the British Isles.[1]

Implicit in the analysis above is that battleships continued to be the foundation of British home defence. This not only undermines the theory behind flotilla defence, it also has implications for the revisionist position on battle cruisers. In the revisionist argument, battle cruisers were multi-purpose vessels needed in the first instance in the trade defence role for hunting down French and Russian armoured cruisers and ultimately to replace battleships in traditional fleet combat situations. The obvious difficulty with this assertion – that under Fisher's leadership the Admiralty ordered three times as many battleships as it did battle cruisers – has been countered (none too convincingly) by the observation that Fisher did this reluctantly and only because he could not persuade colleagues of his case for abandoning *Dreadnoughts* in favour of *Invincibles*. While there may be some truth in the matter of Fisher's preference for battle cruisers, research suggests that this is anything but the full story and that the revisionist arguments regarding the functions of and rationale for this type need re-examination. To start with, it is not at all clear that hunting French and Russian armoured cruisers featured strongly in their initial creation. For one thing, when the Committee on Designs met in late 1904 and early 1905 to formulate the blueprint of Fisher's new warship types, including the battle cruiser, such a threat as existed from the armoured cruisers of the Dual Alliance had already been met by the extensive construction of similar British vessels. Indeed, so great was the British preponderance at this point that there was no need to build anything else for this purpose.

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[1]Christopher M. Bell, 'Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution Reconsidered: Winston Churchill at the Admiralty, 1911–1914', *War in History*, 18 (2011), 333–56; *idem*, *Churchill and Sea Power* (Oxford, 2012). Bell's argument has not gone uncontested. See, Nicholas A. Lambert, 'On Standards: A Reply to Christopher Bell', *War in History*, 19 (2012), 217–40. However, given the current state of research, it is Bell's that is clearly the more convincing position, a fact reinforced by Bell's strong (and, at the time of writing, as yet unanswered) demolition of Lambert's counter-argument. See Christopher M. Bell, 'On Standards and Scholarship: A Response to Nicholas Lambert', *War in History*, 20 (2013), 381–409.

But even if there had been such a need, by the time the first battle cruisers were actually laid down – February, March and April 1906 – there was no longer a Franco-Russian armoured cruiser threat to counter. Many of Russia's principal warships, armoured cruisers included, had been lost in the Russo-Japanese War and France, hardly a threat on its own in any case, was leaning closer to Britain diplomatically to the point where it was in effect, if not in name, an ally. In such circumstances, what could have been the driver for these vessels? Rather than a Franco-Russian armoured cruiser menace, the origins of the battle cruiser seem to be intimately associated with the need to hunt and destroy German armed liners. As has already been stated, this was a pressing threat for which, at least when it was first contemplated, no countermeasures existed. This was something the Admiralty quickly sought to remedy. The building under the Cunard Agreement of two fast British liners – *Lusitania* and *Mauretania* – as hunter-killers of German raiders was a logical first step. However, it was not a solution that appealed to Fisher, who had doubts about the utility of a vessel that could only expect to meet its German counterpart on equal terms. Hence, on assuming the mantle of First Sea Lord he sought alternatives. His solution, as he explained in December 1905, was the battle cruiser.[1] Revealingly, this was still his position in early 1915 during his second stint as First Sea Lord.

Whatever motivated the design and construction of the first battle cruisers it must be acknowledged that in the years before the outbreak of the First World War they were deployed in quite different ways. Upon completion, the three *Invincibles* were sent to join the Home Fleet. Their role there appears to have been to provide heavy support to the destroyers on observational blockade of the German coasts and as a fast reaction force in the event of reports of a German raid. As the years advanced and more battle cruisers became available, this role appears to have been progressively refined, such that by 1913 the prospect of having mixed battle cruiser and light-cruiser squadrons operating in the North Sea was at the forefront of Admiralty thinking for home defence. Once again, this emphasis on armoured warships to deter an invasion casts doubt on the concept of flotilla defence as well as on the revisionist perspective on battle cruisers.

New research on pre-war British gunnery and fire-control development further challenges major portions of the revisionist viewpoint. According to a once influential but now largely superseded analysis by Jon Sumida,

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[1]Matthew S. Seligmann, 'New Weapons for New Targets: Sir John Fisher, the Threat from Germany, and the Building of HMS *Dreadnought* and HMS *Invincible*, 1902–1907', *The International History Review*, 30 (2008), 303–31; Stephen Cobb, *Preparing for Blockade, 1885–1914: Naval Contingency for Economic Warfare* (Farnham, 2013), pp. 226–7.

Fisher's emphasis on the battle cruiser was underpinned by developments in fire control that mistakenly led him to assume that it would be possible for the battle cruiser to fill the role of the battleship in a fleet engagement. As Sumida explains, Fisher 'believed that a monopoly of new methods of gunnery would enable British battle cruisers to fight at distances that were greater than the effective range of torpedoes and enemy big guns, which would allow them to avoid torpedoes and engage battleships with impunity in spite of their relatively weak armor [*sic*] because they could supposedly hit before being hit'.[1] As long as it was unchallenged, this argument held some prominence. However, in 2005 a highly convincing alternative viewpoint was presented by John Brooks that undermined several elements of the Sumida thesis. Based on extensive research into a range of papers seemingly ignored by Sumida in his account as well as a penetrating evaluation of the institutional, personal and technological drivers of British naval policy, Brooks concluded, contra Sumida, that 'at no stage did fire control … have any discernable influence on Fisher's dreadnought policy'.[2] The implications of this statement are, of course, considerable. If new inventions and techniques in mechanical fire control did not provide the basis for Fisher's push to build battle cruisers then something else must have done so. The idea that the battle cruiser was developed in order to replace the battleship, already a rather dubious proposition, thereby becomes increasingly untenable.

   The current assault on all aspects of the revisionist argument means that British naval policy in the decade and a half before the First World War is now, for the first time in many years, highly contested ground. The question of where Germany fits into Admiralty thinking is especially contentious. The argument – exemplified by Sumida's assertions that the 'German challenge … was not the focal point of British naval policy' and that, in the years up to 1914, the Royal Navy was actually preparing 'to fight a global naval war against a superior combination of naval powers'[3] – is fundamentally incompatible with the alternative viewpoint that, while not blinkered by the German threat, the massive extent of Germany's naval build-up and the fact that it was taking place at such close proximity to the British mainland simply mandated that protection against this menace should be the Admiralty's principal concern. As a result, as the anniversary of the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War looms, a focus on

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[1]Jon Tetsuro Sumida, 'British Preparation for Global Naval War, 1904–14: Directed Revolution or Critical Problem Solving?', in Talbot C. Imlay and Monica Duffy Toft (eds), *The Fog of Peace and War Planning: Military and Strategic Planning under Uncertainty* (London, 2006), pp. 126–38, at p. 130.

[2]John Brooks, *Dreadnought Gunnery and the Battle of Jutland: The Question of Fire Control* (London, 2005), p. 296.

[3]Sumida, 'British Preparation', pp. 126–7.

this most well known facet of the Anglo-German antagonism is once again to the fore. It is notable that, in different ways and for different reasons, the historiography of German naval policy is also currently entering a period in which long held views are being contested.

