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AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE POLICY

A STUDY OF EMPIRE AND NATION (1897-1910)

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... (This) House, while it fully recognizes the claims of all portions of the Empire on Imperial aid against perils arising from the consequences of Imperial policy, is of the opinion that Colonies exercising the rights of self-government ought to undertake the main responsibility of providing for their own internal order and security, and ought to assist in their own external defences ...
Vivid among childhood memories, Alfred Deakin recalled in 1907, were red-coats on Australian soil. These soldiers of the Queen protecting the colonies from her European enemies doubtless fired young minds with the military exploits of the British race. Maintained partially at Australian expense, they also signified the limitations imposed on local autonomy and the humble, even servile, status of the colonies in Greater Britain. Like Deakin, many others in the first Commonwealth parliament could remember how this changed. They, too, could recall the withdrawal of British troops after 1870. They, too, had long accepted the two fundamental assumptions involved: the Royal Navy would defend the Empire from invasion and ensure the flow of overseas commerce; the self-governing colonies would ensure local security by the creation of their own forces. They, too, had witnessed the development of colonial policies in strange accord with the doctrine of self-reliance put most succinctly by Gladstone: self-government begets self-defence.¹

For although the Australian colonies had found no great difficulty in implementing the doctrine, they did so in a spirit of cooperation and dependence upon Great Britain unusual in the Empire. Almost from the outset colonial self-reliance in the Antipodes bore few of the features with which some said it had been endowed. Australians did accept the restraint Gladstone had put upon colonial expansion; they had no wish to bear the cost of military adventures in the South-Western Pacific. But rather than place blind faith in British sea supremacy they had demanded fixed portions of the Royal Naval shield. And they had spurned the suggestion that the devolution of responsibility for defence prepared — at the policy level — the road for the dissolution of the Empire. Out of this had come security. No British possession, read a strategic assessment from Whitehall in 1890, was less likely to face foreign aggression than Australia.

Yet neither then nor later did Australians accept measures merely because they offered security. The clash between republican and
Imperial federationist over the despatch of troops to the Soudan indicated that national aspirations and Imperial sentiment were too intensely anti-pathetic to be accommodated in settled defence policies. The colonial jealousies which frustrated federal military discussions revealed the difficulties of any who sought to create united and distinctive Australian forces. Even while Gladstone's principle was being transmuted into detailed schemes, colonials continued to debate those issues which the doctrine did not settle: their future within Australia and the status of the nation within Greater Britain.

By the turn of the century the terms of that debate had changed. The premiers attending the Jubilee Celebrations no longer felt that there was a gap between existing policy, future prospects and colonial opinion. It was left to the policy-makers of the first parliament to amalgamate colonial defence policies — and interpret anew self-reliance in the federal context.
CHAPTER ONE

THE APPLICATION OF THE DOCTRINE: COOPERATION FOR SECURITY

(1865-1891)

(I hope that British assistance in financing the Victorian turret-ship, the Cerberus, will be) but the first of many acts of mutual aid and cooperation between the Mother Country and her Australian Colonies.

PREMIER OF VICTORIA, 1866.

... the members of the Conference pledge themselves to use all legitimate endeavours to procure the efficient fortifications and land defence of the several ports of the Australian Colonies, at the cost of the several Colonies interested ...

RESOLUTION, INTER-COLONIAL CONFERENCE, Sydney 1881.

It is possible that an attack may be delivered by a small squadron of iron-clads .... It could make demands on cities for bullion, stores, and coal .... It could effect a certain amount of harm by bombardment .... The more lasting effect would be the destruction of trade, and with it the recuperative power of the country for years ...

ADMIRAL TRYON, 1885.
Between 1875 and 1887 British investigations revealed the inadequacy of port and local defences throughout the Empire. In an age of steam the navy needed protected bases and the mercantile marine harbours of refuge. In an age of possible conflict with France, Russia, or both, Australians demanded security. To satisfy both Whitehall and the colonies men like Sir William Jervois, Colonel Scratchley, and Admiral Tryon came to Australia. They clarified the basis of existing defences, advised systems for adequate self-defence, and modified the Gladstonian doctrine.

Like other Imperial advisers, they found that while Australians could fear for their safety, they did not remain apprehensive. There was a rhythm in the colonial response to international crises—a pattern of panic and confidence, of anxiety and nonchalance with the passing of each war scare. The tempo was quickening. The Crimean War had been seen as a dread exception; friction with Russia in 1885 seemed to follow close upon the troubles of 1878; Fashoda preceded the Spanish–American War and conflict erupted in South Africa shortly afterwards. Once it had been possible for Australians to argue that their very remoteness from Europe was their best protection. Yet even in the fifties, the suspected presence of Russian cruisers in South American waters had been enough to stir great alarm. Whatever protection distance had offered was rapidly reduced decade by decade. Once telegraphic communication with Europe had been introduced the colonists could be stirred greatly by news of conflicts in the old world. By the end of the eighties it seemed to some that the chances of attack had been increased by the appearance of European powers near Australia. For others the Asian hordes to the North presented a danger. But it was not until the late nineties that many acknowledged in peacetime what the wary had long felt: security rested not only on local defence but on the might of the Empire.

Another difficulty facing Imperial advisers was the reluctance of one colony to support another. To many colonists self-defence had come to mean the protection of the key urban areas which were in turn the
centres of government, the storehouses of gold and wool, and the major harbours for commerce. If confidence in peacetime made problems of united effort seem irrelevant, panic intensified the development of separate policies. Scattered on the perimeter of the continent, too distant from each other to offer mutual assistance, too remote from the sources of British aid to hope for relief, the capitals became in times of crisis a series of garrisons in a state of siege.

Such fears could be removed only by an authoritative statement of the scale of attack which the colonies might be called to face. How much protection did the might of Great Britain afford? To what degrees should local defences be taken? Imperial advisers on the spot gave uneasy, vague, and often contradictory answers. It was, however, common for them to foresee graver dangers than their counterparts in London. Often they did not — and could not — know; often they attempted to take account of colonial moods; usually, they realized that the graver the threat postulated the more likely they were to get their schemes implemented. All rested their case upon the premise that Great Britain would maintain her sea supremacy. Invasion was therefore out of the question. Provision for local security, it was agreed, was pointless without this assumption. Yet they differed about the scale of the raids to which the periphery of the Empire might be subject: fugitive attack by raiders, systematic destruction of commerce by cruiser squadrons, bombardment by larger war ships, and landings by expeditionary forces — all were suggested.

By 1890 the Colonial Defence Committee in London could provide authoritative answers. Its assessments were based on strategic appreciations from the intelligence sections of the Admiralty and the War Office. Its predictions were briefly put: so long as port defences were adequate the Australian colonies had to face merely the prospect of fugitive raids conducted by less than four unarmoured cruisers. But Australians distrusted these calculations made at the centre, not the periphery, of the Empire. By and large, politicians responsible for defence legislation accepted the assessments of Jervois, Scratchley and Tryon, rather than
those from Whitehall – and continued to do so.*

Thus it was that both fears and assessments encouraged the colonials to demand security against all possible enemies. To this end, they saw safety in five lines of defence: British supremacy on the high seas; the unrestricted flow of overseas commerce; the protection of coastal shipping; the defence of the capitals and their harbours; and the safety of hearths and homes. As the officer chosen to implement the general schemes sketched by Sir William Jervois, Colonel Scratchley exhorted the colonies to accept the burden of the last three lines of defence. By the end of the eighties, they had done so, but in a manner that left only the first entirely to Whitehall.

