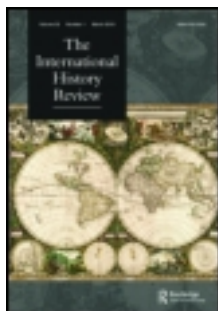


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Sentiment vs Strategy: British Naval Policy, Imperial Defence, and the Development of Dominion Navies, 1911–14

Christopher M. Bell*

This article examines British naval policy towards imperial defence and the development of autonomous Dominion navies in 1911–14. It shows that the Admiralty's main goal under the leadership of Winston Churchill was to concentrate British and Dominion warships in European waters, and ideally in the North Sea, to meet the German threat. Churchill's approach to naval developments in the Dominions was also shaped by his desire to fulfil the Cabinet's policy of remaining strong in the Mediterranean Sea. He made some concessions to sentiment in the Dominions, but his attempts to create a coherent imperial policy for the naval defence of Britain and its empire were ultimately unsuccessful. By 1914 it was clear that the Dominions would not provide the additional warships Britain required for the Mediterranean, and on the eve of war the Admiralty was beginning to prepare an imperial naval strategy that more accurately reflected the Empire's capabilities.

Keywords: Royal Navy; imperial defence; Winston Churchill; Canada; Australia

The imperial dimensions of British naval policy in the years leading up to the First World War have been overshadowed by Anglo-German naval rivalry, and for good reason. Germany's powerful High Seas Fleet posed a direct threat to the heart of the Empire, and British naval preparations were naturally focused on the North Sea rather than more distant waters. Most studies of British naval policy during this period, following the lead of Arthur Marder's *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, omit imperial concerns altogether, ignoring not just preparations for the defence of British interests outside European waters, but also the development of autonomous navies by Britain's self-governing Dominions.¹ Scholarship on the new Dominion navies, which might be expected to fill this gap, has been dominated instead by national and regional concerns.² Recent interest in the Admiralty's approach to imperial defence has been largely confined to a small school of revisionist historians whose conclusions are warped by their controversial views on the broad outlines of British naval policy in 1904–14.

According to the revisionists, British naval leaders were not so preoccupied with Germany and the naval balance in the North Sea that they neglected the threat to trade and imperial interests in distant waters, particularly that posed by the French and Russian navies. To meet this danger at a manageable cost, Admiral Sir John ('Jacky') Fisher, Britain's First Sea Lord from 1904–10, allegedly developed secret plans to transform the navy's force structure. Britain would be protected from

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invasion by swarms of submarines and flotilla craft ('flotilla defence'), which would release fast, heavily armed battle-cruisers to protect British interests in distant waters (the 'battle-cruiser concept'). Even after Fisher had left office, his ideas continued to influence naval policy and, with some modification, were being adopted by the Admiralty in the final months of peace.³ Jon Sumida, one of the leading revisionists, has claimed that the revolutionary changes under way included the transfer of naval resources to the Far East. 'In early 1914,' he writes, 'the Admiralty decided to create a battle cruiser force in the Pacific, and was in the process of implementing the plan when the war broke out in August.'⁴

While recent scholarship has disputed key aspects of the revisionist interpretation of British naval policy before the First World War, the idea that the Royal Navy was on the verge of despatching capital ships to distant waters has not been carefully considered.⁵ This article will trace the evolution of British naval policy towards two separate but closely related issues: imperial defence and the development of Dominion navies. The defence of Britain's global interests was an increasingly complicated problem for the Admiralty during the pre-war period, and one that received more attention than traditional accounts have recognised. However, the Admiralty's preferred solution was not, as revisionists have sometimes suggested, to move battle-cruisers (or fast battleships) to distant waters. Winston Churchill, the energetic and domineering First Lord of the Admiralty before the outbreak of war, struggled to meet what he believed were the most important threats to Britain's security while reassuring the press, public, and elites that vital interests were not being endangered, and that costs were being kept under control. At the same time, the development of autonomous navies by Britain's Dominions created both opportunities and challenges for the Admiralty. The British Empire would potentially have more warships at its disposal, with the cost of imperial defence spread more evenly. But any relief to the British taxpayer was likely to mean the loss of centralised Admiralty control over the Empire's naval assets. When all these factors are taken into consideration, it will be seen that under Churchill's leadership the Admiralty's overriding concern was to concentrate British *and* Dominion warships in European waters, and ideally in the North Sea, to meet the German threat, even if this meant running risks in distant theatres.

Dominion navies pre-dated Winston Churchill's appointment as Britain's First Lord of the Admiralty, but not by very much. The legislation creating the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) was passed by the respective Dominion parliaments in 1910, and royal approval was granted the following year. When Churchill arrived at the Admiralty in October 1911, these new services existed mainly on paper: their first modern warships were nearly all still under construction. The desire of the British Dominions to create their own navies had generated little enthusiasm within the Admiralty, however. The British ideal, as articulated by one First Lord in 1907, was 'one sea, one empire, one navy'.⁶ Naval leaders believed that a single imperial navy would ensure maximum efficiency through unified control, doctrine, and training. Decentralisation, it was feared, would impair the navy's efficiency and restrict its strategic mobility. The constituent parts of the Empire had traditionally been encouraged to make financial contributions towards the cost of imperial defence, an arrangement that bolstered British naval strength while leaving the Admiralty a free hand to build and manage the fleet as it saw fit. But this ideal increasingly ran up against political realities: as Britain's self-governing dominions

became larger, more prosperous, and more assertive, they began to demand greater control over matters affecting their own security. During the first decade of the twentieth century, the Admiralty grudgingly accepted that autonomous Dominion navies were inevitable, and would have to be supported with as much good grace as possible. The only consolation was that the Dominions would probably be less stingy with their own navies than with a purely British service.⁷

The escalation of naval competition between Britain and Germany after the introduction of the powerful new dreadnought-class battleships further complicated the situation by stimulating fears throughout the Empire that Britain's naval supremacy was in danger. This prompted Australia and New Zealand to finance the construction of capital ships, which ensured that the Admiralty would have little choice but to acknowledge the Dominions' growing stake in imperial defence. As First Sea Lord, Fisher believed that all parties' interests would be best served if the Dominions acquired battle-cruisers.⁸ These ships possessed nearly the same armament as a dreadnought, but were less heavily armoured and capable of greater speed, making them particularly useful for commerce protection on distant stations. At the Imperial Conference of 1909, Dominion governments were discouraged from concentrating on destroyers, submarines, and other small vessels that would be tied to the defence of their own coasts. The Admiralty recommended instead that they consider the construction of a distinct 'fleet unit', consisting of a battle-cruiser, three unarmoured cruisers, six destroyers, and three submarines. Such a force would be capable of catching and destroying an enemy's detached commerce raiders on the high seas, and could take over some of the burden of trade protection in distant waters. They could also, if necessary, be integrated into a larger (i.e. imperial) fleet. The Admiralty hoped that imperial interests in the Pacific and Indian oceans would eventually be protected by four distinct fleet units: Canada and Australia would each provide one, while Britain would maintain the other two, one of which would be subsidised by New Zealand.⁹

These units would collectively form a new 'Pacific Fleet', and Fisher hoped that in time Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and India would take over the whole burden of naval defence in this region. 'We manage the job in Europe,' he wrote in 1909. 'They'll manage it against the Yankees, Japs, and Chinese, as occasion requires out there!'¹⁰ In the event, the fleet-unit proposal was accepted by Australia, but not by Canada. The Imperial Conference therefore concluded with an agreement that the Empire's new Pacific Fleet would consist of just three fleet units. One of these, to be based at Sydney, would be maintained by Australia. Two others, to be known as the East Indies and China squadrons, would be maintained by the British. The flagship of the latter would be HMS *New Zealand*, a new battle-cruiser funded for the Royal Navy by New Zealand. The rest of the squadron would be subsidised by New Zealand and manned, as far as possible, by New Zealanders. And to ensure that the defence of New Zealand's interests was not left entirely in Australian hands, Britain agreed to station part of the China squadron - including two new Bristol-class cruisers, three destroyers, and two submarines - in New Zealand waters.¹¹