The German Historiographical Context

The German historical perspective on the Anglo-German naval arms race was defined, initially at least, by its outcome. Germany's naval and political leadership had set out to challenge British maritime supremacy and had failed to do so successfully. Yet, this was not the full extent of the navy's failure. Not only had Germany lost this competition – a galling enough outcome in itself – but, in addition, it was felt that this race had helped to provoke a war, one which, despite claiming the lives of more than 2 million German soldiers and approximately 700,000 civilians, had also ended in failure.[1] Then, on top of this, Germany had to face the consequences of defeat, including the political, economic, military and moral impairments imposed by the hated Versailles Peace Treaty. Further still, the German Reich then entered a period of revolutionary upheaval and instability which followed the sudden and seemingly complete breakdown of the old monarchical order. Many people believed that the Imperial Navy had to take much of the blame for all of this. After having spent most of the war in an idleness enforced by British maritime superiority, in October 1918 the High Seas Fleet was tasked with a last desperate sortie, which plan could easily be painted as a 'death ride'. Nothing was to come of it. A mutiny by the navy's disgruntled sailors forced the mission to be aborted and soon developed into a movement which led to the overthrow of the monarchical order. A junior officer, who later rose to the top echelon of Foreign Office officials, Lieutenant Commander Ernst von Weizsäcker, commented on 5 November 1918: 'Die Marine! Entsprungen aus dem Weltmachtsdünkel, verdirbt unsere auswärtige Politik 20 Jahre lang, hält ihre Versprechungen im Kriege nicht und entfacht nun den Umsturz!'[2] As it happened, all of these charges from November 1918, although in this instance confided to a personal diary,

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[1] Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich, Irina Rink (eds), *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg* (Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich, 2nd imprint 2004), pp. 664–5.

[2] Quoted in Werner Rahn, 'Kriegführung, Politik und Krisen – Die Marine des Deutschen Reiches 1914–1933', in Deutsches Marine Institut (ed.), *Die deutsche Flotte im Spannungsfeld der Politik 1848–1985: Vorträge und Diskussionen der 25. Historisch-taktischen Tagung der Flotte 1985* (Herford, 1985), pp. 79–104, at p. 79. The quote translates as: 'The [Imperial] Navy! It sprung forth from the hubris of world power, and for 20 years it has been ruining our foreign relations. It never kept its promises in wartime. Now it sparks the revolution!'

were replicated in the public discourse which evolved in the aftermath of the First World War and which remained in vogue even beyond the Reich's catastrophic demise in 1945 which enabled a new examination to focus on the German part of the naval arms race. For this reason, Weizsäcker's comments can serve as the springboard for a deeper analysis and merit scrutiny in detail. To reiterate: his first charge deals with the effects the German naval build-up had on foreign relations, in particular concerning the United Kingdom, and its respective motives and aims; the second focuses on the military methods applied to achieve the aims of the design, ranging from strategies to decisions pertaining to the naval materiel; while the third acknowledges the fact that the relation between the resultant navy and German domestic politics at least had to be accounted for as well. All of these points will now be explored in detail, as will the nature of the debate following the Second World War.

During the years immediately preceding the First World War, the naval build-up faced severe criticism even within government circles. Starting in the closing days of Bernhard von Bülow's chancellorship,[1] the criticism became even more vociferous under his successor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg. The thrust of the criticism was that naval expansion had unnecessarily poisoned Anglo-German relations, thereby endangering Germany's international stance while squandering financial resources which were desperately needed to improve the capabilities of the German armies in their preparations for a war against the Dual Alliance. Tirpitz, who left office under a cloud on 17 March 1916, clearly sensed that he had better brace himself against these charges, which duly appeared in the summer 1919 from the pen of Bethmann Hollweg.[2] Tirpitz was, however, ready to mount a defence. For some time he had been sequestering documents of interest and now, with the assistance of the historian Fritz Kern, the former State Secretary published his account of the naval race.[3]

As justification for the German naval expansion, Tirpitz reiterated a claim, first made by him in the pre-war years, that British fears of Germany's growing economic competition, a sentiment which he labelled 'trade envy', required Germany to guard against the possibility of the Royal Navy attempting to crush Germany before it got too strong. It was, thus, only because Germany was faced with such a British menace,

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[1]See, for example, Bülow to Tirpitz, 25 December 1908, Doc. No. 88.

[2]Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, 'Die Memoiren des Herrn von Tirpitz' (extended version, summer 1919), in Jost Dülffer (ed.), *Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, Betrachtungen zum Weltkriege, Erster Teil: Vor dem Kriege, Zweiter Teil: Während des Krieges* (Essen, 1989), pp. 315–29, see pp. 318–19.

[3]Michael Epkenhans, '"Clio" und die Marine', in Werner Rahn (ed.), *Deutsche Marinen im Wandel. Vom Symbol nationaler Einheit zum Instrument internationaler Sicherheit* (München, 2005), pp. 363–96, at pp. 370–71.

exemplified by the manner in which Britain managed to isolate Germany in the pre-war decade through the establishment of ententes, that the Reich leadership built the 'Risk Fleet', not to undermine British sea power, but to dissuade Britain from deploying her naval might against Germany.

In this objective, Tirpitz argued, his naval build-up nearly succeeded. After having passed through the most dangerous times, when the still nascent German battle fleet might have been destroyed by a pre-emptive British strike – feared most during the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–5 and at the height of the naval scare of 1908–9 – the Imperial Navy stood on the verge of acquiring a strength sufficient to deter Britain from using her still more powerful navy against Germany, something he claimed would have been reached by 1916. Far from constituting a threat to Britain and inducing her to side with the Dual Alliance, the German naval expansion had already brought about some kind of détente between the Reich and the United Kingdom. According to Tirpitz's narrative, Britain, which he claimed had initiated the naval race in the first place, was even persuaded by the growing 'Risk Fleet' to moderate her ambitions towards Germany. By 1914 the Admiralty had come to accept the 8:5 ratio in naval strength which would neither threaten Britain's naval superiority nor leave Germany lacking reasonable capabilities in case of a British attack. At this point, a long-term improvement in Anglo-German relations was to be expected, but due to an inept German political leadership, which allowed the British adversary to seize the unexpected opportunity, the German Reich blundered into the Great War.[1]

The official German history of the First World War endorsed this view. The opening volume of the 'War at Sea' series, published in 1920 by the *Marine-Archiv* (Naval Archive), insisted that the fleet, which it maintained was designed exclusively to deter a British attack, had by 1914 already made its peace-preserving capability felt in the face of a hostile British policy driven by economic envy.[2] By and large, until 1945 semi-official naval literature and even, in part, professional historians, some of whom – for example, Ulrich von Hassell and Fritz Hallmann – had privileged access to Tirpitz, also subscribed to Tirpitz's analysis, namely: that British economic envy was the root cause of the Anglo-German estrangement; that the 'Risk Fleet' was merely designed to safeguard Germany's economic ascendancy against British political and military aggression; that Britain reacted by encircling Germany and by unleashing an arms

[1] Grandadmiral [Alfred] von Tirpitz, *My Memoirs* (2 vols, London, 1919), vol. I, pp. V, 194–209, 231–41, 256–7, 262–73, 286–7. The translation is based on Alfred von Tirpitz, *Erinnerungen* (Leipzig, 1919).