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Even before the withdrawal of British troops the colonies had learnt to rely upon the man who voluntarily gave a little of his time each year to military duties. At first great reliance was placed upon volunteer units. Men were not paid for their services; they were offered instead other inducements. But so dependent was the volunteer system upon crises and enthusiasts that it was soon deemed a failure. The alternative was expensive, and some enthusiasts refused to countenance it. Even so, experiments with militia units whose officers and men were paid a fixed sum annually in return for their attendance at parades and camps of training promised success. And after a series of enquiries in the eighties this solution was adopted in principle by most colonial governments. In New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland every effort was made to convert volunteer to militia units. In South Australia both systems were used, while in the other two colonies the volunteer system continued. At about the same time rifle clubs were formed whose members received the free use of ammunition and the rifle ranges in return for regular attendance. In some cases elementary drill was expected of the members, and in others,

* The detailed reasoning of the Colonial Defence Committee is presented in Chapter Four below.
drill and musketry instructors were provided. For riflemen were to form a reserve of the partially-trained manpower for the militia units. The basis of land defence - the guarantee of safety for hearths and homes - was thus the citizen who was also the amateur soldier. The citizen-soldiery provided the officers and men for batteries of garrison and field artillery, companies of engineers, regiments of mounted rifles, and battalions of infantry. Such an arrangement satisfied the colonial democratic tradition, the expediency of raising military forces from a small and scattered population, and the slender financial resources of the colonial governments.

Though employed as a military adviser Scratchley could do little more than encourage the militia movement. His value lay elsewhere. For he was primarily concerned with the defence of the major ports and recommended the organization of forces to that end. He advised the construction of coastal batteries on vantage points at harbour entrances. These and other fixed defences demanded technically proficient soldiers to operate them; regular troops with special training would have to be employed. This was not a great departure from colonial practice. Various attempts had been made to raise small bodies of regular or fully-paid troops and initially their duties had included the formation of artillery, infantry, and even cavalry units. However, in Victoria the prime role of the regular troops, numbering a little more than a hundred, had been the maintenance of the coastal batteries; they had also been given the additional task of training the citizen-soldiery. This system, Scratchley explained, was worth emulating. The citizen-soldier could continue to predominate, special volunteer units could aid the regulars in tending to the defence installations while the remainder were organized into small mobile field forces to defend the coastal batteries from enemy landing parties. Such defences, both he and Jervois had assured the colonies, would protect the possible bases of naval operations; they would provide harbours of refuge for British and colonial floating commerce; and they would deter attack upon the capital cities either in the form of bombardment or raiding parties.
The Jervois-Scratchley recommendations were considered by the colonial governments between 1880 and 1885. Concerned only with their own security they rejected Scratchley's suggestions for a common military law and common military organization so that the forces could support each other in extreme circumstances. The port defence schemes of Jervois they accepted. And, as both men had urged, they resolved to take full responsibility for all local defences irrespective of the British interests they might be protecting at their own cost. In this they had gone further towards self-reliance than any other portion of the Empire.

In return they expected a *quid pro quo* and demanded that the Imperial Squadron based at Sydney should be strengthened - at the expense of the British government. The Australian Station had been made a separate command in 1859 and the colonies had repeatedly requested the reinforcement of the Squadron to uphold their second line of defence - the free flow of overseas commerce. Reluctantly the Admiralty had met these requests until, despite the assortment of British vessels in Sydney, the Australian Station possessed greater strength than such a backwater in Imperial seas warranted. But it steadfastly refused, on strategic and professional grounds, to distribute the strength of the Imperial Squadron among the colonial capitals to supplement the coastal batteries under construction.

Partly to ensure further the safety of their capitals and partly to provide themselves with the protection the Admiralty refused, some colonies created local naval forces. From the mid-fifties the two senior colonies, New South Wales and Victoria, had purchased small ships for the defence of their harbours in the absence of British squadrons. To clarify the status of colonial vessels, the Imperial government had passed the Colonial Naval Defence Act in 1865. This authorized the colonies to raise volunteers as part of the Royal Naval Reserve and to maintain vessels for harbour defence, localized operations, and police duties. Colonial ships, however, could voyage outside territorial waters only if certain conditions were satisfied: officers commissioned in the Royal Navy had to be in command; special Orders-in-Council had to approve the operation; and Admiralty Instructions had to be obeyed. At colonial discretion the
vessels could fly the White Ensign under the direction of the Senior British Naval Officer on the Australian Station or the Blue Ensign under local control. In time of war they could be inducted into service with the Royal Navy by Orders-in-Council at the request of the colonial government concerned. Though untested in times of emergency and obscure in many respects, this act remained the legal basis for colonial naval forces until 1911.

The first vessel commissioned under the legislation, the turret ship H.M.C.S. Cerberus, added to misunderstanding and featured in subsequent naval discussions, particularly those emanating from Victoria. In 1886 the premier of that colony persuaded the British government to provide £100,000 toward the capital cost of the Cerberus; Victoria, then the richest of the Australian colonies, paid £25,000. Hailed in many quarters as the prime example of mutual aid and cooperation between Great Britain and its self-governing colonies, this assistance was given on the understanding that the ship would pass automatically in time of war to the control of the Admiral on the Australian Station who would be free to use it at his discretion. Further confusion arose from mistaken assessments of the capabilities of the Cerberus. In its day it was of revolutionary design, being one of the first mastless ironclads with unobstructed arcs of fire from fore and aft turrets. But its sea-going potential was small and it was originally constructed—and by 1871 only fit for—harbour defence. As a British commission into imperial defence observed in 1882: the colonies had little desire to maintain sea-going vessels for action beyond local waters. In short, the British had assisted one colony to provide for more effective port defence.

Applying current British practice to the colonial situation, both Jervois and Scratchley struggled against this tendency. Such were the possible ravages to colonial shipping, Scratchley warned, that floating defences should be of two kinds: defensive and offensive. While the Royal Navy managed the enemy on the high seas, the colonies should eventually plan to keep raiders from their coasts. For defence operations armoured turret ships or unarmoured gunboats were necessary, depending
upon local geographical conditions. To protect the shipping in all large harbours torpedo boats were considered an essential adjunct to the fixed defences. For offensive operations Scratchley advised the colonies to consider the purchase of ironclads and swift cruisers. The ironclads could serve as floating gun platforms in harbour defence or as effective coastal patrol vessels; swift unarmoured cruisers could pursue and capture the raiders whose efforts had been thwarted by the other measures. Scratchley had, then, presented the framework for an integrated scheme of defence, federal rather than colonial in implication.

The provision of floating defences, the colonies decided, was an expensive business. After a period of fitful experimentation, New South Wales decided to rely on the Imperial Squadron based at the capital. It did, however, later acquire two torpedo boats. The Victorian government did the same to supplement the naval force it had created in the sixties. The colony of South Australia purchased the special service cruiser, the Protектор, to watch over her gulfs. In the same period, Queensland's defences were enhanced by the arrival of two gunboats designed for the relatively placid waters inside the Barrier Reef. Like the senior colony, the other three supplemented their small cadres of permanent sailors with members of the naval militia, the volunteers, and the Royal Naval Reserve. But the vessels even the richest colony could afford were incapable of coastal patrol and united action. They were, in reality, part of the garrison forces scattered along the fringe of the continent.*

In 1885 Admiral Tryon arrived in Australia determined to steer these naval aspirations in a different direction, away from disparate groups of small vessels towards a united effort to finance a special squadron of the Royal Navy which would adequately uphold the third line of colonial defence - the protection of coastal commerce. From the seventies various British authorities had urged the colonies to pay an annual contribution for the maintenance of British sea supremacy. Now

* The vessels of the colonial naval forces are listed in Appendix A. Further discussion of their capabilities - and illustrations of some of them - appear in Chapter Seven below.
in the midst of another international crisis and the fervour which
accompanied the despatch of troops to the Soudan, many Australians were
prepared to consider such a departure from the tenets of self-reliance.
Moreover, many of the colonies had not yet finally decided their local
naval policies; and the more Tryon depicted the crippling effects of a
devastated or blockaded mercantile marine, the more the colonies felt
they needed coastal — not merely port — defence. Initially, then, he
convinced the premiers that they should pay for a squadron of special
service cruisers to be manned and controlled by the Admiralty yet retained
in both peace and war on the Australian Station. He offered a further
inducement. Local seamen could train in the squadron which would pass to
the colonies once the agreement with the British had expired: in a decade
Australians would possess the nucleus of a national coastal service.