These arrangements began to fall apart, however, not long after Churchill arrived at the Admiralty. The new First Lord had been an early critic of plans to move new and powerful British warships to the Pacific. His concerns were both financial and strategic. As Home Secretary, he had argued in 1910 and early 1911 that the Dominion battle-cruisers should be kept in home waters, which would strengthen Britain against Germany in the North Sea while reducing the strain of naval competition on

British finances. He also disliked the Admiralty's commitment to dispatch the British battle-cruiser HMS *Indomitable* to become the flagship of the new East Indies squadron. 'Older battleships or smaller cruisers', he insisted, 'could perfectly well discharge all the necessary naval duties' in the Pacific.¹² His views did not change when he became First Lord in October 1911, even though he was now responsible for implementing the 1909 agreements. In January 1912 he complained to Sir Lewis Harcourt, the Colonial Secretary, that the 'fleet unit' concept was inherently flawed. 'The whole principle of local [i.e. autonomous Dominion] Navies is, of course, thoroughly vicious,' he wrote, 'and no responsible sailor can be found who has a word to say in favour of it.'¹³

Churchill soon began quietly altering the 1909 agreement with the Dominions. The first change was to replace HMS *New Zealand* on the China Station with an armoured cruiser so that the more powerful battle-cruiser could be kept in home waters. This was relatively simple to arrange, since the New Zealand government had not put down any conditions as to where the ship it financed would be employed. But Churchill did not have the same freedom with the new Australian battle-cruiser, which was to become an integral part of the new Australian navy as HMAS *Australia*. 'I do not expect', he lamented, 'that there is any chance of inducing Australia to let us have battle cruiser *Australia* in Home waters during the next few years.' He therefore informed Harcourt that he intended 'to put the best face on this that we can and to aid the Australian Government to establish their complete Fleet unit as quickly as possible. The departure of these valuable modern ships, so important to our Fleet in Home waters, is, of course, very unpleasant.'¹⁴

Churchill's views on Dominion navies were also shaped by naval developments in Canada, where a new Conservative government under Sir Robert Borden was unhappy with its predecessor's policy of creating a Canadian navy composed primarily of vessels for coastal defence and fisheries protection. The alternative under consideration was to build capital ships for use by the Royal Navy. From Churchill's perspective, this was preferable to the Australian policy of incorporating capital ships directly into an autonomous Dominion service. However, the First Lord was not ready to abandon the fleet-unit policy altogether, which would provoke a strong reaction from Australia and New Zealand. And he hesitated to allocate the proposed Canadian capital ships to the North Sea, since there now appeared to be an opportunity to substitute them for British capital ships in the Pacific. Churchill therefore resurrected Fisher's idea of making Dominion forces responsible for imperial naval defence. This would give the Admiralty a free hand to withdraw British capital ships from distant waters without fear of recrimination. 'Here then', he explained to the British Prime Minister, Henry Asquith, in April 1912, 'is the fundamental division of labour wh[ic]h the mother country should make with her Colonies: - We will cope with the strongest combination in the decisive theatre, you shall patrol the Empire.'¹⁵

Churchill still had reservations, however, about the fleet-unit concept, which would have left Dominion forces dispersed throughout the Pacific and potentially tied down to purely local defence. He therefore recommended that these ships be collected into a single powerful squadron that would move from station to station in peacetime and be capable of rapidly reinforcing any threatened area when necessary. 'Separately these navies are weak & even ridiculous,' he concluded. 'But combined they might make a force wh[ic]h no European power c[oul]d face without dispersing its own home concentr[at]io[n] & consequently releasing ours.' A Dominion squadron

along these lines would indeed have been a formidable force, combining the two battle-cruisers being built by Australia and New Zealand with two (projected) Canadian-funded battle-cruisers. Churchill also hoped that in time South Africa and India might each contribute two light armoured cruisers to the squadron.¹⁶

There was probably no chance of the scheme ever being implemented, but it did represent a genuine attempt by Churchill to honour the spirit of the 1909 agreement with the Dominions. From the Admiralty's perspective, however, the scheme could not be justified on strategic grounds. As long as Germany was the greatest naval threat, Churchill and his advisers believed that Dominion capital ships should be concentrated in the North Sea. The security of Australia and New Zealand would be assured, in Churchill's opinion, by Britain's naval dominance in European waters and its alliance with Japan.¹⁷ The correct course for the Dominions, therefore, was to strengthen Britain's main fleet. The addition of two modern capital ships in this decisive theatre 'might', he predicted, 'turn the scale and make victory not merely certain but complete'. The defeat of that fleet, on the other hand, would leave Australia and New Zealand exposed to attack by European powers and by Japan. Nevertheless, it was clear that the Admiralty could not disregard naval sentiment in the Dominions.

The Dominions want [Churchill wrote] to have their own ships under their own control, cruising in their own waters, based on their own Ports. They want to see continually the result of the money they have spent or may spend. They wish to enjoy the custom and advantage which the presence of their own ships in their own waters confers. They want to have something they can see and touch and take pride in with feelings of ownership and control. These feelings, although unrecognised by military truth, are natural. They are real facts which will govern events if the choice which is open to us in the immediate future is not one between having Australian vessels in the right strategic stations or the wrong, but between having them in the wrong or not having them at all.

'[T]ime will be required', Churchill concluded, 'before the true principles of naval policy are comprehended in the Dominions, and ... in the interval arrangements must be made to develop, so far as possible, their local naval establishments.'¹⁸

Churchill announced his idea of a Dominion squadron in a speech to the Shipwrights' Company on 15 May 1912, but soon had second thoughts.¹⁹ The division of labour he had envisioned assumed that Britain would have little difficulty maintaining a clear margin of superiority over the German fleet in the North Sea. When Churchill proposed the Dominion squadron, Britain's position relative to its main rival seemed secure. Only two months earlier he had announced to Parliament that the Liberal government would maintain a 60% margin over Germany in new construction. He also proclaimed that every new battleship added to the current German construction programme would be met with two additional British capital ships. And to ensure Britain's predominance over Germany in the North Sea, he planned to recall British battleships from the Mediterranean.²⁰ His overriding concern was to ensure an overwhelming numerical advantage in what he regarded as the main and decisive theatre. As long as Britain won the decisive battle against the German fleet 'we can put everything else straight afterwards', he observed. But if Britain lost that battle, 'there will not be any afterwards.'²¹ Fisher, the former First Sea Lord, took the same view. 'It is quite futile to be strong in the subsidiary theatre of war', he wrote to Churchill, 'and not overwhelmingly supreme in the decisive theatre'.²²

Being strong in the main theatre meant, however, that Britain must be prepared to accept risks in other theatres. The proposed Dominion squadron could have dealt

with any threats likely to emerge in the Pacific, but the Mediterranean posed a different set of problems. Germany's allies Austria-Hungary and Italy had both begun building dreadnoughts of their own. Churchill did not think Britain could afford to maintain a dominant position simultaneously in the North Sea and the Mediterranean. The policy of maintaining a superiority of 60% over Germany in capital ships (a 60% naval 'standard') was already straining British finances and causing dissent within the ruling Liberal Party. Nearly all these ships were earmarked for service in the North Sea, and it was unlikely that additional battleships could be built, over and above the 60% standard, to match Austrian and Italian strength in the Mediterranean. Churchill instinctively disliked the idea of maintaining a small capital-ship force in that theatre that would be outnumbered in wartime by its likely enemies. He therefore proposed to protect British interests in this secondary theatre with flotillas of submarines and destroyers.²³ This was an idea that he had probably picked up from Fisher, the former First Sea Lord, who believed that modern torpedo craft posed a formidable threat to large surface craft in the narrow seas around the British Isles or in the Mediterranean.²⁴ It was not, Churchill admitted, an ideal solution, but he insisted that there was no other realistic choice. The risks would be minimal, he predicted, because Britain would likely have the support of the French Navy in the event of war. The two navies together would match the combined forces of Italy and Austria-Hungary, and Churchill advocated a firm naval arrangement with France to secure British interests in the region.²⁵