[2] Otto Groos (ed.), *Der Krieg zur See 1914–1918. Der Krieg in der Nordsee, Vol. I: Vom Kriegsbeginn bis Anfang September 1914* (Berlin, 1920), pp.1–2, 44–5.

race; and that by 1914 the 'Risk Fleet' had nearly achieved its purpose of enforcing an Anglo-German relationship based on mutual security and respect.[1] And this was not all. Others exonerated the 'Risk Fleet' altogether from the charge of poisoning Anglo-German relations, at least as far as they considered the period down to 1904, again blaming British trade envy for all problems.[2] Scholars even credited the 'Risk Fleet' with the potential for improving Germany's international stance, particularly with regard to Britain.[3]

Admittedly, this narrative did not go entirely unchallenged. Some historians rejected the notion of British economic envy. Instead, the British desire to prevent Germany from becoming the hegemonic power of continental Europe was presented as the prime concern in Whitehall and the factor which most stood in the way of an Anglo-German détente. Yet, even this interpretation could also be aligned with the view that attributed a beneficial intention[4] to the German naval build-up or even a capability to ease the way for a better understanding between Britain and Germany.[5]

Frequently, however, Tirpitz's armaments were denied these positive connotations. Sometimes they were regarded as a powerful catalyst adding to the might of the German armies threatening France's survival, thus consolidating the ententes.[6] Alternatively the 'Risk Fleet' was considered as one of the main factors that resulted in Britain siding with Germany's opponents.[7] Some went even further and laid the blame for Germany's

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[1]Ulrich von Hassell, *Tirpitz. Sein Leben und Wirken mit Berücksichtigung seiner Beziehungen zu Albrecht von Stosch* (Stuttgart, 1920), pp. 163–88; Alexander Meurer [Vice Admiral ret.], *Seekriegsgeschichte in Umrissen. Seemacht und Seekriege vornehmlich vom 16. Jahrhundert ab* (Leipzig, 1925), pp. 322–7; (Leipzig, 2nd imprint 1942), pp. 407–15; Hans Hallmann, *Der Weg zum deutschen Schlachtflottenbau* (Stuttgart, 1933), pp. xii–xiii; Adolf von Trotha, *Großadmiral Tirpitz. Flottenbau und Reichsgedanke* (Breslau, 1933), pp. 93–113; Reinhold Gadow [Rear Admiral ret.], *Geschichte der deutschen Marine* (Frankfurt a.M., 1936), pp. 58–80, esp. pp. 65, 75–6.

[2]Fritz Uplegger, *Die englische Flottenpolitik vor dem Weltkrieg 1904–1909* (Stuttgart, 1930), pp. 3–8, 33.

[3]Hans Herzfeld, 'Der deutsche Flottenbau und die englische Politik', *Archiv für Politik und Geschichte* 4 (1926), pt I, pp. 97–146, see pp. 103–46.

[4]Hermann Oncken, 'Ziele und Grundlagen der auswärtigen Politik des Deutschen Reiches von 1871 bis 1914', in Bernhard Harms (ed.), *Volk und Reich der Deutschen. Vorlesungen gehalten in der Deutschen Vereinigung für Staatswissenschaftliche Fortbildung* (Berlin, 1929), vol. I, pp. 143–64, see pp. 160–61.

[5]Hansgeorg Fernis, *Die Flottennovellen im Reichstag 1906–1912* (Würzburg, 1934), pp. 98–9, 154.

[6]Hans Delbrück, *Ludendorff – Tirpitz – Falkenhayn* (Berlin, 1920), p. 31; Wilhelm Schüßler, *Deutschland zwischen Rußland und England. Studien zur Außenpolitik des Bismarckschen Reiches 1879–1914* (2nd imprint Leipzig, 1940), pp. 172–4, 193–202.

[7]Hans Delbrück, *Der Stand der Kriegsschuldfrage* (Berlin, 1924), pp. 15–7; Friedrich Meinecke, *Geschichte des deutsch-englischen Bündnisproblems 1890–1901* (Darmstadt [1927], 1972), pp. 261–3; Willy Becker, *Fürst Bülow und England 1897–1909* (Greifswald, 1929), pp. 306–98.

increasing isolation entirely on the doorsteps of the very unfortunate effects the 'Risk Fleet' had on British foreign policy.[1] A modified version of this claimed that Britain had reacted to the fear of a continental league being formed against her, with the 'Risk Fleet' representing an essential nucleus to this challenge (which would have gone well with its declared purpose).[2]

While analysing Germany's naval policy, a few historians addressed the question of how the 'Risk Fleet' was supposed to perform its mission and whether it was able to do so. Willy Becker, for example, concluded that to do the job Tirpitz required of it the Imperial Navy would have needed the capability to meet the Royal Navy offensively on equal terms. This he thought feasible under the conditions prevalent around 1900 with the Royal Navy not concentrated in home waters but scattered around the globe.[3] Becker was not alone in this view. Even before the war the German naval establishment had needed to cope with scattered dissent from within its own ranks. Voices, such as retired Vice Admiral Karl Galster, had questioned the strategic *raison d'être* of the 'Risk Fleet', arguing that, rather than focusing on battleships, Germany should develop a cruiser and submarine capability instead. After the war, Galster, who had been ostracised from the naval officer corps for espousing such 'heresies', repeated his criticism of the 'Risk Fleet' claiming that, to have worked as intended, it would have been necessary for the German navy to have mustered a strength several times the size of that of the Royal Navy – clearly an impossibility.[4] An even more detailed review of the innate fallacies of the 'Risk Fleet' was provided by retired Vice Admiral Wolfgang Wegener. His study, published in 1929, subjected Tirpitz's 'Risk Fleet' concept to an unsparing and annihilating criticism. While Tirpitz had bitterly complained that '[t]he German people did not understand the sea',[5] Wegener pointedly included the State Secretary himself in this verdict: 'We never really understood the sea. Not one of us.'[6] The underlying fallacy of the 'Risk Fleet', as seen by Wegener, was its failure either to threaten the British sea lines of communication spanning the

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[1] Johannes Haller, *Die Ära Bülow. Eine historiographisch-politische Studie* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1922), pp. 40–76.

[2] Bernhard Michalik, *Probleme des deutschen Flottenbaus* (Breslau, 1931), pp. 31, 54, 61, 112–16.

[3] Becker, *Fürst Bülow*, p. 313–14.

[4] Karl Galster, *England, Deutsche Flotte und Weltkrieg* (Kiel, 1925), pp. 65–74, 92–6, 172–8.

[5] Tirpitz, *My Memoirs*, vol. II, p. 445.

[6] Wolfgang Wegener, *Die Seestrategie des Weltkrieges* (Berlin, 1929). A translation of this study by Holger H. Herwig is available in Vice Admiral Wolfgang Wegener, *The Naval Strategy of the World War* (Annapolis, MD, 1989), p. 78. The next footnote refers to this edition.

Atlantic or to challenge British command of the seas by securing a favourable base on French or Norwegian soil, the indispensable prerequisite for acquiring a credible German naval capability versus the United Kingdom. This renunciation completely missed the essence of how naval warfare was to be conducted by a true sea power. Tirpitz's naval build-up was neither criticised for its detrimental effects on Anglo-German relations nor for its preparation of a clash with Britain. In the world view of the outspoken nationalist Wolfgang Wegener, the struggle between power-hungry expanding nations was to be expected anyway. Rather Tirpitz's naval policy was deemed irresponsibly mistaken because it utterly failed on its own naval professional grounds as it contented itself merely with the aim of guarding against a British attack. This represented an impossibility in the realms of naval strategy. Accordingly, Tirpitz's naval expansion, despite all pretensions, represented nothing else than 'political cant', never leaving the narrow confines of a coast defence navy.[1] Wegener's harsh verdict damning the fundamentals of Tirpitz's strategy, thus casting a dark shadow over the professional competence of the former State Secretary, had a difficult reception from the naval hierarchy of the Reichsmarine, but it was at least considered within the naval officer corps.[2] By contrast, the literature which focused on the domestic causes of Germany's naval challenge and its subsequent failure fared even worse, falling into disregard until well after the Second World War.