At least one youthful Victorian liberal, concerned already with
dreams of national unity and a new Empire ready to acknowledge the rights
of Australians, was deeply impressed. Twenty years later Alfred Deakin
was to recall Tryon's proposals. Others were not as impressed. They
were reluctant to pay more than a small proportion of the cost for a
squadron clearly serving both British and colonial interests. They were
not ready to involve themselves either in a quasi-federal or an Imperial
scheme of naval defence — except on their own terms. The implications of
this became clear at the Colonial Conference of 1887.

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At that Conference the British representatives reviewed the
changes in Imperial policy since 1860. In an age of modern warfare,
increasing colonial wealth, and European expansion, it was suggested,
security was to be found in Imperial cooperation, not isolation. Such
a tendency might well end in an Imperial kriegsverein with each part of
the Empire offering mutual aid against all foes of the Crown; it might
well be encouraged by colonial contributions of money — and perhaps men
— for Imperial purposes.
This grand vision of an autarkic Empire was considered irrelevant by the Australian delegations. They had responded to each change in Imperial policy to ensure their own security; they had come to London ready to discuss an appropriate modification of Tryon's naval scheme; and they knew the departure they were taking from the doctrine of self-reliance. Some thought it justified by the stand of Alfred Deakin: just as colonial interests in the islands of the South-Western Pacific should be considered Imperial interests in London, colonial defences were Imperial defences in Australia. Others viewed the financing of a local squadron as the cheapest form of local defence. A few welcomed the scheme because united action seemed to anticipate federation. But all welcomed discussion of the scheme because they considered it involved local – rather than Imperial – interests. They were not, therefore, deterred by the greater issues it raised: the payment of contributions to the British Treasury, the lack of representation in the Imperial government, the problem of strategic control. Nor were they upset by the indifference of the other delegations. For it was generally agreed that if the colonies of Australasia could not afford naval defence, they must hire it at the cheapest price.*

On this basis the Naval Agreement of 1887 was formulated. The colonies agreed to pay £106,000 annually to the British government – and no more. The Admiralty undertook to construct, equip, and man a fleet of five third-class cruisers for the protection of floating commerce in Australasian waters. These would form the Australian Auxiliary Squadron whose presence was in no way to interfere with the continuance of the colonial navies nor with the addition of more efficient and powerful vessels to the Imperial Squadron. It was to be a third and far more homogeneous naval force consisting of ships of greater capability than those suggested by Tryon. There were, however, no provisions to train Australian seamen. The ships, on the termination of the Agreement after a decade, would remain with the Royal Navy.

* New Zealand was included in this discussion and was a party to the Naval Agreement of 1887. This aspect of naval discussions is omitted unless the attitude of New Zealand influences Australian policy.
Nevertheless, the gains seemed considerable. For a sum which did not cover the cost of maintenance and salaries — let alone construction, replacement and depreciation — they received a fixed portion of the Imperial fleet. No matter how poorly their colonial navies fared nor how far distant the duties of the Imperial Squadron, the Australian Auxiliary Squadron would remain in their waters. It would, of course, be under the sole control of the Commander-in-Chief on the Australian Station. He could request the use of these vessels outside coastal waters in times of crisis. But he could so deploy them only after all colonies had given their consent.

There were two disadvantages not fully appreciated at the time. The Australian representatives knew they were purchasing cheap naval protection; they did not feel that they were providing the model for a general defence system. Nevertheless, some Imperialists were to argue that the colonies were subsidizing the Royal Navy and had bound themselves to the great issues of Imperial defence. Nationalists were also later to object. Although there was little sign that the colonial governments wished to create a national coastal service, the terms of this Agreement involved a large sum over ten years. There would be little to show for the expense.

Other matters of importance were decided at the Colonial Conference. The colonies agreed to make arrangements for the inspection of their fortifications and forces by an Imperial officer. Subsequently Major-General J. Bevan Edwards, the General Officer Commanding in China, visited Australia in 1889. Some degree of united action was achieved in the erection of fixed defences on Thursday Island and King George's Sound, two stations of importance to the Royal Navy. After prolonged discussion about the allotment of costs, the colonies jointly undertook to provide the fortifications and men; the Imperial government, while stressing that it was laying no precedent for future policy, agreed to provide the armaments.
By 1891 the five lines of colonial defence were established. Great Britain was rebuilding her battle fleets – at her own expense. The Imperial Squadron had been considerably strengthened by the replacement of obsolete vessels. The Australian Auxiliary Squadron had arrived. The colonial naval forces had received most of their vessels. Fortifications for most capital cities were under way or complete; arrangements were being made for fixed defences at other places such as Thursday Island and King George's Sound. The duties of the regular soldiers had been carefully defined. Volunteer units were being converted to militias. Defence schemes for the mobilization of garrison and field forces were being prepared for submission to the Colonial Defence Committee. Achievement was manifestly uneven between the defence of one colony and another and even between forces under the one command. But whatever the defects in implementation – and they were considerable – policy was clear. Self-reliance did not mean complete self-defence. Without impairing local autonomy the Australian colonies had each found security through cooperation and dependence upon Great Britain.

It was at the level of formal and informal political discussions that the questions were posed: Was not this dependence too great? Was not this cooperation too active?
An English minister — one man — in a certain high office may drag England into a needless war, and with England all her colonies and dependencies, and the colonies have no option .... What arrangement can be made by which when England is drunk, the colony I lived in may continue sober?

ANONYMOUS, 1883.
The first irresistible impulse for active participation in an Imperial war arose from the death of General Gordon. Colonists were stirred by military heroism and Christian martyrdom on the Nile. They were also acutely aware of the hostility of Russia and Germany. To a few it seemed necessary to make some positive move which would uphold the honour of British arms, indicate the solidarity of Greater Britain, and join the Christian cause against the Saracens. This seemed the occasion to depart from the policy of colonial self-reliance and honour the pledges made twenty years earlier on the passing of the Colonial Naval Defence Act. So it was that in 1885 Australians were despatched to Egypt to aid the British cause in the Soudan Campaign.

On his own initiative the Premier of New South Wales, W.B. Dalley, had formally offered military assistance to the Crown. Lord Rosebery's Liberal government promptly accepted — so long as the colonial contingent remained under the direct control of Lord Wolseley. In all New South Wales raised some 770 men for service at Suakim. Not to be outdone, the Victorian government offered the services of its gunboats. Previously — during the Maori Wars and the first Boer War — individual colonists had volunteered and served with Imperial forces. This was the first occasion in which organized colonial troops were sent overseas to cooperate with the British Army.