These plans met with strong protests from many directions, including the press and public, the Conservative Party, and even prominent members of the Liberal cabinet. It was widely feared that Churchill was proposing to 'abandon' the Mediterranean, which would mean the loss of prestige in peacetime and serious injury to British interests in wartime. In May 1912 Churchill attempted to reassure his critics by offering to station two battle-cruisers at Gibraltar, but he continued to face strong pressure to maintain a full squadron of capital ships in the Mediterranean. The matter was taken up in early July by the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID), which decided - against Churchill's advice - that Britain 'must maintain available for Mediterranean purposes and based on a Mediterranean port, a battle fleet equal to a one-Power Mediterranean standard, excluding France'.²⁶ This decision, later ratified by the Cabinet, created serious difficulties for Churchill over the next two years. Britain was now committed to maintaining a 60% standard of new construction measured against Germany alone, but the Admiralty was required to divide these ships between two separate theatres: the North Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. This could only be accomplished, Churchill feared, by reducing Britain's margins in the North Sea below the point of safety.²⁷

Churchill persuaded the Cabinet that Britain's commitments in the Mediterranean could be met in the short term by stationing four battle-cruisers at Malta. But the new one-power standard meant that a squadron of eight capital ships would be required in the Mediterranean by mid-1915 to match new construction by Austria-Hungary and Italy.²⁸ Churchill immediately lobbied his colleagues to adopt a new standard of naval construction that would allow him to build additional battleships to meet this commitment.²⁹ When these efforts failed, he abruptly dropped his plans to form a Dominion squadron in the Pacific. The only way to maintain a margin of 50% over Germany in battleships in the crucial North Sea theatre - which now became the Admiralty's 'irreducible' requirement in this region - would be for the Dominions to keep up British numbers in the Mediterranean. Churchill had already

halted the transfer of the battle-cruisers *Indomitable* and *New Zealand* to the Pacific, but more capital ships would eventually be needed in European waters. With this in mind, Churchill and other members of the British cabinet outlined the naval situation to the Prime Minister of Canada, Sir Robert Borden, at a meeting of the CID in London on 11 July 1912. The First Lord explained that Britain could only meet its commitments in both theatres by laying down three extra capital ships. This would be difficult, he admitted, for financial reasons, but also because additional construction by Britain would increase the strain on Anglo-German relations. However, he maintained that if Canada undertook to build these ships, diplomatic complications could be avoided.³⁰ As one of the secretaries noted: 'Winston . . . end[ed] up by practically asking for three Dreadnoughts from Canada.'³¹

To Churchill's relief, Borden appeared eager to co-operate.³² The Canadian Prime Minister told Churchill the following month that he believed the Admiralty could make out an 'unanswerable case for an immediate emergency contribution by Canada', and asked Churchill to outline the arguments in two separate documents, one suitable for presentation to the Canadian Parliament and another, 'confidential and in detail' that he could share with his Cabinet.³³ This was not as simple as it appeared, however. To overcome domestic opposition in Canada, Borden wanted a clear and unequivocal statement from the Admiralty that Britain faced an emergency. Churchill was concerned that he might spark a panic if he appeared to suggest that Britain was unable to meet its obligations to the Dominions. He informed Borden privately that without Canadian assistance, Britain would have to take additional measures 'over and above the very great exertions they are already making' in order to provide for the safety of both Britain and the Empire. But he confided that he was wary about presenting the situation 'so nakedly, even in a confidential document'.³⁴

After two weeks of working on the Admiralty document, Churchill confided to the Colonial Secretary that he had found the process 'very difficult and laborious'. The challenge, he noted, was 'to make a case for an emergency policy in Canada without admitting that we have not provided adequately for the safety of the Country here, and without unduly dwelling on the facts regarding the German naval development or committing ourselves to a position which would not leave us any choice but to make additional provision if Canada does not'.³⁵ The final draft of the Admiralty paper, which was scrutinised by both Asquith and Harcourt, was finally sent to Borden in September 1912. The document studiously avoided any hint of a crisis. Britain, it affirmed, would not 'in any circumstances fail in her duty to the Oversea Dominions of the Crown'. The British Parliament would take whatever measures were necessary to safeguard the vital interests of the Empire. But Canada's aid, it maintained, would have a tremendous *moral* value.

Any action on the part of Canada to increase the power and mobility of the Imperial Navy, and thus widen the margin of our common safety, would be recognised everywhere as a most significant witness to the united strength of the Empire, and to the renewed resolve of the Oversea Dominions to take their part in maintaining its integrity.

The Admiralty memorandum recommended that Canada's immediate efforts should be directed towards providing 'the largest and strongest ships of war which science can build or money can supply'.³⁶ This decision clearly stemmed from Churchill's pressing need for additional dreadnoughts to maintain the British

government's new one-power Mediterranean standard, but he also justified this recommendation on the grounds that building submarines for the Royal Navy would not be popular in Canada. 'Your people', he wrote to Borden in September 1912, 'would never see them, would hardly hear of them.'

They have no names, only numbers. Their construction would not excite any enthusiasm, nor would it take a form which the mass of people who know very much about the Navy in Canada would understand. To the ordinary layman it would look as if large sums of Canadian money were being frittered away on a host of 'small fry' vessels for British home waters. . . . There is a great and legitimate sense of pride which the Canadian people feel in contributing the finest and most powerful ships in world to the Imperial Navy, in naming them after Canadian Provinces, and in watching their progress to and fro about the world.³⁷

The First Lord was also quick to reassure Borden that the Admiralty was receptive to proposals that would encourage the Canadian shipbuilding industry by building some new warships - other than dreadnoughts themselves - in Canada.³⁸ His efforts were rewarded in December 1912 when Borden introduced a Naval Aid Bill in the Canadian Parliament to allow for the construction of three dreadnoughts for the Royal Navy.

A prediction by Asquith that Borden would 'find himself in stormy water the moment he launches his naval proposals' proved to be apt.³⁹ The Naval Aid Bill immediately provoked a fierce debate in Canada.⁴⁰ To strengthen Borden's hand, Churchill decided it would be necessary after all to support the Canadian leader's claims that Britain faced an emergency. When presenting the Royal Navy's annual estimates to Parliament in March 1913, Churchill declared that while Britain's margins relative to Germany were not in danger, the proposed Canadian dreadnoughts were 'absolutely necessary for the whole-world defence of the British Empire from the end of 1915, or from the beginning of 1916 onwards'.⁴¹ These were the dates by which Britain would require additional capital ships to maintain the one-power Mediterranean standard.

Churchill also hoped to ensure that the Admiralty had full control over the Canadian dreadnoughts when they were built. Borden had shown no inclination to restrict this freedom, but the possibility existed that Canada might eventually follow Australia's lead and incorporate these ships into the new Royal Canadian Navy, in which event they would no longer be available for general service in the Royal Navy. The Canadian Prime Minister had asked in November 1912 that the British government should acknowledge the right of the Dominion to take over control of the ships 'whenever Canada is prepared to maintain them'.⁴² This, from Churchill's perspective, was an ominous sign. The idea of undercutting Ottawa's claims to the ownership of the new warships was probably a factor behind the plans he began to develop in early 1913 to create a new 'Imperial Squadron'.⁴³

This concept was similar in many respects to his earlier scheme for a 'Dominion squadron'. The three Canadian dreadnoughts would be combined with HMS *New Zealand* and a fast new battleship, HMS *Malaya*, which had recently been offered by the Federated Malay States. But this force would be based at Gibraltar, which had the advantage, from Churchill's perspective, of fulfilling part of the Admiralty's obligation to maintain a one-power standard in the Mediterranean. In peacetime, the squadron would visit different parts of the Empire, and the Dominions would provide the bases, dockyards, flotilla vessels, and other ancillary craft needed to support

the fleet. They would also be consulted by the Admiralty as to any movements 'not dominated by military considerations'. Churchill explained to Borden - although not yet to any other Dominion leaders - that this was 'the right and sound plan which ought eventually to eliminate the policy of tying up individual isolated Dreadnoughts to particular localities'. Moreover, he believed that it would ease Borden's task of selling his naval bill by 'raising the principle of combined inter-Dominion action as against purely local navies on the one hand or complete absorption in the British Navy on the other, and also as opening a large field for development of naval bases and other local resources'.⁴⁴

The Canadian Prime Minister expressed his enthusiastic support for what he described as Churchill's 'inspiring proposal', and Churchill announced it to Parliament in March 1913, although without consulting any other Dominion leaders. He also complied with Borden's request for a declaration that Canada would always retain the right to recall its battleships 'upon reasonable notice'.⁴⁵ But the provision of Canadian battleships for an Imperial Squadron depended on the ability of Borden's Conservative government to obtain the support of Canada's Liberal-dominated senate. By mid-1913 this was looking increasingly uncertain. Churchill's difficulties in the Mediterranean were eased somewhat by the conclusion of a convention in February 1913 by which France assumed responsibility for protecting British interests in the western Mediterranean in wartime. But Churchill was still no closer to having the ships necessary to maintain the Cabinet's one-power standard in that region. His difficulties increased in May 1913 when the naval-aid bill was rejected by the Canadian senate.