This brings us to Weizsäcker's third charge. His suggestion that the navy was to blame for initiating the collapse of the old order in 1918 implied a direct connection between naval policy and German domestic politics. Others would attempt to develop this point. Foremost in this field was Eckart Kehr. In 1930, he hinted at an explanation which traced the terminal failure of the Imperial Navy back to the contradicting forces inherent in its build-up. The anti-British naval policy Germany had embarked on at the turn of the century raised the question of whether the new fleet could be manned with crews whose majority would come from a class opposed to the existing order.[3] However, he addressed this problem only in a marginal note, immediately relating it to the wider framework of the contradictory social foundations of Germany's quest for world power.[4] This endeavour, which centred on the creation of a battle fleet

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[1]Ibid., pp. 79–130; see p. 109: 'Consequently, the "risk theory" belongs exclusively in the realm of political cant – neither on the sea nor in politics – for every premise is in error when considered from a strategic naval point of view.'

[2]Epkenhans, 'Clio', p. 380.

[3]Eckart Kehr, *Schlachtflottenbau und Parteipolitik 1894–1901. Versuch eines Querschnitts durch die innenpolitischen, sozialen und ideologischen Voraussetzungen des deutschen Imperialismus* (Berlin, 1930), p. 444.

[4]Ibid.

designed to deter Britain's sea power, originated in the crisis that confronted the social fabric of the Bismarckian state, when the economic rise of industrial interests clashed with the political and social pre-eminence of the landed interests and both were challenged by the labouring classes. The expedient that the German political leadership decided upon between 1897 and 1902 was to use economic expansion, to be provided by imperialistic gains, for the preservation of a compromise favouring the rule of the landed and industrial interests. The measures taken in this course ('Weltpolitik … Sammlungspolitik, Zuchthausvorlage … Zolltarif') predetermined Germany's situation in 1914.[1] As these measures only met the needs of the agrarian elite as well as of the industrial elite allied to it, they resulted in the hostility of Britain (due to the industrial expansion) and of Russia (due to the agrarian interests). At the same time, again due to agrarian interests, the requirements associated with a proper economic and military preparation for the war were neglected.[2] For the sake of a reasonable prospect of success in the imperialistic struggle the only promising option for Germany trying to rise to world-power status would have rested with achieving the utmost social and political cohesion by a thorough democratisation. Instead, the German leadership was selected for conservative purposes to serve only particular interests. Thus, the naval challenge failed not only because of British resistance but also due to Germany's domestic structural weakness.[3] Soon after its publication Kehr's analysis, which focused on the domestic policies determining the course of international policy, fell out of favour in Germany and became almost forgotten. It would not be reconsidered until some time after the end of the Second World War.[4]

Tirpitz's analysis of the German contribution to the naval arms race survived the catastrophic termination of the German Reich. As late as 1958 the admiral's articles of faith – that Britain's trade envy made her a foe of Germany and that the 'Risk Fleet' forced Britain to observe a policy of restraint versus her competitor and thus bolstered the prospects for peace – were still being disseminated by Alfred Schulze-Hinrichs, a retired naval officer.[5] He was not alone. While discounting the effects that the alleged trade envy had on German naval expansion, Walther Hubatsch repeated all the other claims associated with the arguments of Tirpitz and his defenders. According to Hubatsch, the German naval

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[1]Ibid., pp. 6–9, at p. 8.

[2]Ibid., pp. 258–72.

[3]Ibid., pp. 445–8.

[4]Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Eckart Kehr', in *idem* (ed.), *Deutsche Historiker*, Vol. I (Göttingen, 1971), pp. 100–113, at p. 108.

[5]Alfred Schulze Hinrichs, *Großadmiral Alfred von Tirpitz. Ziel erkannt – Kraft gespannt!* (Göttingen, 1958), pp. 26–31, 48, 51, 72.

build-up neither induced Britain to side with the Dual Alliance nor was
to blame for her decision to declare war on Germany. Far from it,
Hubatsch subscribed to the supposedly beneficial effects of the 'Risk
Fleet' in easing the way towards an Anglo-German understanding. If
Tirpitz's programme had any deleterious diplomatic effects he blamed
these on the Chancellor and the Foreign Office, under whose jurisdiction
German foreign policy fell, rather than on Tirpitz, who could not be
blamed for problems that lay outside his ministerial remit.[1] Meanwhile,
historians like Wilhelm Schüßler could afford to stick to previously
published views, that it was not trade envy but the British fear of
Germany dominating the European continent, to which from 1905/06
onwards the German building of dreadnoughts added the perception that
Germany had embarked on a quest for maritime preponderance as well,
that lay at the root of the Anglo-German estrangement. Whereas this
interpretation was somewhat echoed in the writings of George W. F.
Hallgarten,[2] two papers published within the decade following the
Second World War were to shape the course of the debate concerning the
Anglo-German naval race by focusing not only on the effects of Tirpitz's
design but primarily on its objectives.

  In 1944, Rudolf Stadelmann had drafted an essay which in 1948 went
into press. In his careful analysis of Tirpitz's project, he concluded that,
from 1897 onwards, the State Secretary aimed at a fleet equalling the
fighting power of the Royal Navy in the North Sea (despite being on the
whole still numerically inferior) thus denying Britain the sanctuary of her
naval supremacy and forcing her to consent to Germany succeeding her
on the world stage. Due to this naval challenge, the United Kingdom,
which already had to cope with economic rivalries and the German
potential for establishing a continental hegemony, almost inevitably
became an enemy of Germany.[3] The argument put forward by a second
historian, Ludwig Dehio, sharpened this line of thought. During the early
1950s, under the cloud of the Soviet-American nuclear stand-off, Dehio
described the German contribution to the naval arms race as a 'cold
offensive' unleashing a 'cold war' or 'dry war'. While pretending to
provide only for defensive means, the German naval build-up actually

[1]Walther Hubatsch, *Die Ära Tirpitz. Studien zur deutschen Marinepolitik 1890–1918*
(Göttingen, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, 1955), pp. 13–20.
    [2]Wilhelm Schüßler, 'Deutsche Weltpolitik 1890 bis 1914', in *idem* (ed.), *Weltmachtstreben
und Flottenbau* (Witten/Ruhr, 1956), pp. 11–34, see pp. 20–25, 31–2; George W. F.
Hallgarten, *Imperialismus vor 1914* (1933), 2 vols (München, 1951), Vol. I, pp. 72, 466–7,
Vol. II, pp. 331–6.
    [3]Rudolf Stadelmann, 'Die Epoche der deutsch-englischen Flottenrivalität' (1944), in *idem*,
Deutschland und Westeuropa (Laupheim, 1948), pp. 85–146, 159–75; see pp. 101–6,
119–24, 145.

tried to achieve offensive ends. The aim was to alter the world power system radically by stripping Britain of her naval supremacy, thus toppling the guarantor of the continental balance of power and making way for a German world power. The purpose of Tirpitz's naval expansion was not to defend a position Germany already occupied but to provide for one that was yet to be gained. The threat it posed to Britain was unique and it forced her to join Germany's enemies. While designed to avoid the real test of war, the German naval challenge led straight into the situation of 1914.[1]