Dalley's action was undoubtedly popular in Sydney. Telegrams of support came from all the other colonies; some were prepared to follow his example if the experiment proved successful; representatives of Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, and Tasmania came to bid farewell to the troops. With some justice, contemporaries looked upon the contingent as a symbolic Australian expeditionary force, demonstrating at once the intensity of Imperial patriotism and the force of national sentiment. During the initial waves of enthusiasm even the Bulletin, the staunchest of nationalist periodicals, acknowledged the prevalence
of an attitude it later attempted to denigrate: "the existence and vigour of a sentiment which many doubted and some denied - the sense of the essential unity of the Empire". By the act of the senior colony, it seemed, Australia was no longer a subservient dependency of Great Britain but her compeer and ally.

There were opponents to Dalley's gallant offer. They included Sir Henry Parkes, soon to re-enter the political arena as premier and leading advocate of Australian federation; the working classes of such districts as Newcastle and Balmain; members of the Congregational Church; and writers for the Bulletin. They acknowledged from the outset that they were in the minority. They argued that there was no national or Imperial emergency. They pointed out that Britain was not legally at war; she was reconquering and pacifying Egypt. The purification of foreign governments, it was forthrightly asserted, was no business for Australians; the subjugation of peoples struggling to preserve the freedom of their soil was unmanly and immoral. Furthermore, if the despatch of a contingent set a precedent then Australians might be expected to participate in all unjust Imperial wars as well as national emergencies. Finally, they considered it an affront to national dignity - twenty years later Richard Jebb's phrase "national self-respect" was to be used - for such a small force of colonials to be swallowed up in the British Army under the sole command of an Imperial officer.

Despite such opposition in Australia a precedent was established in the minds of British and colonial Imperialists: from this gesture emerged the conviction that units of colonial troops capable of being brigaded with regiments of the British Army could serve as an Imperial reserve. The conviction was reinforced by Dalley's subsequent offer to despatch the contingent wherever else it might be needed in the Empire.

Yet such a scheme was manifestly premature. The most urgent military problem was the absence of cooperation between the various colonial forces, not their use overseas. Colonial defence schemes of
the day omitted any consideration of the defence of Australia. Each colony seemed to view its neighbours as if they were separate nations. There was a desperate need for one scheme, a united effort, a common defence act, and a federal army for effective home defence. Foreign ventures could not cloak this.

No less pertinent was the case of Dalley's opponents especially when the waves of enthusiasm had receded. They had made it plain that military adventures were the exception to settled policies, not the foundation of new. Local control over local defence was their demand; to eschew the calumnies of Empire was their aim. When, in the spirit of 1885, the Naval Agreement was justified before the colonial legislatures, opposition was no less profuse — and no more effective. On this occasion, however, Parkes, now Premier and federationist, championed the measure as the cheapest form of naval defence in which the colonies and Great Britain cooperated. In the eighties not only did opinions on the future of Australia vary greatly. They were changing.

* * *

Of all the components of nationalism none was more decisive in compelling Australians to face the problems of their status in the British world than the role they might be forced to play when the Crown was at war. Four courses were open to the colonists: separation; the declaration of neutrality; Imperial federation; or cooperation with Great Britain.

Separatist arguments as stated by John Dunmore Lang in 1852 and extended by R.T. Thomson in 1888 found a remarkably wide set of supporters among public men and the press. Yet their effectiveness at the level of politics seems to have been slight. Colonial response to the Crimean War, the Indian Mutiny, and the Soudan Campaign, no less than the history taught in schools, imported British newspapers and magazines, music, novels, and theatrical shows, and the welcome given royal visitors, indicated a large
but often silent reservoir of approval for things British and thus for the status of the colonies in the Empire. Even so, talk of separation continued, particularly among the radical and Labour Party politicians of Queensland and in the pages of the Bulletin, only to drop from the vocabulary of rhetoric by the time of the Boer War.

Then the Bulletin, while not refusing to give up its right to criticize things British, declared it stood for alliance, not independence. The Australian Natives Association, which in the eighties had considered separation at least an open question, was confident now that a nation could be created within the Empire, and was soon to look upon plans for Imperial unity with favour. In 1885 B.R. Wise, commenting on the despatch of colonial troops to the Soudan foresaw two alternatives: separation or cooperation with Great Britain in some form of alliance. By 1900 he marvelled at the change in opinion during a little more than a decade. Separation was no longer an issue.

Thomson's polemic was not, however, to be forgotten. Unlike Lang, he had balanced the demand for independence with the problems of security. For the protection of the small but expanding Australian commercial interests in coastal shipping and towns against lesser attacks he had recommended a locally controlled flotilla of torpedo boats. In the face of full-scale invasion Australians could withdraw into the arid interior. The enemy, beset by the insurmountable difficulties of subjugating a free people and the vicissitudes of guerrilla warfare, would soon abandon any desire for conquest. These solutions were as simple as they were compelling.

While the desire for separation had flourished, however incoherently, in New South Wales and Queensland, it was in Victoria that the second course - the right of the colonies to declare their neutrality in any Imperial war - was given its most thorough examination by Sir Charles Gavan Duffy.
He complained that although the colonies did not have a voice in the conduct of the foreign policy of Great Britain they were likely to be attacked by enemies the British might provoke. Yet, like the separationists, he eschewed Imperial federation; unlike them, he rejected the idea of complete independence as disastrous. How, then, were the colonies to be protected?

The solution Duffy offered in 1870 was that the colonies should possess treaty-making powers. They could then proclaim their neutrality, if they so wished, to the world. There the difficulties began. Would British authorities depart from the fundamental constitutional principle that the Crown was one and indivisible? In any case, would the enemies of the Queen accept the neutrality of a colony, particularly when that neutrality was not absolute? For Duffy's doctrine implied that the colonies would be neutral if the war was fought for an unjust cause and belligerent if the cause was just. What constituted a just war? The criteria were vague. What if Australians wished to intervene in an unjust war? What if the war began out of ambition and became one of defence? What if military strategy dictated the offensive in the opening stages of a defensive war? Were not all wars for the defence of some interest?

To these questions Duffy gave no answer. There was little support for this doctrine of conditional neutrality. British authorities were antipathetic and devastating in their criticism. The plight he described found sympathy in the hearts of many colonial politicians, but provided no solution to their problems.

Other Victorians, frankly admitting the duality of allegiance to King and country, concluded that no distinction could fruitfully be drawn between colonial and Imperial interests and became Imperial federationists. When the Imperial Federation League invaded Australia during 1885, it chose the anglophile upper middle classes of Victoria as its beachhead. Soon it gained the support of the colonial military cliques, the expatriate lobby, the Anglo-Australian plutocracy of Victoria and Tasmania, and some pastoral, grazing, and planting interests in Queensland.
The League attracted diverse political support. But its days were numbered. Its aims were the permanent unity of the Empire by federation, an Imperial defence system, and a programme of mutual economic benefit. The means it advocated were confused. Its propaganda rested on the elaboration of simple and emotive propositions: the manifest destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race; hatred of the Yankees; the need of Australia for the British naval shield; the prospect of mutual prosperity through reciprocal tariff agreements; and the bond of blood and sentiment which bound an Empire demanding organization to make it a mighty, self-sufficient unit. Therein lay prosperity, amity, and security.

Radical nationalists rejected the movement with savage vigour. Indeed many of the republican organizations were formed primarily to do battle with the Imperial federationists. The Australian Natives Association, a moderately radical and nationalist body with more respect for wealth and property and more concern for the continuance of ties with the Empire, became the League's principal antagonist in Victoria, in the belief that nothing, not even Anglo-Saxon unity, should stand in the way of Australian federation. By 1890 the Imperial federationists viewed the radical nationalists as degenerate Britons, traitorous and red-republican, and the moderates as crypto-republicans, un filial Britons, and crude opportunists. By 1894 the parent body in England had been disbanded and its ancillary in Victoria admitted defeat. Some supporters blamed the radical upsurge of the maritime and shearing strikes; others blamed the success of the Australian federation movement; and the Bulletin gloated over the remnants of the gilded-loafers and toadies of Imperialism.