Borden assured Churchill that he was still committed to building dreadnoughts, and Churchill clung to the hope that the legislation would eventually be passed. He was therefore reluctant to take any steps that would hinder Borden by casting doubt on his claims that the Canadian ships were needed by a particular date to meet the Empire's essential security requirements. Churchill also had to consider his obligation to maintain the one-power standard in the Mediterranean. Both objectives could be met in the short term by accelerating Britain's own capital-ship programme. Churchill explained to the British Cabinet in June 1913 that the delay in building the three Canadian dreadnoughts would leave Britain behind Austria-Hungary in modern capital ships by the autumn of 1915. To prevent this, he recommended moving ahead the start date of three British dreadnoughts that would normally have been begun in March 1914. If these were started early, Britain could maintain the approved standards of strength in both home waters and the Mediterranean until the autumn of 1916. But the acceleration of the current programme would only provide a temporary solution. If the Canadian government did not supply dreadnoughts, he warned that Britain would eventually have to add more ships to its own programme to maintain the one-power standard beyond 1916.⁴⁶

The Cabinet sanctioned this expedient, but Churchill still faced a complicated set of problems. He was committed to maintaining a one-power standard in the Mediterranean, but there was no realistic prospect of building additional British warships to fulfil this obligation. This forced him to rely on Canada to supply the three extra ships he needed, but these vessels might never materialise. Churchill therefore had to prepare contingency plans in the event that Borden failed to deliver and the one-power standard became untenable. His preferred solution was to withdraw Britain's capital ships from the Mediterranean and rely on some form of 'flotilla defence' in this theatre, the same scheme he had pressed on the Cabinet in the first half of 1912.

This was, in Churchill's view, the right strategy to employ, especially once Britain entered into a naval agreement with France. Abandoning the one-power standard would eliminate the need for three additional dreadnoughts, which would ease Churchill's other difficulties. He was eager in 1913–14 to build up Britain's submarine force, and he had no desire to forego these craft in order to build battleships solely for the Mediterranean. However, admitting publicly that Britain would not build additional dreadnoughts if the Canadian ships were delayed would contradict Churchill's assurances that Britain faced an emergency for which these dreadnoughts were badly needed. This would discredit the First Lord, and the resulting backlash in Canada would wreck any chance of obtaining warships from the Dominion.

In late 1913, Churchill continued to hope that Borden would eventually deliver on his pledge to finance three new dreadnoughts. This would forestall another contentious debate over the 'abandonment' of the Mediterranean, allow Churchill to fulfil his commitments to the Cabinet, and enable the Admiralty to build the additional submarines it wanted. To buy time, Churchill warned his cabinet colleagues in December 1913 that further delays in the construction of the Canadian dreadnoughts would have to be covered by moving forward the start date of battleships in the Admiralty's 1914 programme. But once again this could only be a temporary expedient. Matters finally came to a head during the formulation of the Navy's estimates for 1914–15. Churchill asked for four new dreadnoughts - the number he had previously announced to Parliament - and hinted that an additional three might be necessary to replace the Canadian ships. But there was never any possibility of the Cabinet agreeing to fund seven new capital ships that year. A strong faction within the government was dismayed by the rising cost of naval construction and proposed that Britain should only authorise *two* new dreadnoughts. Such a reduction would have made a mockery of Churchill's declarations that the Canadian dreadnoughts were required to meet a naval emergency. The First Lord had publicly committed himself on these issues, and had done so with the explicit consent of his colleagues. He was now prepared to resign if the Cabinet reduced his construction programme and repudiated his policies.

In the Cabinet crisis that followed, Churchill continued to play for time. He advised the British Prime Minister that Borden might still obtain funds for the new dreadnoughts, in which event the Admiralty could maintain its authorised distribution standards in both the North Sea and the Mediterranean. By 'hold[ing] firm now', he insisted, there were still 'good chances of a complete success'. But if Borden failed, Churchill was prepared to recast British naval policy. He reassured Asquith that he could, if necessary, fall back on flotilla defence in the Mediterranean, which would eliminate any need for additional battleship construction. Churchill was, in fact, already looking into the possibility of substituting submarines for one or possibly two of the projected capital ships in the 1914 estimates.⁴⁷ To strengthen his position in Cabinet, Churchill enlisted Borden's support. On 19 December he warned the Canadian Prime Minister that the Admiralty was being pressed to reduce its programme for the coming year to two capital ships. He invited Borden to send him a letter stating that such a reduction in the British programme 'would be disastrous to your Government & its naval policy, & that you w[oul]d consider you had been ill-used'. Such a letter, he predicted, would have a strong impact on his colleagues. 'The claim of obligation & good faith is one wh[ic]h no British Cabinet will reject; & an argument on these lines makes it easy for persons who do not agree on the merits of particular proposals to bow to what they can regard as past commitments.'⁴⁸

Borden promptly replied along the lines requested. If Britain cut its capital-ship programme for 1914 by half, he warned that it 'would be quite impossible for us to persevere in proposals which were based upon considerations of an urgency which we vigorously proclaimed and in which we fully believed'. At the same time, he reassured Churchill of his determination to obtain funding for the Canadian dreadnoughts, although he admitted that until the composition of the Senate was altered to favour his party there was no point in introducing a new naval-aid bill.⁴⁹ Armed with Borden's letter, Churchill reminded his colleagues in January of the previous assurances he had given to Canada - with their explicit consent - regarding the existence of a naval emergency.⁵⁰ After several weeks of hard bargaining with David Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, a compromise was reached that authorised the Admiralty to build all four new dreadnoughts. But this did not resolve the difficult question of the Mediterranean standard. In early February, Churchill reminded the Cabinet that if two ships of the new programme were not started immediately it would be necessary to abandon either the existing margin over Germany in home waters or the one-power Mediterranean standard.

Churchill was determined to prevent the former, but he still regarded the alternative as a last resort, as this would destroy any chance of obtaining dreadnoughts from Canada. Despite strong opposition within the Cabinet, he was able to obtain its consent to the acceleration of the British programme by warning his colleagues that abandoning the Mediterranean standard would leave the British government open to 'accusations of breaking pledges and breaking faith' - and by threatening the resignation of the entire Board of Admiralty.⁵¹ The acceleration of British construction was announced to Parliament in March 1914, and Churchill also warned that Britain might have to accelerate another capital ship in 1915 in order to maintain its strength in the Mediterranean for another year.⁵² But within a month his Mediterranean policy collapsed completely. The Canadian warships were clearly not going to be approved in the short term, and both Austria-Hungary and Italy decided to lay down additional dreadnoughts.⁵³ Neither the acceleration of British ships nor Canadian construction would suffice any longer to allow a one-power standard in the Mediterranean. By May 1914, Churchill appears to have decided that there was no longer any choice but to rely on flotilla defence in that theatre.⁵⁴

The tacit abandonment of the Mediterranean naval standard allowed the Admiralty to begin distancing itself from the idea that Canadian dreadnoughts were essential to the security of the Empire. On 6 March 1914, Churchill informed Borden that Britain's battleship margins against Germany were now secure 'thanks to our exertions', and he suggested that the three dreadnoughts previously sought from Canada might be converted to two dreadnoughts plus cruisers and other vessels.⁵⁵ The First Lord also revealed his view that battleships might be on the verge of obsolescence, which suggests that he was no longer committed to obtaining *any* dreadnoughts from Canada. Meanwhile, priorities were also being re-examined in Ottawa. By early 1914, an 'emergency' contribution to the Royal Navy had become less urgent than the need for a 'permanent policy' to guide the development of the new Canadian navy.⁵⁶ In February, Borden forwarded to the Admiralty a memorandum on this subject by Vice-Admiral Charles Kingsmill, Director of the Naval Service of Canada. This document suggested that the Dominion's navy should be comprised primarily of submarines and torpedo boats, which could protect Canadian ports against enemy raiders. This was not a very ambitious policy, but it was in keeping with the broad goals of the Canadian Conservative Party. In London, however, the naval war staff

rejected the idea of a coastal defence force that would be tied to Canadian ports, proposing instead that Canada acquire Chatham-class light cruisers. These vessels, with a far greater radius of action and more powerful armament than flotilla vessels, would be well suited to protect imperial trade in the western Atlantic against German commerce raiders.⁵⁷