After the German naval files became available to historical research in the 1960s, Volker R. Berghahn seized the opportunity and integrated the perspectives developed by Eckart Kehr, Rudolf Stadelmann and Ludwig Dehio into a comprehensive overview. In his conception of it, the Anglo-German naval arms race now appeared as the result of a German challenge which originated from the crisis Germany experienced as her ruling elites were faced with the social and political consequences of the ongoing transformation to an industrialised economy. Instead of trying to accommodate the political system to the needs of the emerging industrial society, naval expansion was resorted to in order to preserve the political power of the pre-industrial agrarian, bureaucratic and military elites. By forcing Britain to cede her pre-eminent international position to Germany, the naval expansion would provide for a secondary integration by substituting the material and ideological benefits associated with Germany's rise to world power for the denied domestic political participation. The combination of a steady building rate with legal provisions served as the primary means for the exclusion of the potentially disruptive interference of the Reichstag (which still had to provide the necessary funds). The primary tool to be employed against Britain with the aim of neutralizing her potential interference was a battle fleet capable of defeating a British attack in the North Sea (though not of attacking the British). Although the British managed to thwart the scheme by turning a manpower-intensive arms race into a technological, cost-intensive competition with the transition to dreadnoughts, which now appeared as a masterstroke of the Admiralty,[2] the German naval challenge nevertheless

[1]Ludwig Dehio, 'Deutschland und die Epoche der Weltkriege' (1952), in *idem*, *Deutschland und die Weltpolitik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main, Hamburg, 1955), pp. 9–32, see pp. 12–13; *idem*, 'Gedanken über die deutsche Sendung' (1952), in ibid., pp. 63–96, see pp. 65–71.

[2]Even after the Second World War German historians considered the British dreadnought policy as a grave mistake, for it allegedly had provided Germany with the opportunity for a fresh start. See, for example, Günter Howe, 'Gedanken zur deutschen Wehrpolitik zwischen 1871 und 1914', in Wilhelm Schüßler (ed.), *Weltmachtstreben und Flottenbau* (Witten/Ruhr, 1956), pp. 36–144, at pp. 82–7.

effected the British alignment with the Dual Alliance and framed the situation of 1914.[1]

Based on extensive use of new archival material, Berghahn's meticulously researched study, published in 1971, furnished the 'Tirpitz Plan' with its proper meaning, designating it as a wide-ranging grand design (although the term was occasionally used previously)[2] which, by unleashing the naval arms race, had created the Anglo-German antagonism thereby representing the prime factor in the erosion of Germany's international stance and indirectly leading to the First World War.[3] From time to time this interpretation was challenged. Apart from the criticism questioning the basic assumptions inherent in an approach which focused on the German 'Sonderweg',[4] most notably Michael Salewski disputed the notion of a fleet expansion driven by domestic considerations. He also credited the State Secretary with the ultimate objective of a power rearrangement among the leading Atlantic powers – namely, Germany, the United States, and United Kingdom – which was to be brought about by an Imperial Navy matching the Royal Navy in strength.[5] Notwithstanding these critical contributions, by 1971 Berghahn's arguments established what amounted to a 'new orthodoxy'.[6] For roughly three decades his findings paved the way for studies, which confirmed his analysis either by extending the period investigated right up to the outbreak of the First World War[7] or by building on these findings by, for example, integrating them into a modern technological history of the German capital ships.[8] Consequently, mainstream historiography – whether it accepted the view of Germany's naval challenge originating from a domestic crisis or not – considered the threat to Britain deliberately raised by Tirpitz and posed by the emerging German battle fleet as a primary cause for the rise of the

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[1]Volker R. Berghahn, *Der Tirpitz-Plan. Genesis und Verfall einer innenpolitischen Krisenstrategie unter Wilhelm II.* (Düsseldorf, 1971), pp. 592–604.

[2]Becker, *Fürst Bülow*, p. 299.

[3]Berghahn, *Der Tirpitz-Plan*, p. 598.

[4]See David Blackbourn, Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History. Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Oxford, New York, 1984).

[5]Michael Salewski, *Tirpitz. Aufstieg – Macht – Scheitern* (Göttingen, Zürich, Frankfurt am Main, 1979), pp. 49–50, 54, 57–8, 66, 71.

[6]For this term, see the classification James J. Sheehan used for the trend then prevailing in German historiography while reviewing two recent monographs, in *Journal of Modern History*, 48 (1976), 3, pp. 564–7, at p. 567.

[7]Berghahn finished his study with the 1908 Amendment to the Navy Law. Others extended the period further. See, for example, Michael Epkenhans, *Die wilhelminische Flottenrüstung 1908–1914. Weltmachtstreben, industrieller Fortschritt, soziale Integration* (München, 1991).

[8]Axel Griessmer, *Große Kreuzer der Kaiserlichen Marine 1906–1918. Konstruktionen und Entwürfe im Zeichen des Tirpitz-Plans* (Bonn, 1996); idem, *Linienschiffe der Kaiserlichen Marine 1906–1918. Konstruktionen zwischen Rüstungskonkurrenz und Flottengesetz* (Bonn, 1999).

Anglo-German antagonism and the ensuing deterioration of Germany's international stance.[1] Yet, historians continued to be puzzled by the way the 'Risk Fleet' was supposed to function in the face of a numerically superior and geographically tremendously advantaged opponent. Edward Wegener reiterated his father's criticism indicting Tirpitz of neglecting the geostrategic imperatives (while, of course, dispensing with his father's nationalistic revisionist sentiment);[2] Paul M. Kennedy did not content himself with laying bare the strategic fallacies of the Tirpitz Plan; he also tried to establish the ultimate size of the fleet which might have enabled it to overcome the obstacles inherent in Germany's deplorable strategic position;[3] and Ivo N. Lambi scrutinised the German operations plans, again shedding light on the inherent flaws of Tirpitz's design.[4]

Whereas many modern historians focused on the German challenge to Britain's naval position, historiography in the wake of Berghahn tended to ignore the question of Germany's requirements for naval security. However, after Avner Offer had pointed to British pre-war plans, which envisioned causing a severe dislocation to Germany's economy by using Britain's sea power offensively,[5] Rolf Hobson raised the issue of Germany's maritime security in a study, which may be regarded as the first substantial new departure since Berghahn's seminal and still indispensable work.[6] While not entering into a detailed consideration of the legal foundations of the aimed-for iron naval budget (*Äternat*) within the constitutional framework of the German Reich,[7] Hobson questioned

[1]Klaus Hildebrand, *Das vergangene Reich. Deutsche Außenpolitik von Bismarck bis Hitler 1871–1945* (Stuttgart, 1995), pp. 212, 222, 249–50; Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918, vol. II: Machtstaat vor der Demokratie* (2nd imprint München, 1993), pp. 632–9; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte, Vol. III: Von der 'Deutschen Doppelrevolution' bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges 1849–1914* (München, 2008), pp. 1130–31; Kennedy, *Anglo-German Antagonism*, pp. 415–31. For Kennedy, the British fear of Germany crushing France had become inseparable from prior anxieties concerning the preservation of Britain's naval supremacy.

[2]Edward Wegener, 'Die Tirpitzsche Seestrategie', in Herbert Schottelius and Wilhelm Deist (eds), *Marine und Marinepolitik im kaiserlichen Deutschland 1871–1914* (Düsseldorf, 1972), pp. 236–62.

[3]Paul M. Kennedy, 'Maritime Strategieprobleme der deutsch-englischen Flottenrivalität', in ibid., pp. 178–210.

[4]Ivo Nikolai Lambi, *The Navy and German Power Politics, 1862–1914* (Boston, 1984), pp. 141–5.

[5]Avner Offer, *The First World War. An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 229–32, 324–6.