This, reduced to a sketch, is the picture vigorously painted by the most persuasive of the movement's historians, C.S. Blackton. But by setting fervent separationist against ardent Imperialist he offers a misleading explanation of its failures — and significance.

The League afforded an opportunity to reaffirm belief in the unity of the Empire and the benefits of the Imperial connection at a time
when European rivalries for prestige and territory were intensified. Few supporters accepted all the Utopian principles; less adhered to any of the many schemes that the hard core of conservatives, academics, and professionals formulated. The views of C.H. Pearson, a member of an intellectual, urban, Anglophile set in Melbourne, and a man whose fears for the future of the Anglo-Saxon race and the security of Australia far outstripped those of many Imperial federationists, are instructive—especially when it is remembered that he was not a native-born Australian: often the most effective statements of Australian nationalism came from men who maintained that sound liberal views of the British world were applicable to any Imperial problem. Pearson placed his hopes in Australian federation and a voice in foreign policy, not by representation in an Imperial parliament but by discussion in the councils of Empire. As for any scheme of united Imperial defence, he sardonically observed, no Australian would not care to guarantee Alsace and Lorraine.

No matter what fire and zeal Blackton's radical nationalists put into their attacks upon the Imperial Federation League, its sudden demise owed much to the scepticism of some who may have appeared to support it.

Nor does Blackton give sufficient weight to differences between members of the Imperial Federation League in Victoria and its parent body in England. In appeal, composition and aims, there were essential differences hidden below the rhetoric of Empire and race. Though defeated, the members of the League in Victoria did voluntarily withdraw from the contest in 1893 to allow the Australian Natives Association greater freedom to enlist support for the Australian federation movement. Subsequently the Australian Natives Association made it clear that it sought neither separation from the Empire nor independent republican status. From 1900 the remnants of the League in Victoria were as jealous as the staunchest nationalist of the rights of Australians to control their own affairs. By 1905 Alfred Deakin could be elected president of the organization. By 1907 even the Bulletin could applaud Deakin's proposals—commended by the League—for an organization promising closer Imperial unity. While
the parent body carried on with a shadow committee, the Imperial Federation (Defence) Committee, which vainly attempted to thrust its policies on the emergent Dominions, the members of the League in Victoria were sympathetic to the aims of federal parliament. They had become, to use Richard Jebb's phrase, colonial nationalists.

The future, however, belonged to the conservatives and radicals, the Imperialists and nationalists of the federation movement. In their concern for piecemeal political and social engineering, they cautiously resolved the apparent conflict between the demands of colony and nation, nation and Empire. They reached for solutions to the problem of Australian security. It was they who charted an acceptable route along the fourth course open to colonialists. It was not a simple task.

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The first federal convention of 1891 was dominated by conservatives, pastoralists and merchants, figures of import in the upper houses of the colonial legislatures. They wanted to maintain property rights and liberties from the threat of the labour parties. Though defence was supposed to be one of the reasons for their meeting, their main interests lay elsewhere - in the powers over external tariffs which the federal government was to have and the extent of the suffrage which was to give it authority, and in removing the barriers to better colonial government.

These conservative elements continued to be represented at the conventions. Among them were some, particularly from New South Wales and Queensland, who had flirted with the idea of separation from the Empire. But the bank failures of 1892-1893 put an end to this kind of colonial ebullience. The withdrawal of British credit threatened not merely commerce and business but the activities of the colonial governments already burdened with debt. Federation, it was suddenly hoped, would give Australian stocks a new prestige, stability, and uniformity in the British market.
Talk of separation was not merely irrelevant to the major issues they faced and seemingly stupid in a decade that saw a challenge to Royal Naval power by the Dual Alliance, but unsettling for the burghers of the city of London.

Many of the Free-traders in the first parliament were the heirs to such views. They were ready to struggle against any move by the British government that endangered Australia's autonomy. Beyond this, they possessed no cogent national policy towards the Empire. They were colonialists in a national parliament. The perpetuation of loose federal ideals – particularly in finance and defence – owed much to them and their interests.

The first Labour Party spokesmen – among them separationists of many hues – were for a long time suspicious of the federation movement. This suspicion was fed by a confusion in many minds between Australian and Imperial federation. It was feared that one would lead irrevocably to the other. More important were the limited aims of Labour. The maritime and shearing strikes of 1890-1891 had brought the Labour movement close to disaster. Political parties in each of the colonies pressed for piecemeal social reform with considerable success. The gains were uneven; but they would be far less, it was suspected, if Labour representatives were outnumbered in a national assembly whose constitution was in the hands of conservatives and liberals. Initially, they too wished to remove the barriers to colonial development.

In some respects, then, the first Labour politicians in federal parliament were colonialists and in others they were nationalists. By 1901 representatives of Labour could agree on a platform of adult suffrage, old-age pensions, compulsory arbitration, resistance to a standing army, and complete restriction of alien immigration. But they did not agree about defence policy and its Imperial context. This had to await ad hoc alignments and personal leadership, particularly from J.C. Watson, the parliamentary leader of the party.
The initiative, therefore, fell to the liberal-nationalists in the federation movement who believed that Australia should remain within the Empire and that every attempt should be made to accommodate the Australian interests within the Imperial policy. These liberals, whom Blackton termed the moderate-nationalists, agreed with the conservatives on the need to regain the confidence of British investors. But unlike the colonialists, many looked forward to a federated Australia with a more coherent concept of nation. Elections should be conducted, they argued, with the widest possible franchise so that the influence of the oligarchies of wealth in the colonial legislatures would be annulled; all industries should be protected; all citizens should be protected against poverty; a national government should rule the nation to meet national problems that could not be restricted within colonial boundaries. They hoped a united Australian voice in London would reclaim the national inheritance in the South-West Pacific lost by the indifference of Whitehall. While respecting colonial rights, they wished to establish the identity and the authority of the central government within Australia and in the British world. They also believed that federation was the only source of effective self-defence.

After 1901 the liberals under the leadership of Barton and Deakin were to inaugurate a defence policy involving the amalgamation of the colonial forces. Insofar as this policy respected existing colonial policy and practice, it was federalist in substance. Insofar as it later sought to assert the authority and identity of the federal government, it was to be nationalist in character. Federalist defence policy was a stop-gap; national policy involving both armed services was the long-term aim. This Alfred Deakin made clear publicly in December 1907.

Even before these attitudes had taken shape, many leaders of the federation movement had quickly grasped how those few Imperial problems as important as local ones might be solved through the medium of the Colonial Conference. In London they learnt to discuss over a conference table particular issues which were of concern to them. The experience of this and the later Conferences of 1894 and 1897 were to convince
federationists that close relations with the British world could be rewarding.

Cooperation and dependence upon Great Britain for the better exercise of local autonomy — these were to be the assumptions of the defence policy contemplated by the federationists. Discussion of Australian security in this spirit during the Conference of 1887 had led to the creation of the Australian Auxiliary Squadron. It led also to the request for the services of an Imperial officer to inspect their colonial units and to advise them on the organization of a uniform military force capable of cooperative action in times of crisis.

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In 1889 Major-General Bevan Edwards arrived in the colonies to tender advice. He quickly came to the same conclusion as other military advisers: that Australia could only be effectively defended by the federation of all military forces.