The Admiralty was either uninterested in or unaware of the political ramifications of these recommendations, which would produce a navy along the lines favoured by the Canadian Liberal Party - and denounced by the Conservatives. But a force of modern cruisers would relieve some of the pressure on the Royal Navy to disperse its own cruisers to defend the Empire's seaborne trade outside European waters. With the future of the 'emergency contribution' and the 'permanent policy' both up in the air, Churchill hit upon the idea of sending Admiral John Jellicoe, the Second Sea Lord, to meet with authorities in Canada before taking up his new appointment as Commander-in-Chief of Britain's Home Fleet. Churchill proposed the idea to Borden in March, and was eager to move preparations forward after he received a positive response in July.⁵⁸ The Admiralty's advice that Canada finance dreadnoughts rather than other classes of warship was fast becoming a source of embarrassment. The demise of the battleship was being openly discussed in the British press at this time, and the Admiralty was preparing to reduce its own battleship programme, which would demonstrate that there was no longer an emergency that could only be solved with additional dreadnoughts. Churchill, no longer driven by his Mediterranean agenda, now sought to tailor the Admiralty's advice to the vagaries of Canadian politics. 'There are several alternatives which might be proposed,' he informed the Colonial Secretary on 13 July, 'and before the Admiralty commit themselves to any formal modifications of their previous advice, full and frank discussion with Mr. Borden is necessary so that we know exactly which alternative would be most likely to be acceptable to the Canadian Government.'⁵⁹ Preparations for Jellicoe's visit were cut short by the outbreak of the First World War. Canada entered the conflict, as the official history of the Royal Canadian Navy notes, 'having neither contributed dreadnoughts to an imperial fleet nor formed a proper naval service of her own'.⁶⁰

While Churchill took Borden into his confidence throughout these deliberations, his relationship with other Dominion leaders was never close. He was particularly frustrated by the reluctance of New Zealand politicians to fall in with his plans to concentrate major British and imperial warships in European waters. The New Zealand government had not protested Churchill's decision to withdraw *New Zealand* and *Indomitable* from the China and East Indies squadrons, but it was nonetheless concerned about the Admiralty's apparent lack of commitment to the 1909 naval agreement. Not only would the British Pacific squadrons be deprived of modern capital ships, the Admiralty was also wavering over its agreement to maintain a strong naval presence - two Bristol-class cruisers, three destroyers, and two submarines - in New Zealand waters. These concerns were justified. The growth of the German menace meant that Churchill was reluctant to send Britain's newest cruisers to the Pacific, while doubts had developed within the Admiralty as to the suitability of New Zealand as a base for submarines. The Admiralty hoped that New Zealand would be satisfied with older cruisers and the substitution of a fourth destroyer for the two submarines originally proposed.⁶¹ Churchill was alarmed to learn in the autumn of 1912 that the Dominion's new Reform government was exploring the possibility of strengthening its naval ties with Australia.⁶² This seemed to open the possibility of a

single combined Australian–New Zealand navy, which threatened the New Zealand subsidy for the Royal Navy, and might result in demands for the transfer of HMS *New Zealand* to the Pacific. Churchill rebuked Admiral Sir George King-Hall, Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Navy's Australia Station, who had encouraged discussions between the two Dominions. 'Withdrawal of New Zealand [battle] cruiser', Churchill warned, 'would be extremely inconvenient'.⁶³ But the New Zealand government was not as compliant as Churchill probably expected. In February 1913, Colonel James Allen, the Dominion's Minister of Defence, announced to the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) in London that his government wished to develop its own naval institutions rather than subsidise the Royal Navy indefinitely.⁶⁴ This was not at all to Churchill's liking. In a lengthy letter to Allen, Churchill insisted that Australia and New Zealand were both 'perfectly safe from all danger of external attack' because they were protected by the Royal Navy - which could deal with hostile warships originating from Europe - and by Britain's alliance with Japan. These Dominions could only be threatened if the British fleet were destroyed in its home waters, he maintained. If this occurred, there was no hope of Australia and New Zealand matching Japanese naval power. The wisest course for New Zealand, therefore, was to continue providing a subsidy to the Royal Navy.⁶⁵ 'We are reluctant', he told Allen, 'to take any steps which should appear to commit us to favouring the principle of local navies against that previously adopted by New Zealand of one Imperial Fleet'.

It was clear, however, that the Admiralty would have to support some local naval development for political reasons. Churchill therefore agreed to provide facilities, including two older light cruisers, to assist in the development of 'naval sentiment and naval interests' in the Dominion by building up a New Zealand Naval Reserve. He proposed to augment these ships with a third British cruiser to compensate for the destroyers and submarines the Admiralty had promised in 1909. This force, he wrote, would be entirely adequate for 'commerce protection and other military purposes likely to be required of them in New Zealand waters in the present period'.⁶⁶ Allen was probably surprised to learn that the scheme adopted in 1909 was being abandoned, but he agreed to accept the new dispositions Churchill outlined, provided they would 'have some permanency'. At the same time, he made it clear that New Zealand was determined to gain a stronger voice in the administration and control of naval forces in the south Pacific.⁶⁷

When Churchill's correspondence with Allen was printed for circulation to the CID, Lieutenant-Colonel Adrian Grant-Duff, the Committee's Assistant Secretary (Military) noted that Churchill 'appears to have done his very best to alienate New Zealand'.⁶⁸ The question of imperial defence in the Pacific was taken up by the CID in April 1913, with Allen in attendance. Churchill carefully outlined the case against developing an autonomous New Zealand navy on the Australian model. 'The situation in the Pacific', he explained, 'will be absolutely regulated by the decisions in the North Sea'.

Two or three Australian and New Zealand Dreadnoughts, if brought into the line in the North Sea, might turn the scale and make victory not merely certain, but complete. The same two or three Dreadnoughts in Australian waters would be useless the day after the defeat of the British Navy in Home Waters. Their existence could only serve to prolong the agony without altering the course of events. Their effectiveness would have been destroyed by events which had taken place at the other side of the globe as surely as if they had been sunk in the battle. These facts may not be palatable; but the Admiralty is bound to expose the peril and military unwisdom of divided organisation, of

dispersion or dissipation of forces, and of partial engagements in detail, which have led to the squandering of so many powerful States and Empires.⁶⁹

Allen acknowledged the validity of this argument, but explained that New Zealanders felt threatened by Japan's naval expansion and believed that they must eventually 'provide for their own protection by their own Fleet'. Although Churchill was unenthusiastic about taking steps towards creating an autonomous New Zealand navy, the Prime Minister recommended that Britain should provide a cruiser for use by New Zealand in training its own men.⁷⁰ According to Grant-Duff, 'Winston with not too good a grace conceded the ship but made mountains of difficulties over lending the instruction staff. It will be sometime I think before New Zealand has any more fits of generosity.' The military secretary also noted that the only thing Churchill 'seemed to care about as a result of the meeting was that Allen's statement that the [HMS] "New Zealand" was a free gift should be recorded'.⁷¹

This new arrangement satisfied Allen, but additional complications arose in June 1913 when the New Zealand government complained that the ships allocated to the New Zealand station in 1909 were to be replaced by three older cruisers.⁷² Churchill was clearly annoyed by this development. He urged Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg, the First Sea Lord, and Admiral Sir Henry Jackson, the Chief of the Admiralty's war staff, to meet with Allen and 'take every possible opportunity of inculcating sound principles into his mind'. The New Zealander, he complained, was 'full of very foolish and retrogressive ideas'.⁷³ Churchill himself wrote to Allen in August to dissuade him from demanding the employment of Bristol-class cruisers on the New Zealand station. He began by noting that the Dominion's annual subsidy did not cover the entire cost of maintaining a squadron of ships in New Zealand waters. Since Britain was bearing most of the expense, he maintained that the Admiralty must be free to allocate ships 'in what is judged to be the most effectual manner according to military and strategic needs'.