[6]For Offer's analysis and the deficiencies of current historiography exhibiting only a remote interest in investigating Germany's security needs, see Rolf Hobson, *Imperialism at Sea. Naval Strategic Thought, the Ideology of Sea Power, and the Tirpitz Plan, 1875–1914* (Boston, 2002), pp. 6, 38, 315, 329.

[7]This issue was recently revisited by Patrick Kelly, *Tirpitz and the Imperial German Navy* (Bloomington, In., 2011), pp. 191–5, raising questions concerning the reliability of the *Äternat*.

the social basis whence, according to Berghahn, the project of a naval challenge to Britain providing for a secondary integration originated.[1] Even more importantly, while introducing the aspect of the maritime balance of power as represented in contemporary international maritime law, which considered neutrals and belligerents alike, he cast serious doubts over the strategic rationale allegedly governing a menacing German naval expansion.

Berghahn had seemingly solved the problem of how an inferior German 'Risk Fleet' could force Britain to desist from interfering with Germany's economic and political expansion. For this he had applied earlier German naval doctrine, which had called for the superiority of roughly one-third as a pre-requisite for an offensively operating fleet, to the threshold for a defending fleet acquiring the capability to thwart such an attack and thus to deter it. Since Tirpitz did not intend to launch an attack on Britain, but only to deter her from attacking Germany, the 2:3 ratio would suffice for the 'Risk Fleet' to achieve its ends.[2]

Hobson did not buy this. According to his analysis, German naval doctrine (as referred to by Berghahn and as embodied in a document known as *Dienstschrift IX*) had established as a paramount principle of naval strategy a provision that came fairly close to Alfred T. Mahan's strategic concept concerning the 'indivisibility of command': in order to achieve any tasks reaching beyond mere coastal defence a fleet had to be capable of seizing the strategic offensive, striving 'for command of the sea' and 'carrying the war to the enemy's coast', which in turn rested on the aforesaid superiority. This capability was considered to be crucial for Germany's need to secure vital supplies from overseas in wartime. The fleet envisaged in 1898 by the original Navy Law would have met this requirement against either opponent in a war against the Dual Alliance. Against a superior enemy such as Britain, the only remedy to Germany's desperate dependence on supplies from overseas (aggravated as it was by her deplorable geo-strategic situation) was to be found in a coalition of second-ranking sea powers which, in the face of a looming British economic war, felt the need to uphold their maritime rights. Considering Germany's security versus Britain, it would have sufficed for the Reich to contribute to this coalition a fleet appropriate to a second-ranking sea power. The two-squadron battle fleet planned in 1898 would have met this requirement too, despite being completely powerless on its own. Yet, Tirpitz's notion of a 'Risk Fleet' of double that size, which in 1900 was publicly promoted while introducing the first Amendment of the Navy

[1]Hobson, *Imperialism*, pp. 312–24.
[2]Berghahn, *Der Tirpitz-Plan*, pp. 192–5.

Law (*Novelle*), substituted an ill-defined yardstick, gained this time from the ideological parts of Mahan's writings, for this shared or collective maritime security, thus feeding the illusion of an independent security. To the detriment of German naval strategy this understanding of Germany's maritime position, which Chancellor Leo Graf von Caprivi (1890–94) representing a policy prior to and distinct from the Wilhelmine *Weltpolitik* is said to have come to, was lost with Tirpitz's turn against Britain. For the latter had the clear-cut yardstick of superiority over the opponent's fleet replaced by a fleet 'commensurate with [peacetime] overseas interests'. In the end, since the 'Risk Fleet' was not afforded an incentive compelling the Royal Navy to attack, it could not live up even to the standards previously established by its own naval authorities.

In a strange twist, as Hobson argues, the 'Risk Fleet', though representing only a hollow threat to Britain's command of the sea and certainly not a cause for Britain to enter the war, contributed essentially to Germany's growing isolation before the war. This deteriorating international stance strengthened the German General Staff's case for executing the 'Schlieffen Plan'. As there was an interrelationship between the continental balance of power and the maritime balance of power the threat to the former removed the incentives to uphold the latter. In the face of a German hegemony, powerful neutrals would be less inclined to prevent Britain from unleashing a full-scale economic war. So in the end the 'Risk Fleet' paved the way for bringing about exactly the threat which it was supposed – but was unable – to deter.[1]

As it happened, Hobson's questioning of the military rationale to be attributed to the 'Risk Fleet' followed rather closely on the heels of the revision which had been suggested for the history of the pre-war Royal Navy by Sumida and Nicholas Lambert. Whereas these studies de-emphasised the role of the Imperial German Navy in shaping British naval strategic decisions, Hobson denied the 'Risk Fleet' its advertised military capability. Other studies showed renewed interest in scrutinising the strategic reasoning behind Tirpitz's naval planning, occasionally including a closer look at the importance attached to the coastal areas. While relating the German concepts to contemporary naval developments, in particular

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[1]Hobson, *Imperialism*, pp. 130–32, 201–12, 247–84, 327–30, at pp. 202, 204, 212. *Dienstschrift IX* is printed in Eva Besteck, *Die trügerische 'First Line of Defence'. Zum deutsch-britischen Wettrüsten vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Mit einem Anhang 'Taktische und strategische Dienstschriften des Oberkommandos der Marine, Nr. IX: Allgemeine Erfahrungen aus den Manövern der Herbstübungs-Flotte'* (Freiburg i, Br., 2006), pp. 123–208. Excerpts of *Dienstschrift IX* had been published previously. Cf. Volker R. Berghahn and Wilhelm Deist (eds), *Rüstung im Zeichen der wilhelminischen Weltpolitik. Grundlegende Dokumente, 1890–1914* (Düsseldorf, 1988), pp. 87–99; *Nauticus* 18 (1926), pp. 188–99.

those of Britain, these papers in part concluded that German naval thinking became progressively disconnected from the emerging strategic environment of naval warfare.[1] With the doubts already cast over the military or strategic substance of the Anglo-German naval race, which as far as the German challenger is concerned might be traced back to the criticism voiced by Karl Galster or Edward Wegener, it proved to be only a small step for historians propagating the new 'cultural' approach to history to substitute a competition of symbols and 'theatrical demonstration[s]' for a race between strategic options backed up by the fighting power of naval hardware.[2] One might wonder whether the naval arms race came down to (mere) representations. However, as with the historiography of British naval policy, the bulk of the literature concludes that the arms race was not an invented feature of the pre-war political, military and international landscape, but was integral to developments in all these areas. In this respect there is still a far-reaching consensus that the naval race was central to the naval policy of the two main protagonists and was the main driver of their military-political interaction in the run-up to conflict.

Arrangement of the Chapters

The pattern of documents published here follows a chronological arrangement. As the arms race originated from a German naval challenge, the first chapter covers the inception and the gradual execution of the Tirpitz Plan. The earliest documents presented here were drafted in the mid-1890s, then the Navy Law of 1898 and the first Amendment to it in 1900 might be said to hold centre stage, with the last papers written in late 1904, when the Tirpitz Plan still appeared to fulfil the expectations attached to it. This is followed by a chapter exploring the initial British reaction to the German naval build-up. The documentation of this period is, sadly, all too patchy, but enough remains to piece together an account of when and why Germany began to loom large in the thinking of the British Admiralty and how this affected the policy process. The third

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[1] The degree to which the German naval project was seen to be out of step with contemporary developments depended considerably on whether these contributions considered the revisionists' findings or not. See Besteck, *'First Line of Defence'*, taking Nicholas Lambert's proposals into account; and Christian Rödel, *Krieger, Denker, Amateure. Alfred von Tirpitz und das Seekriegsbild vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart, 2003).