Edwards was not precise on the degree of danger the colonies faced. But he did consider that attacks upon the capital cities by powerful squadrons of armoured vessels were as likely as the landing of troops in sufficient numbers to capture towns the size of Newcastle. He also dwelt upon the perilous isolation of Western Australia and Port Darwin. Only a field force of some 30,000 to 40,000 men capable of rapid concentration, he argued, could thwart desperate enterprises and maintain colonial confidence in times of crisis.

To meet a graver danger than ever before contemplated Edwards drew a distinction between passive and active defence. Garrison troops composed of efficient regular troops aided by the militia and volunteers would defend the capitals and key ports in the traditional fashion. Field forces composed of militia regiments, under unified command, were to oppose
large raiding parties landed at some distance from the towns and to prevent invasion by an expeditionary army. Each unit was to be kept at low strength in peace and expanded in war. To this end, men could be easily inducted from local rifle companies and rifle clubs. But to create an effective reserve, he warned, Australians must consider "whether every man on attaining the age of 18 or 20 should not be compelled to join a rifle company".¹

There were of course many difficulties to be removed. Railways had to be built and organizations made uniform. A common defence act had to be passed by all the colonies to allow the use of their forces beyond their own borders. Common discipline had to be achieved. Different rates of pay had to be settled, the amount of training demanded of each soldier in return differed in each colony. Above all, the colonies had to agree to act in concord.

But did Australia stand in sufficient danger to justify such a large military force? If it did, then assurances from Whitehall that the Royal Navy would protect the Empire from territorial aggression were dangerously misleading. If it did not, then any statesman would find difficulty in justifying a force of the size needed for efficient military preparations. Therein lay the dilemma to be faced by subsequent commanders.

As was very probably the case with Kitchener two decades later, Major-General Edwards could justify his recommendations by referring to his confidential brief from the War Office. He had been instructed to assess the readiness of colonial troops "for employment in joint operations or in purely local defence" and to discover whether colonial governments would pass military legislation so that their units could operate abroad under the Army Act. For, the War Office thought, the time would soon approach when the colonies "conscious of their power and the interests at stake, may be disinclined to await attack after war shall have broken out (and) will initiate such operations as may make the Enemies of the Empire in the Pacific and China Seas and Indian Ocean look after their own possessions".² In other words the federal army was strategically justified
only if it was conceived as part of an imperial reserve.

The federationists claimed responsibility for Australian security. They had been provided with a project for naval defence by Admiral Tryon. The terms of this had been settled in London. Now Bevan Edwards had presented general principles of military defence. The virtues and faults of these could best be examined by Australians.

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In his famous speech at Tenterfield on the 24th of October 1889, Sir Henry Parkes used Edwards' report to emphasize the necessity for federation. Only by federation, he was to insist in many an oration, could Australia's security be maintained. Great Britain, France, Russia and Germany confronted each other in Asia. Japan was modernizing its society. The industrious and numerous Chinese, once blessed by Western civilization and the arts of war, would become Australia's certain enemy. These Asian hordes would not be content with the bombardment of the capitals. They would invade the North-Western section of the continent. They could not be dislodged. Worse, from there they would infiltrate the rest of Australia! Nor could honour and patriotism be neglected. National control over national forces was essential — Australians belonged to the one country and would soon owe their allegiance to one government.

Defence, however, remained merely the occasion for Parkes' campaign. It was not the cause of the success of the federation movement, nor at any time was it a major issue in the colonial legislatures or the federation conventions. At the 1891 convention the first concern of the delegates was the suffrage and the powers of each house of the federal parliament. Discussion of the defence issue was sparcodic and brief.

Yet there was an interesting difference between the Victorians in favour of federation and the New South Welshmen who opposed it.
Alfred Deakin, supported by other Victorians, insisted that there should be only a small standing army and that reliance should be placed on the citizen-soldier, upon a federal force of militia and volunteers. But George Dibbs of New South Wales insisted that Australia should depend on the Royal Navy. A standing army would be costly. It would introduce a spirit of militarism. It could open the way for despotism. If Australia was invaded, Dibbs declared in faint echo of Thomson, the population would rise as one to protect their freedom. The best measures for local defence were, therefore, to inculcate patriotism and a fierce devotion to liberty; to provide a reservoir of riflemen; to train school children who, in return for free education, should be obliged to undergo military training.

At the time Dibbs' stand was seen as purely obstructive. Yet it is possible to perceive more than bombast in his espousal of a nation in arms. The call for compulsory training was most often to be heard in New South Wales where conservative military influence was strongest. Protectionist though he was, Dibbs may well have been suggesting a correlation between a central government with limited powers, moderate tariff policies, and an unpaid and hastily improvised army, rather than an expensive regular force. A standing army or a militia and volunteer force - on the Victorian model - of any size called for great government expense, to be met in part by customs revenue and centralized control. Perhaps William Morris Hughes - the future Mahdi of a mass army - had perceived a similar correlation.

Nevertheless, these were differences in emphasis. For there was a remarkable consensus of opinion that the regular army of the federal government should be small and that the military defence of Australia should rest on the citizen-soldier. The direction of policy was clear. Federal forces were to be used primarily, if not solely, for defence.

Once the convention became concerned with the main business of constitution-making Parkes' resolution on defence was passed without dissent. The federal army, it was later decided, would possess the power to protect every state against invasion and domestic violence.
At the 1898 convention clauses of the constitution were considered one at a time. Again defence caused very little comment. Alfred Deakin, with the support of C.C. Kingston of South Australia, did, however, return to the problem that had caused misgivings in New South Wales. What were to be the powers of the Governor-General over Australian armed forces?

Deakin insisted that the constitution should provide for the regulation of the services by the Governor-General in Council, that is by the Executive Council. In this way the federal government would have full control and there would be no margin of authority given to the Governor-General solely as the Queen's representative. Barton and other delegates from New South Wales successfully resisted Deakin's attempts to amend the constitution on this point. Apart from the advantages of acting in accord with existing constitutional principles, they argued, it was essential that direction of military affairs — particularly in the field of discipline — must be free from political interference.

What sphere of interests would the federal forces be called upon to defend? Did they have to defend all interests in Australian waters? If so, how could that sphere be defined? The discussion at the convention was inconclusive.

And what of naval defence? Random suggestions for an Australian navy indicated an ill-articulated hope, not a cogent policy. The reason for this doubtless lay in the success of the Naval Agreement of 1887 and the provision of a fixed piece of the Royal Naval shield under whose protection the federation movement flourished. Colonial patriotism and colonial jealousies were too strong, and colonial treasuries too poor for the consideration of national naval defence. At the 1891 convention, Free-traders and the representatives of the less populous states, who had most to lose if a central government took control of tariffs, argued for dependence upon the Royal Navy. References to an Australian navy were few and expressed distant hopes for forces able to protect ports.
Nevertheless, beyond the formal arenas of the colonial legislatures and the federal conventions George Reid, the Premier of New South Wales, strove to explore and implement the more acceptable aspects of Bevan Edwards' report and, to this end, convened a series of military conferences for the commandants of each Australian colony.

By 1896 the officers had drawn up a cogent scheme for the defence of Australia and drafted a federal defence agreement for ratification by all governments. Yet Reid’s efforts to achieve common policies and legislation "during the inevitable interval between the present time and the completion of the Federal design" were thwarted. Though his failure belongs to the history of federation, the findings of the military conferences have a wider significance. They provided the basis for the first Commonwealth Defence Bill in 1901. Moreover, some of the military officers – above all, Major-General E.T.H. Hutton – who met at Reid’s bidding were later to play major roles in shaping national defence.