If and when those needs require the presence of the *New Zealand* or of other vessels of her type in the Pacific, they will certainly be sent. But we are clear and understand that you fully agree with us that to send a vessel where it is not needed, and where it could play no part in decisive events, would not be a policy on which the Admiralty would be justified in making a heavy annual outlay.

The same logic applied to the navy's Bristol-class cruisers. The expansion of the German fleet since 1909 meant that the Admiralty needed to keep as many of these ships as possible in home waters. 'I am sure you will agree with me', he wrote, 'that it would not be justifiable from any point of view for us to remove 2 of these ships from stations where they are urgently and immediately needed, in order to proceed to New Zealand waters in relief of vessels which are from every point of view adequate and suitable for every existing military requirement'.⁷⁴

The New Zealand government asked again the following month for the Admiralty to provide all the ships that had been promised in 1909, but officials in London continued to insist that the agreement could no longer be justified on strategic grounds.⁷⁵ A bill was introduced in the New Zealand Parliament shortly afterwards authorising the acquisition of a Bristol-class cruiser that could be kept under the control of the New Zealand government.⁷⁶ Discontent was also rising at this time in Australia, which shared its neighbour's irritation over the Admiralty's unilateral

abandonment of the 1909 naval agreement.⁷⁷ The Admiralty reassured the Australian government in October 1913 that it was still committed to upholding the 'general scheme' established in 1909, but that the precise dispositions agreed to then had been altered in keeping with new strategic realities. It insisted, however, that Britain had provided ample forces to ensure the naval defence of Australia.⁷⁸

There was no doubt at the Admiralty by this time that a greater effort would have to be made to consult with the Dominions over the direction of imperial naval policy. Churchill himself hoped that a naval conference could be held in London during the summer of 1914. But he gave no indication that he intended to alter his policies to meet the demands of the Australasian dominions for a stronger British naval presence in the Pacific. On the contrary, he clearly expected the Dominion leaders to fall into line with his views. It was 'high time', he remarked, 'that the Dominions had the true strategic conception on which the Empire is conducted impressed upon them'.⁷⁹ The Australian government was also eager to discuss security matters, but Sir Lewis Harcourt and the Colonial Office were not in any hurry to convene a conference.⁸⁰ Churchill therefore used the presentation of the navy estimates to Parliament in March 1914 as an opportunity to outline his views on imperial defence. He repeated the arguments he had outlined to Allen a year earlier about the futility of tying up powerful modern warships in the Pacific. And while this was probably directed mainly at New Zealand, Churchill probably hoped that Australians would also be won over by the force of his argument and release their battle-cruiser for general imperial service.

Churchill also argued that the only means to reconcile strategic requirements with the desire of the Dominions to develop their own navies was the creation of an Imperial Squadron. He suggested again that Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa should each develop the naval establishments and local flotilla forces necessary to support a squadron of capital ships for a prolonged period. He also wanted them to maintain light cruisers for the defence of trade in their own waters, but capable of combining with a squadron of heavy ships if necessary. 'In this way', he claimed, 'a true distinction will be made between the services which are essentially local, and those which are necessarily of general Imperial character.' This would fulfil the Dominions' desire to foster local enthusiasm for their navies. But by releasing their capital ships for service in an Imperial Squadron, the Dominions, he suggested, could also 'create a really strong and effective naval force - not one or two ships isolated on particular stations - which will be able to move rapidly and freely about the world, bringing aid in sufficient strength wherever it may be needed in time of war'.⁸¹

Churchill had already suggested to Borden that Canada might substitute cruisers or smaller vessels for one of its proposed capital ships, but his proposals went over badly in Australia, which had based all its naval preparations on the fleet-unit concept.⁸² Churchill argued that Britain had more than honoured its obligations under the 1909 agreement by replacing *New Zealand* and *Indomitable* with two pre-dreadnought battleships, but leaders in New Zealand and Australia were not taken in - these antiquated vessels were hardly a substitute for the two modern battle-cruisers Britain had originally promised. It was clear to these Dominions by 1914 that Churchill did not take their concerns about imperial defence in the Pacific seriously. Churchill insisted that the Anglo-Japanese alliance removed any threat from Japan, but this is precisely the long-term danger that most alarmed the Australasian dominions. However, the greatest offence was caused by his failure to consult with either Dominion over the abandonment of the 1909 agreement. The proposal in March

1914 to create an imperial squadron, to which Australia and New Zealand were expected to contribute, only seemed to confirm that Churchill was not interested in the Dominions' views.⁸³

The idea of an imperial squadron of capital ships supported by flotilla craft and local facilities throughout the Empire was probably never realistic, but the public announcement of the scheme without proper consultation between the Admiralty and the Australasian dominions ensured that it would never be seriously debated. When the First World War began in 1914, Churchill's efforts to create a coherent policy for the integration of Dominion naval forces into imperial defence had clearly failed. The historian Nicholas Lambert suggests that the First Lord may have possessed 'a too narrow strategic outlook' when it came to imperial defence, but this seems too harsh. Churchill was not wrong at this time to think that British and Dominion naval forces should be concentrated in the North Sea, or that any threat from German raiders in distant seas would be manageable. After the First World War began, the Australasian dominions implicitly accepted Churchill's logic: HMS *New Zealand* and HMAS *Australia* spent most of the war in the North Sea attached to the British grand fleet. Churchill's strategic outlook, which consistently favoured the principle of concentration in the decisive theatre, was sound. The problem was in the execution. In part, he was the victim of circumstances beyond his control. Borden's inability to provide the Royal Navy with three new dreadnoughts effectively destroyed any chance of creating an Imperial Squadron of fast capital ships, just as it undermined British plans for a one-power battleship standard in the Mediterranean. But Churchill can be criticised for the Admiralty's deteriorating relations with New Zealand and Australia, which provided further stimulus towards decentralised control over the Empire's naval forces. He may have had good reason to emphasise the immediate threat to imperial security from Germany, but his dismissal of the long-term danger from Japan caused justifiable concerns. And while Churchill was prepared to make allowances for the Dominions' desire to create navies for what the Admiralty dismissively labelled 'sentimental' reasons, his support for autonomous naval forces within the Empire was generally grudging and half-hearted - something that Dominion leaders could not fail to notice.⁸⁴

There is no evidence to suggest that Churchill's determination to concentrate British and Dominion capital ships in European waters diminished prior to the outbreak of war in 1914. Recent scholarship suggests that in the final months of peace the Admiralty was more focused than ever on massing overwhelming force in home waters to counter the German Navy in the North Sea.⁸⁵ Moreover, Sumida provides no evidence to support his assertion that the Admiralty was preparing in 1914 to create a battle-cruiser force in the Pacific. The idea seems have originated with Nicholas Lambert, who published an article in 1997 dealing with imperial defence in the Pacific and the fleet-unit concept.⁸⁶ At the end of this essay, Lambert notes an Admiralty file dating from early 1914 detailing plans to break up Britain's battle-cruiser squadron. 'Why,' he states, 'the papers do not say.' But he nevertheless implies, on the basis of an unsubstantiated statement by Admiralty Beatty after the war, that some of the ships may have been designated for the Far East.

The file in question reveals that the Admiralty was in fact planning to eliminate the battle-cruiser squadron in early 1915, but it is also perfectly clear on how the navy's battle-cruisers would subsequently be employed.⁸⁷ The plan devised in July 1914, and approved by the Board of Admiralty, would have created four new 'cruiser squadrons', each comprising a mixed force of two battle-cruisers and four cruisers.

Four of the battle-cruisers for these new formations would be provided by breaking up the battle-cruiser squadron, while the other four would be drawn from the Mediterranean fleet. The same documents reveal that all four of the new cruiser squadrons would be allocated to Britain's home fleet. A summary of projected British cruiser distribution in 1916 in this file shows that no battle-cruisers were to be maintained outside home waters, with the possible exception of HMS *New Zealand*, which would be kept in the Mediterranean Sea as long as it was needed to counter the German battle-cruiser *Goeben*, which had recently been moved there. There were no plans at this time to reinforce British forces in the Indian Ocean or the Pacific with battle-cruisers.