[2] An imaginative example of a new cultural approach is Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game. Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 210; for the German reception of this approach, see Dominik Geppert and Andreas Rose, 'Machtpolitik und Flottenbau vor 1914. Zur Neuinterpretation britischer Außenpolitik im Zeitalter des Hochimperialismus', in *Historische Zeitschrift* 293 (2011), pp. 401–37, at p. 427.

chapter, covering the years 1905 till 1907, deals with the crisis caused by the British decision to enter the entente cordiale, to redistribute her fleet and radically to improve the design of capital ships (*Dreadnought*, *Invincible*); it also considers what this meant for Tirpitz's design. On the British side the period 1905–7, which is the focus of Chapter 4, was marked by the need to take positive steps to deal with the now obvious fact of German enmity. It was a period of detailed naval planning and a fundamental refocusing of the strategic centre of British naval thinking to the North Sea and the Baltic. Chapters 5 and 6 look at the era of the 1908–9 naval scare from both the German and British angles. For many contemporary commentators and also for many historians today, this was the high point of Anglo-German naval competition and the moment when the naval race reached its greatest extent. The atmosphere at this time was a poisonous one and was not markedly improved once the scare subsided. Indeed, fear of war and planning for war were both heightened and accelerated across this period, as the documents show. The last chapters deal with the comparative calm before the outbreak of the war. This calm was deceptive. As the documents show, in this period both navies were heavily involved in preparing for a possible war. Their reasoning was different. Britain, having won the naval arms race, was confident of its superiority in materiel, but faced a number of strategic and tactical problems that made deciding on how best to manage the wartime deployment of its fleet difficult. Decisions about such matters occupied considerable time and energy. On the German side, the question was how to deal with the loss of the naval race. Arguably, the fear that Tirpitz's life work had come to nought inclined the German navy to greater belligerence than in the earlier periods and so spurred a re-evaluation of the strategic situation. Thus, in different ways, both sides perceived themselves ready for war when the moment came in August 1914.

TIRPITZ'S ASCENDENCY: THE DESIGN AND INITIAL EXECUTION OF A NAVAL CHALLENGE 1895–1904/5

Tirpitz[1] was officially appointed State Secretary in charge of the Imperial Navy Office on 15 June 1897. A new era was about to begin, one sufficiently distinct from earlier periods for later historians to refer to the 'Ära Tirpitz'.[2] If not for the impact of his policies, the sheer duration of his term in office (1897–1916) provided ample justification for this labelling. However, the State Secretary's naval policy did not achieve what it was meant to. Tirpitz himself later despondently acknowledged that the work of his lifetime would come to a close under a negative prefix.[3] This was not least due to the measures his British opponent had rather unexpectedly taken from around 1904/5 onwards, which were to falsify Tirpitz's basic assumptions. Though the roots of the State Secretary's ultimate failure can accordingly be traced back to pillars central to his very own plan, these fallacies did not emerge until the last years of his first decade in office.

  Most of the documents in this chapter are selected so as to present a more or less detailed view of Tirpitz's programme as it unfolded almost unimpeded during the first seven to eight years of his term in office. This plan basically centred on an armaments programme designed to secure Germany's rise to world power status in the face of anticipated British interference. At the same time, it aimed at emancipating the fiscal foundation of the Imperial Navy from budgetary control of the Reichstag. Seen in a broader context, both objectives were aimed at the ulterior objective of shielding Prusso-German constitutionalism, which favoured the rule of pre-industrial elites, from the political effects of the industrialisation by relying on this very same industrialisation in Germany's quest for world power status.[4] As a rather complex armaments

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[1]Alfred (von) Tirpitz (1849–1930), State Secretary of the Imperial Navy Office 15 June 1897–15 Mar 1916. Rear Admiral, promoted to Vice Admiral 5 Dec 1899, to Admiral 14 Nov 1903, to Grand Admiral 27 Jan 1911.

[2]Hubatsch, *Die Ära Tirpitz*.

[3]Tirpitz, *My Memoirs*, vol. II, p. 466.

[4]Berghahn, *Der Tirpitz-Plan*, pp. 14–20, 592–5.

programme the Tirpitz Plan had to take into account and integrate
political, economic, fiscal, strategic, tactical, and technical matters and
consider their interdependency. International politics and strategic or
operational naval concepts to be applied against the designated opponent
suggested the creation of a specific naval capability which could only be
created by observing given tactical and technical needs and potentials.
Likewise the required naval capability had to be provided for under the
twofold constraints of the industrial capacity available, and the willingness
of parliament to appropriate the funds requested. This, in turn, called for
parliamentary tactics and affected domestic politics – the more so since
there was a desire to establish the navy on a stable financial base removed
from parliamentary interference.

These rather general observations did not apply exclusively to the
Tirpitz Plan. As its elements taken individually were not necessarily
unique to Tirpitz's programme, the substance of the new departure
ascribed to it may best be illustrated by a comparison of the first three
documents presented here. Having been drafted during the years
immediately preceding Tirpitz's rise to State Secretary, they point to
continuity as well as to changes associated with Tirpitz's ascendency. At
the same time, the two papers originating from the pen of the soon-to-be
State Secretary provide some insights into the basic framework of his
design and its persistence as the Tirpitz Plan evolved over the two decades
to follow.

Not long after having succeeded to the throne, on 20 March 1889
Wilhelm II had dissolved the Imperial Admiralty and formed two supreme
agencies in charge of the Imperial Navy. The Imperial Navy Office
(*Reichsmarineamt*) acquired the administrative tasks under a State
Secretary answering to the Emperor and the Chancellor. The High
Command of the Navy (*Oberkommando der Marine*) with a Commanding
Admiral as its Head dealt with the operational matters and exercised the
imperial command authority answering to the Emperor only. Together
with the Navy Cabinet (*Marinekabinett*) which served as the Emperor's
bureau for the affairs concerning the Imperial Navy, these two supreme
agencies were supposed to cooperate. Instead, rivalries quickly came up.[1]
When Tirpitz served as chief of staff the High Command strove to refine
its tactical and strategic doctrines. The most famous result of these efforts
on which Tirpitz had put his stamp was the aforementioned *Dienstschrift
IX* (1894). This document had not only given an exposition of the naval
strategic and operational doctrine to be adopted. It had also determined

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[1]An account of this intra-service rivalry, where the constitutional aspects of the Prusso-
German political system as well as the contemporary strategy-discussion are considered, is
presented by Berghahn, *Der Tirpitz-Plan*, pp. 23–107.

the materiel requirements for the battle fleet envisaged as centring on two squadrons of eight battleships each.