Despite alarm expressed in the New South Wales legislature, the advice of these conferences was not in any sense militaristic. It was professionally sound, competent, and thorough. Though the representatives seemed convinced of the need for federation and federal defence, each was aware of the sentiments and supremacy of his civil superiors. Moreover, the commandants, doubtless aware of the political and military excesses of Bevan Edwards referred their findings to the Colonial Defence Committee for authoritative support and advice. This they received. As a consequence, the strategic basis for federal defence was orthodox. Raids from French and Russian forces operating singly or in alliance from Pacific bases were postulated as the probable danger. There was, therefore, little that was new in the assumptions of the schemes fashioned by the conferences.

The formation of a field force the officers believed essential. But it had to be much smaller than Edwards had envisaged. After providing two federal garrisons for the defence of King George's Sound and Thursday Island and leaving some 9,000 citizen-soldiers for garrison duties, the
conferences decided that the federal field force was to have a peacetime establishment of some 7,300 officers and men. It was to be expanded in time of war to a strength of 12,200. Since Australia's population then numbered only some 4,400,000 and the nation seemed less likely, than any other part of the Empire, to have to face aggression, an army of this size satisfied both political aspirations and prudent strategic assessments.

Lack of sufficient manpower to create units in peace and expand them in war was then and later to be of concern. The conferences decided that the federal scheme would rest in the first instance upon a system of voluntary recruitment. However, the officers recommended a principle already incorporated in the Queensland Defence Acts: that every Australian male could be called upon to bear arms in times of grave emergency. Furthermore, there was provision in times of crisis — and presumably peace — for military quotas to be maintained by a ballot system if voluntary recruitment failed to attract sufficient numbers. The inescapable obligation to serve a nation in arms during times of emergency was woven into assumptions of federal defence.

The question of pay was similarly fraught with political and social issues. The conferences decided to make the pay of all militia privates equal to the minimum rate for an unskilled labourer — six shillings a day. From this difficulties arose. Mobilization of the field forces would cost the colonial governments a fortune. Friction would result between permanent and citizen-soldiers from disparate pay; and, on the same grounds, it would be difficult for Australian units to serve with the British Army. The solution lay in a system of deferred pay. Thereby it was hoped federal action and Imperial cooperation could be achieved without friction.

Not even in such matters as training, drill, and discipline could the conferences avoid political issues. Following the wishes of his civilian superior, C.C. Kingston, Brigadier J.M. Gordon from South Australia exhorted his colleagues to simplify infantry drill. Defence of Australia
in the absence of a threat of invasion would rest, he declared, upon some form of guerrilla fighting. No marching kit was necessary. Elementary drill, simple weapons, cheap uniforms, and casual training were enough. This faint echo of the call made by men like Thomson was rejected. Military opinion stood firmly against guerrilla warfare by untrained hordes. Such a course might be cheap or in accord with some popular ideas, but, it had been argued, it was most dangerous. Quite apart from the indecisive nature of irregular warfare, Australians would not wish the shooting of hostages, the reprisals, and the laying waste of towns that inevitably accompanied it. It was rejected on this occasion on other grounds: the standards of training should not fall below that set by the Imperial government for its own forces.

On one matter the conferences were adamant. Whatever system of military discipline the various governments might deem best for their troops, once the federal forces were mobilized they would operate under the British Army Act of 1881 and the Queen's Regulations. This was considered essential for an efficient federal army. It would also be convenient when Australian forces again acted in concert with the British Army.

The technical discussion of the most suitable weapon for the militia revealed different assessments of the quality of Australian troops. The issue before the federal military conferences was the uniformity and interchangeability of weapons within Australia and within the Empire. Hutton felt Australians should possess the best possible weapon of the day — the Lee-Metford magazine rifle.* This, he said, was used by English volunteer forces; Australians could easily master it. The representatives of Victoria and South Australia were equally convinced that their militiamen and volunteers would be unable to handle any complex weapon. It was therefore decided that wherever possible to convert the .45" single-loading Martini-Henry rifle. The resulting weapon, the Martini-Metford, would have a calibre of .303" but would retain the single-loading, falling-block

* For technical details see notes to this Chapter.
breech mechanism. As obedient agents of their parsimonious and cautious colonial governments, the military officers — Hutton excepted — were willing to countenance an obsolete weapon.

They did, however, address themselves to problems of greater moment to the federationists: the control and coordination of all forces. To whom would the Commander-in-Chief be responsible? In the final draft of the proposed federal defence agreement provision was made for the formation of a Council of Defence composed of two delegates from each of the two senior colonies and one from each of the others. Hutton argued successfully that the Council should not merely be a military institution. It should possess the direct advice of an Australian naval officer on local harbour defence and, after more informal consultations, receive the recommendations of the Royal Naval officer in command of the Australian Auxiliary Squadron, without whom it would be impossible to make strategical assessments. This ensured not only information about enemy movements, sea traffic, and the defence of ports, but the provision of transport for Australian troops to give them strategic mobility where railways could not and naval advice about the direction of any campaign the federal army might be called on to fight. In time "of war, imminent National Emergency, or Great Danger, so declared by proclamation" the Council would take full control. Then it could call, mobilize, equip, and finance the federal army, distribute it at will after consultation with the General Officer Commanding, and demobilize the troops only when it thought fit.

Who would control the Council of Defence? Would all colonial interests be satisfied? How could finance be raised? If the Council, as envisaged, called for reinforcements, would not that infringe colonial autonomy? Such questions were posed inferentially by the opponents of federation and by the Victorians suspicious of Reid. They were left unanswered.

Throughout most of the period under consideration little politico-strategic thinking was done by Australian politicians. In part
this was the result of inexperience. In part it flowed from dependence on the Royal Navy and geographical distance from the centres of military power. In part it was justified by suspicion at possible involvement in Imperial wars. In part, it was restrained by that tenet of the Gladstonian doctrine which compelled the colonies to pay for all wars they might provoke. Yet, the Victorian government had contemplated in 1887 the use of its forces to forestall the French in the New Hebrides; and the dream of Australian hegemony over the South-West Pacific remained an important strand in political thought and nationalist posturing. Hostility to Imperialism apart then, there were sufficient reasons to consider the sphere of interests in which Australian arms might be legitimately and effectively used to preserve - or to gain - national interests. Military men thought in such terms, and made suggestions. Whenever they did so, their advice was either ignored or condemned by politicians.

The advice of the federal military conferences was no exception. On a matter of central importance - the definition of Australia's sphere of interest, which the army might be called upon to defend - the soldiers could expect little direction from their civilian superiors and had to intrude upon policy. The first military conference of 1894 defined an area 110° E. to 170° E. and 0° S. to 50° S. The citizen-soldiers of the federal forces could therefore be called upon to conduct operations in the Eastern sector of the Dutch East Indies, Southern New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia and the New Hebrides, as well as in the Australian colonies. Under Hutton's influence the second conference increased this area from 110° E. to 180° E. and 0° S. to 50° S. The Australian sphere of interest was now to include most of the Dutch East Indies, all of New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago, the Gilbert, Ellice, and Fiji Islands, and all of New Zealand. It was among Australia's vital interests, went the implicit argument, to deny any enemy the continued use of bases of operation within its sphere of interest.*

* See Map No. 1.
Such actions might well have involved cooperation with the British Army. This raised the problem of colonial participation in imperial wars. The solution offered by the conferences was simple and effective. Australian troops were not to be ordered to serve outside the area defined. But any part of the citizen forces, either groups of men or whole units, could volunteer for service overseas under provisions similar to the British Militia Act of 1882. As we shall see, while this became an important feature of the British territorial system, it was successfully resisted in the Commonwealth parliament. The escape clause envisaged by Hutton for those men who wished to serve both Queen and country in any crisis was effectively sealed by radicals who remained suspicious of Imperial involvement.