When Nicholas Lambert returned to the subject of imperial defence in 2005, he made no reference to his earlier speculation about the transfer of British battle-cruisers to the Pacific in 1914. On the contrary, he now emphasised that under Churchill's leadership the Admiralty abandoned the 1909 agreement with the dominions in the interest of maintaining superiority over Germany in the North Sea.⁸⁸ Nor has Sumida repeated his specific claim that in 1914 some British battle-cruisers had been allocated to the Pacific. However, he has continued to argue that Admiralty policy in 1911–14 was heavily influenced by the radical agenda supposedly developed by Admiral Fisher during his tenure as First Sea Lord in 1904–10. According to a 2006 article in the *Naval War College Review*, for example, Fisher's strategic goal was 'The replacement of general sea control by battleships with local sea denial by submarines and distant sea control by highly mobile battle cruisers.' This, in Sumida's opinion, 'reversed the Mahanian formula for maintaining British naval security at home and abroad when numbers of capital ships were insufficient to be able to deploy superior force everywhere: surface heavy units were to be concentrated on the periphery rather than at the center.' He goes on to suggest that before the outbreak of war, 'many senior naval officers of the Royal Navy' were convinced 'that flotilla defense of the British Isles was practicable, which in turn would free the surface fleet-albeit made up of battleships rather than battle cruisers - for deployment outside of home waters'.⁸⁹

The evidence presented in this article favours a different interpretation. To begin with, the suggestion that Admiralty policy was dominated by the ideas of Admiral Fisher even after he left office needs to be qualified. On the question of imperial defence, the dominant views in 1911–14 were those of Winston Churchill, an unusually active First Lord. And his views were not the ones that the revisionists attribute to Fisher. Flotilla defence was an expedient Churchill's Admiralty was only prepared to consider in the Mediterranean, a secondary theatre; there was little or no support in the upper levels of the navy for adopting this strategy in the North Sea. As First Lord, Churchill was also adamant that the Empire's most powerful vessels should be concentrated in home waters rather than on the periphery. Moreover, he had broad support for this policy from his naval advisers. Given the tremendous strain on Britain's financial resources in 1913–14 and the diverse global threats it faced, the navy could not hope to be strong everywhere, or to meet every potential threat. Rather than rely on untested new technologies to provide 'radical' solutions, the Admiralty pursued a more pragmatic course: it concentrated its resources on meeting the most serious threats to Britain's own security; it sought allies to shore up its position abroad; and it accepted that some important interests might be endangered in wartime. These options encountered strong resistance when Churchill proposed them in 1912. For over two years, the Admiralty hoped to fulfil the Cabinet's policy of

remaining strong in two widely separated theatres by using the Dominions to augment the strength of the Royal Navy. It was only in 1914, when these hopes finally faded, that the Admiralty could begin preparing an imperial naval strategy that more accurately reflected the Empire's capabilities.

Notes

1. A.J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*. 5 vols (Oxford, 1961–71).
2. A notable exception is N. Tracy (ed), *The Collective Naval Defence of the Empire, 1900–1940* (Aldershot, 1997).
3. The key revisionist works are: N. Lambert, *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution* (University of South Carolina Press, 1999) and J. Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy* (Boston, 1989).
4. J. Sumida, 'Fisher's Naval Revolution', *Naval History*, x, no. 4 (1996), 20–6.
5. Key post-revisionist works include: M.S. Seligmann, *The Royal Navy and the German Threat 1901–1914: Admiralty Plans to Protect British Trade in a War against Germany* (Oxford, 2012); C.M. Bell, 'Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution Reconsidered: Winston Churchill at the Admiralty, 1911–14', *War in History*, xviii, no. 3 (2011), 333–56; idem, 'On Standards and Scholarship: A Response to Nicholas Lambert', *War in History*, xx, no. 3 (2013); D. Gethin Morgan-Owen, "'History is a Record of Exploded Ideas": Sir John Fisher and Home Defence, 1904–10', *International History Review*, 2014 (forthcoming).
6. Lord Tweedsmouth, 1907 Colonial Conference, cited in S.J. McNaught, 'The Rise of Proto-nationalism: Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Founding of the Naval Service of Canada, 1902–1910', *A Nation's Navy*, ed. Michael L. Hadley, Rob Huebert, and Fred W. Crickard (Montreal, 1996), 105.
7. The best overview of British views on the development of imperial naval forces is Tracy, *Collective Naval Defence*.
8. N. Lambert, 'Economy or Empire?: The Fleet Unit Concept and the Quest for Collective Security in the Pacific' in K. Neilson and G. Kennedy (eds), *Far Flung Lines* (London, 1996), 55–83; see also N. Lambert, 'Sir John Fisher, the Fleet Unit Concept, and the Creation of the Royal Australian Navy' in D. Stevens and J. Reeve (eds), *Southern Trident* (Crows Nest, NSW, 2001), 214–24.
9. The origins and development of the fleet-unit concept are examined in Lambert, 'Economy or Empire?'; see also *Collective Naval Defence*, xvii–xviii, 101–14.
10. Fisher to Viscount Esher, 13 Sep. 1909, in *Fear God and Dread Nought*, ed. Arthur J. Marder. 3 vols (London, 1952–9), II:266.
11. Summary of results of meetings of the Inter-departmental Conference on Status of Dominion Ships of War, 19 Aug. 1909, *Collective Naval Defence*, 110–11.
12. Churchill cabinet memo, 'Naval Expenditure', 15 July 1910, CAB 37/103/32; Lewis Harcourt cabinet diary, 22 Feb. 1911, [Oxford, Bodleian Library,] Harcourt Papers, Harcourt uncat. 4004A.
13. Churchill to Harcourt, 29 Jan. 1912, [Cambridge, Churchill College Archives Centre], Churchill Papers, CHAR 13/8; *Winston S. Churchill*, ed. Randolph S. Churchill (London, 1969), vol. II, companion book 3 (hereafter cited as *WSC*, II/3), 1507.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Churchill to Asquith, 14 April 1912, [Admiralty records, The National Archives (TNA), Kew] ADM 116/3485; *WSC*, II/3:1538.
16. *Ibid.*
17. CID 102-C, Admiralty memo for the CID, April 1913, [Cabinet office records, TNA] CAB 5/3; see also *WSC*, II/3:1511–14.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Speech of 15 May 1912, *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches*, ed. Robert Rhodes James. 8 vols (New York, 1974) (hereafter cited as *Complete Speeches*), II:1962–5.
20. Speech of 18 March 1912, House of Commons, *Complete Speeches*, II:1929; see also Churchill's minute to the Chief of the Admiralty War Staff, 1 Feb. 1912, ADM 116/3099;