However, to the rising annoyance of the High Command, the Imperial Navy Office stuck to its inclination towards the teachings of the *jeune école*. With the backing of Wilhelm II, Vice Admiral Friedrich von Hollmann[1] had sought to procure numerous cruisers in lieu of the battleships for which the High Command had persistently and comprehensively argued. The naval estimates from 1891/92 until 1895/96 had provided for four coast defence battleships (of rather limited combat effectiveness) and eight cruisers of various rates, but only for one battleship, the *Ersatz Preußen*, later to become *Kaiser Friedrich III*.[2] On 27 October 1895, the Imperial Navy Office sent a draft of the budget proposals for 1896/97 to the High Command on short notice. The next day Admiral Eduard von Knorr[3] stated in his reply that the construction programme to be submitted by the Imperial Navy Office had originally completely ignored the well-founded proposals of the High Command. Indeed, the Imperial Navy Office had planned to procure only one battleship, two second-class protected cruisers (disparagingly dubbed 'ten-minutes-cruisers' by the British, insinuating the time required to sink them), and a fourth-class unprotected cruiser.[4] Knorr took up the gauntlet and pleaded the case of the High Command directly with the Emperor [1]. Upon receipt of his report the former chief of staff, Rear Admiral Tirpitz, was approached by the Chief of the Navy Cabinet, Rear Admiral Gustav Freiherr von Senden-Bibran,[5] and asked to comment on Knorr's memorandum. Tirpitz drafted his own paper during the closing days of 1895 and on 3 January 1896 he delivered a written report to the Emperor [2].[6] Six weeks later and after the 'Krüger-Telegramm', sent by Wilhelm II on 3 January, had caused the Transvaal Crisis to sour the relations between Britain and Germany,[7] Tirpitz on 13 February 1896 came back to some of his proposals put forward in his commentary, elaborated on

[1]Friedrich von Hollmann (1842–1913), Vice Admiral, promoted to Admiral 5 May 1896. 23 Apr 1890–15 June 1897 State Secretary, Imperial Navy Office.

[2]Lawrence Sondhaus, *Preparing for Weltpolitik. German Sea Power before the Tirpitz Era* (Annapolis/Md., 1997), pp. 184–90.

[3]Eduard von Knorr (1840–1920), Admiral. 4 Mar 1895–13 May 1895 acting Commanding Admiral, 14 May 1895–7 Mar 1899 Commanding Admiral, High Command.

[4]High Command of the Navy to the State Secretary of the Imperial Navy Office, signed Knorr, 28 Nov 1895 [Copy], BArch, Tirpitz papers, N 253/3, f. 82. Cf. Hallmann, *Schlachtflottenbau*, pp. 157–8.

[5]Gustav Freiherr von Senden-Bibran (1847–1909), Captain, promoted to Rear Admiral 10 Oct 1892, Vice Admiral 17 Nov 1899, Admiral 14 Nov 1903. 1 Apr 1889–7 July 1906 Chief, Navy Cabinet.

[6]Hobson, *Imperialism*, p. 220; Berghahn, *Der Tirpitz-Plan*, p. 90.

[7]On the Krüger-Telegramm, see Matthew S. Seligmann, *Rivalry in Southern Africa 1893–1899: The Transformation of German Colonial Policy* (London, 1998).

them, and at times broadened their scope in his letter to General Albrecht von Stosch [3], who had served as the first Head of the Imperial Admiralty and with whom Tirpitz had entered into a trustful correspondence.[1] Seen in their interrelation, these three documents already reveal a good deal of the peculiarities of the proposals Tirpitz was to inaugurate two years later.

Basically the High Command's paper dealt with an armaments programme, with the requirements to be met in order to carry it into effect, with a concept of naval warfare coupled with an assessment of the international situation on both of which the armaments effort was to be based.[2] As for the substance of the programme, the High Command called for the rebuilding of the battle fleet up to the strength of a two-squadron battle force by 1908, supported by the required light forces, which in part were destined for service on foreign stations. In order to attain the planned total, it was deemed necessary to add to the fleet, over the next twelve years, at least twelve battleships, three armoured and twelve protected cruisers. Besides providing for a back-up in overseas contingencies, the main function of the fleet was to defend the seas adjacent to Germany, including the coastal regions and harbours. The aim was to secure sea control in home waters. Such an endeavour would require a long-term construction programme with the costs spread evenly over the period till 1908. The necessary economies were to be achieved by a stringent reduction to only three types of fleet units – battleship, armoured cruiser, protected cruiser – which being of rather moderate size were to be capable of serving with the battle fleet as well as on overseas stations. Subsequent to 1908, the plan apparently aimed at a steady replacement programme.

Not surprisingly, Tirpitz in his commentary wholeheartedly endorsed the recommendations put forward by the High Command which closely followed the prescriptions of the *Dienstschrift IX* concerning the battle fleet's composition and crucial role. Notwithstanding some minor amendments Tirpitz adopted the construction programme of the High Command. He also concurred with it in considering it necessary to arrange for a new relationship with the Reichstag seeking its commitment to a long-term construction programme. However, in two aspects he went beyond the scope set by the High Command.

While dealing with the necessity to mobilise public support in order to persuade the Reichstag to consent to a long-term armaments effort, Tirpitz

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[1]Hobson, *Imperialism*, p. 226. General Albrecht von Stosch (1818–96), 1 Jan 1872–20 Mar 1883 Head of the Imperial Admiralty. Stosch was succeeded by Leo Graf von Caprivi (1831–99), 20 Mar 1883–5 July 1888 Head of the Imperial Admiralty, 21 Mar 1890–26 Oct 1894 Chancellor.

[2]Jonathan Steinberg, *Yesterday's Deterrent. Tirpitz and the Birth of the German Battle Fleet* (London, 1965), pp. 77–81; Lambi, *Navy*, pp. 84–6; Hobson, *Imperialism*, pp. 218–20.

introduced an argument which can be interpreted in terms of a concept of a 'secondary integration', designed to preserve the specifics of the Prusso-German pre-industrial rule in the face of a rapidly industrialising Germany.[1] Closely related to this extension was another broadening of scope by which Tirpitz shifted the focus of Germany's naval policy. Whereas the High Command had written of the need to preserve the world power status of Germany, the only contingency it dealt with was a war against the Dual Alliance – i.e. against Russia and France, possibly joined by Denmark. Tirpitz instead suggested for the fleet a role guarding against British interferences as well. When, in the wake of the Transvaal Crisis, Stosch asked him for an evaluation of the German prospects in an Anglo-German war he accordingly elaborated on the notion he had already expressed in his commentary on the High Command's memorandum.[2]

Again, Tirpitz, taking a longer-term view, stuck to the prospect of a battle fleet numbering two or three squadrons as recommended by the High Command, albeit signalling a tendency for an extension. Taking up the assessment voiced in his commentary, Tirpitz considered this fleet to provide for sufficient strength to eventually force the decision-makers in London to pay due regard to the German interests. In this context he repeated his promotion of the 'political importance of sea power'. This may be viewed as a sign of the distortion of a sound naval strategy by the ideology of sea power, since Tirpitz had apparently disregarded the paramount importance *Dienstschrift IX* had placed on the capability to seize the strategic offensive. On the other hand, Tirpitz stuck to the strategic significance the High Command had attributed to the coastal regions and to their crucial vulnerabilities. His vision of an Anglo-German war located the decisive operations (including the bombardment of London) in the vicinity of the belligerents' shores while at the same time disparaging the contribution of any commerce raiding. Thus he at least sketched the kind of threat the German navy was supposed to pose to Britain. Anyway, before having been appointed State Secretary Tirpitz had already suggested a rededication of the battle fleet programme drawn up by the High Command with war against the Dual Alliance in mind, by pointing it 'in a completely new direction',[3] i.e. against Britain. By conceding the total lack of any staff preparations for the contingency of an Anglo-German war, he revealed the unprecedented character of this re-orientation. When Admiral Hollmann's relations to the Emperor

[1]Berghahn, *Der Tirpitz-Plan*, pp. 91–4, 137–8.

[2]Albrecht von Stosch to Tirpitz, 12 Feb 1896, quoted in Tirpitz, *My Memoirs*, vol. I, pp. 62–3. For an analysis of Tirpitz's letter, cf. Lambi, *Navy*, pp. 118–20; Hobson, *Imperialism*, pp. 226–8.

[3]Hobson, *Imperialism*, p. 214.