- and the Admiralty memo (undated, but early 1912) in the [Oxford, Bodleian Library] Henry Asquith Papers, Asq 24.
21. Churchill to Viscount Haldane, 6 May 1912, *WSC*, II/3:1549.
 22. Fisher to Churchill, 20 June 1912, CHAR 13/43.
 23. Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, I:287–98; P.G. Halpern, *The Mediterranean Naval Situation 1908–1914* (Cambridge, MA, 1971), 20–46; Bell, ‘Fisher’s Naval Revolution Reconsidered’; idem, ‘On Standards and Scholarship’.
 24. Lambert, *Fisher’s Naval Revolution*.
 25. WSC cabinet memorandum, 15 June 1912, CAB 37/11/76; *WSC*, II/3:1564–9.
 26. CID 117th mtg, 4 July 1912, CAB 2/2; see also Asquith to King George V, 5 July 1912, CAB 41/33/56.
 27. Bell, ‘On Standards and Scholarship’, 389–91.
 28. Churchill memo (not circulated), 6 July 1912, CAB 37/111/89; *WSC*, II/3:1588–91; CID 118, 11 July 1912, CAB 2/2.
 29. Bell, ‘On Standards and Scholarship’.
 30. CID 118th mtg, 11 July 1912.
 31. Grant-Duff diary, 18 July 1912, photocopies held at Churchill College Archives Centre, Cambridge.
 32. The evolution of Borden’s views is outlined in M. Thornton, *Churchill, Borden and Anglo-Canadian Naval Relations, 1911–14* (Basingstoke, 2013), ch. 4.
 33. Borden to Churchill, 28 Aug. 1912, [Ottawa, National Archives of Canada,] Borden Papers, microfilm reel C4349, ff. 67313–6; *WSC*, II/3:1641–2.
 34. Churchill to Borden, 29 Aug. 1912, Borden Papers, ff. 67319–20.
 35. Churchill to Harcourt, 13 Sep. 1912, Harcourt Papers, HAR 443.
 36. Secret Admiralty memo for the Canadian government, 20 Sep. 1912, CAB 37/112/105; G. N. Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada* (2 vols, Ottawa, 1952), II:406; Thornton, *Churchill, Borden and Anglo-Canadian Naval Relations*, 137–49.
 37. Churchill to Borden (not sent), c. 14 Oct. 1912, ADM 116/3485; *Collective Naval Defence*, 166–8.
 38. Churchill to Borden, 4 Nov. 1912, Borden Papers, ff. 57400–1; *Collective Naval Defence*, 174.
 39. Asquith to Harcourt, 15 Sep. 1912, Harcourt Papers, HAR 421.
 40. A good overview is provided by Thornton, *Churchill, Borden and Anglo-Canadian Naval Relations*, chs 6–8.
 41. Speech of 31 March 1913, House of Commons, *Complete Speeches*, II:2108; see also Churchill’s note on this speech, *WSC*, II/3:1807.
 42. Borden to Churchill, 2 Nov. 1911, CAB 37/113/132.
 43. Churchill to Battenberg and Jackson, 17 Jan. 1913, *Collective Naval Defence*, 183–4.
 44. Churchill to Borden, 19 March 1913, *WSC*, II/3:1804–5.
 45. Borden to Churchill, 23 March 1913, Borden Papers, f. 67648; *WSC*, II/3:1805–6; Churchill speech of 26 March 1913, House of Commons, *Complete Speeches*, II:2075.
 46. Churchill cabinet memo, ‘The Three Canadian Ships’, 3 June 1913, CAB 37/113/128; *WSC*, II/3:1808–10.
 47. Churchill to Asquith, 18 Dec. 1913, *WSC*, II/3:1834; see also Churchill to Sir Edward Grey, 25 Dec. 1913, *WSC*, II/3:1836–8.
 48. Churchill to Borden, 19 Dec. 1913, Borden Papers, ff. 67896–7.
 49. Borden to Churchill, 31 Dec. 1913, Borden Papers, ff. 67914–15.
 50. Churchill cabinet memo, 10 Jan. 1914, CAB 37/117/93; *Policy and Operations in the Mediterranean, 1912–14*, ed. E.W.R. Lumby (Navy Records Society, 1970), 117–20.
 51. Churchill cabinet memo, 6 Feb. 1914, CAB 37/119/25; Harcourt cabinet diary, 11 Feb. 1914.
 52. Churchill speech of 17 March 1914, House of Commons, *Complete Speeches*, III:2256–7; Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, I:325–7.
 53. Churchill cabinet memo, ‘Italian and Austrian Building Programmes’, 26 April 1914, CAB 37/119/57.
 54. Bell, ‘Naval Revolution Reconsidered’.
 55. Churchill to Borden, 6 March 1914, Borden Papers, 68016; Tucker, I:204.

56. W. Johnston, W.G.P. Rawling, R.H. Gimblett, and J. MacFarlane, *The Seabound Coast: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Navy, 1867–1939* (Toronto, 2010).
57. Admiralty memo, 5 May 1914; Borden Papers, 68033–42; ADM 1/8369/47.
58. Borden to Churchill, 10 July 1914, Harcourt Papers, HAR 462.
59. Churchill to Harcourt, 13 July 1914, Harcourt Papers, HAR 462; CAB 1/34; *The Submarine Service, 1900–1918*, ed. Nicholas Lambert (Aldershot, 2001), 258.
60. Johnston, et al., *The Seabound Coast*, 210.
61. Draft letter, Greene to Colonial Office, Jan. 1913, *Collective Naval Defence*, 180–2.
62. King-Hall to Churchill, 22 Oct. 1912, and Churchill minute of 25 Nov. 1912, ADM 116/1270; *Collective Naval Defence*, 172–3; N. Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific* (Sydney, 1976), 233–5.
63. Churchill to King-Hall, 7 Nov. 1912, ADM 116/1270; Meaney, *Security*, 235.
64. CID 122, 6 Feb. 1913, CAB 2/3. For Allen’s views, see I. McGibbon, *Blue Water Rationale* (Wellington, 1981), 1417.
65. Churchill to Allen, 14 Feb. 1913, *Collective Naval Defence*, 186–9.
66. Ibid.
67. Allen to Churchill, 18 Mar. 1913, *Collective Naval Defence*, 190–3.
68. Grant-Duff diary, 21 April 1913.
69. CID 102-C: Admiralty memo for the CID, April 1913, CAB 5/3; *WSC*, II/3:1511–14.
70. CID 123, 11 April 1913, CAB 2/3.
71. Grant-Duff diary, 21 April 1913.
72. Allen to Churchill, 27 June 1913, *Collective Naval Defence*, 222; McGibbon, *Blue Water Rationale*, 15–16.
73. Churchill to Battenberg and Jackson, 31 July 1913, *WSC*, II/3:1759.
74. Churchill to Allen, 25 Aug. 1913, *WSC*, II/3:1756–8.
75. Lord Liverpool to Colonial Secretary, 24 Sep. 1913, and minute by Oswyn Murray, 25 Sep. 1913, *Collective Naval Defence*, 222–3.
76. D. Gordon, ‘The Admiralty and Dominion Navies, 1902–1914’, *Journal of Modern History*, lxxi, no. 4 (1961), 419; McGibbon, *Blue Water Rationale*, 16.
77. P. Overlack, ‘“A Vigorous Offensive”’: Core Aspects of Australian Maritime Defence Concerns before 1914’ in *Southern Trident*, 140–59.
78. Harcourt to Governor General, Australia, 17 Oct. 1913, ADM 116/3485; Meaney, *Security*, 244–6.
79. Churchill to Sir W. Graham Greene, 14 Oct. 1913, ADM 1/8375/108; *WSC* II/3:1789
80. Meaney, *Security*, 238–49; Gordon, ‘Admiralty and Dominion Navies’, 419–20; Churchill minute, 21 April 1914, ADM 1/8375/108.
81. Speech of 17 March 1914, *Complete Speeches*, III:2259–60.
82. Churchill to Borden, 6 March 1914, Borden Papers, f. 68016; Overlack, ‘A Vigorous Offensive’.
83. D. Gordon, *The Dominion Partnership in Imperial Defence, 1870–1914* (Baltimore, 1965), 290–4.
84. Given Churchill’s belief that the desire for autonomous Dominion navies was motivated primarily by ‘sentiment’, it is interesting to note that one Canadian MP, William Manley German, was similarly dismissive of Borden’s desire to contribute to the upkeep of the Royal Navy. This policy, he asserted, ‘is simply, and solely and only sentimental – nothing else but pure sentiment’. Thornton, *Churchill, Borden and Anglo-Canadian Naval Relations*, 87.
85. C.M. Bell, *Churchill and Sea Power* (Oxford, 2012), 47–8; S.T. Grimes, *Strategy and War Planning in the British Navy, 1887–1918* (Woodbridge, 2012).
86. Lambert, ‘Economy or Empire’, 75.
87. The remainder of this paragraph is based on documents in the Admiralty folder O.D. 132/1914, in ADM 1/8383/179. The reasons why the battle-cruisers were being redistributed are outlined in D. Morgan-Owen, ‘An “Intermediate” Blockade? British North Sea Strategy, 1912–1914’, *War in History* (forthcoming).
88. Lambert, ‘Strategic Command and Control for Maneuver Warfare: Creation of the Royal Navy’s “War Room” System, 1905–1915’.
89. Sumida, ‘Geography, Technology, and British Naval Strategy in the Dreadnought Era,’ *Naval War College Review*, xlix (2006), 97.