It was not this sensible, realistic, and yet politically dangerous foray into policy that prevented the acceptance of the federal defence agreement laboriously drafted by the conferences. It was the nature of federationist politics. Crown Law officers of New South Wales were given the unenviable task of drawing up a bill for their government which was to serve as a model for all others. Tasmania remained interested and enthusiastic. South Australia passed an act calling for universal service in a grave emergency and allowing its troops to serve anywhere in Australia; but there its efforts ceased. Queensland remained content in the knowledge that the Colonial Defence Committee had presented its defence legislation as the interim model for the other colonies; but its premier remained hostile to the scheme. Western Australia held that the notion of federal defence was unreal until the construction of a transcontinental railway. The Victorian government adamantly refused to vote the $20,000 per annum necessary for the scheme. It felt that the ear-marking of troops for federal service would be impolitic and would create friction and ill-feeling in the services; it suspected that the selection by ballot for national service would be found repugnant, but no less so than service of Victorians under the Army Act; it rejected a Council of Defence which had the power to send Australians to Africa or India without reference to an Australian legislature; it was even reluctant to convert its rifles to the Martini-Hetford type. Above all, it feared that implementation of the scheme
would divert the federal movement from the desired course—the acceptance of the Constitution Bill and the provision of defence under a Commonwealth parliament.

So the military officers called together by Reid, despite a general review of their proposals by the colonial premiers in 1897, were to see little immediate return for their labours. Some of them were, however, able to see the embodiment in Commonwealth legislation of some aspects of Bevan Edwards' project which they had tailored for the federationists.

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Forty years of discussion of the problems of security and Imperial relations were to leave their mark after 1901. In the prolonged debate over defence policy and Australia's role in the Empire all the views represented had roots deep in the nineteenth century.

From the separationists came the conviction that Australian defences should be self-sufficient, and that the continent could be defended by hastily enlisted patriotic citizens who, trained briefly in the use of the rifle, would form a mass army. Nationalism would be manifest in the nation-in-arms, in forces that could not be readily employed to fight Imperial wars. While Australians could hold off the invader by threat of guerrilla warfare from the interior, a coastal force of torpedo boats would beat off the lone commerce raiders. It too would have little concern for the large responsibilities of Imperial defence.

The neutralist solution proposed by Gavan Duffy continued in a form that military planners could ignore only at their peril. The dual loyalty to King and country that none denied by 1900 made it imperative that Australians decide how far they would cooperate with Great Britain in the light of the justice of the conflict in which she was engaged.
Australians might be independent Australian-Britons, but they were Australians first and Britons afterwards.

For the latter-day Imperial federationist the doctrine of national self-reliance was anathema. They had stressed the importance of the Royal Naval shield to Australia, the continuance of contributions to the Admiralty, and the need for an expeditionary force to serve with the British Army in the defence of the Empire. Their less ardent followers could admit both the need and appeal of these measures yet insist on adequate self-defence as a prerequisite.

The solution found by the federationists was neither permanent nor doctrinaire. It called for a constant examination of national aspirations and the imperial policies that might help their realization. As federalists they contemplated the perpetuation of colonial defence policies after 1901. As nationalists, they looked forward to solutions in some ways similar to those who believed in national self-sufficiency yet with reservations. For as Imperialists, they were also concerned with security of the Empire, and had experienced the benefits of dependence and cooperation with Great Britain. They could look forward to a national army of citizen-soldiers for the defence of Australia and at the same time consider the military programme offered by the Imperial federationists. For they could despatch an Australian army to fight in an Imperial war so long as their control over the forces was not in jeopardy during peacetime and so long as they were not committed to a fixed course of action by prior agreement. They had also learnt that naval protection could be hired from the Admiralty. They knew this could involve them in Imperial defence. But they also wished to see a national navy. Such a goal, they realized, could only be fully achieved with the approval and the assistance of the British government. Active cooperation with Great Britain, they knew, might prove necessary; the autonomy of the Australian government had to be preserved.

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That the attitudes of the eighties had changed became clear at the turn of the century. During the Colonial Conference of 1897 the premiers strove to define the nation's role in the Empire. During the South African War Australians displayed a fervent attachment to the British world. Each in their way marked the conversion of political and public opinion to the stand adopted by the federationists.

Even so, it left them with lingering doubts. As parliamentarians of the Commonwealth they were to wonder whether the premiers had been concerned too little, and the public too much, with commitment to Empire.
CHAPTER THREE

COMMITMENT TO EMPIRE: CONFERENCE AND CONFLICT (1897-1901)

Under our present relations we have a weight (in the British world) beyond anything we deserve .... The influence of the Colonies upon public opinion in England, considering what we contribute towards the cost of the Empire, I think is marvellously out of proportion.

GEORGE REID, June 1897.

(The) struggle today is not a struggle between the Boers and Great Britain, urged on by a coterie of land-grabbers headed by Cecil Rhodes, but the struggle has reached such an acute stage that it is a matter of national existence - whether the prestige of the British Empire is to be sullied and to suffer humiliation in South Africa at the hands of its traditional enemies on the continent who, when they find her in difficulties, may make a dash for her possessions.

SENATOR DAWSON, 20 December 1899.

(Our) only warship, the Protector, is preparing to start for China with our gallant soldiers to assist in restoring order among the excited Mongolians, who are reported to be trying to murder all the European residents. We feel that, should the sad necessity arise, our Jack Tars will be found as ready and daring as our soldier boys have shown themselves in defence of Queen and Empire.

"UNCLE JACK" in the Children's Hour, August 1900.

The Greater Britons of the South are proud of the land from which they sprang; their pride in Imperialism is as high as that of England itself. The readiness with which Australians responded to the call to arms for South Africa is the proof.

The AGE, 27 February 1903.
To the splendour and pageantry of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee came the premiers of the self-governing colonies. This was not only a time for a new generation of Englishmen to venerate their sovereign. It was the occasion for proud review. Great Britain might stand alone in Europe facing the alliance between France and Russia and the sabre-rattling of the German Emperor. But never had her might been greater. Never had sentiment bound the men of self-governing Greater Britain more closely to the Crown. Never had the resources of India and the smaller dependencies been considered with such profound satisfaction. Truly, London stood at the centre of the British world and a great Empire. If the spirit of the celebrations for the Queen in 1887 had seemed royal and nation-wide, that of 1897 was manifestly Imperial.¹

All this the colonial premiers saw, and they were greatly pleased. They also acknowledged that their pleasure was to a great degree due to the efforts of one man – Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies.²

As their host, Chamberlain was responsible for the prominence they enjoyed. They were feted and honoured. The bearing of their military contingents in the procession to St. Paul's Cathedral was acclaimed. They were seated with members of Lord Salisbury's Cabinet so that they might the better see the royal progress. They were presented to the Queen. They were made Privy Councillors. They were provided with a special yacht to observe the awesome parade of British naval strength. They were dined. Duly they swelled the flood of rhetoric, expressing loyalty to Crown and Empire. They felt the force and persuasion of the desire for Imperial unity. In 1887 the representatives of the self-governing colonies were expected, in the view of Alfred Deakin, to be overawed, respectful and subservient. In 1897 it was as if Chamberlain wished to impress the premiers not merely with the majesty of Empire but with the role they played in its destiny.³
As Secretary of State for the Colonies, Chamberlain was the man to solve those local problems concerning the Empire. The Australian colonies desired to pass legislation excluding coloured aliens, irrespective of British treaties with foreign countries and the susceptibilities of the Indian government. They, like New Zealand, were deeply concerned at the success of foreign powers in the islands of the South-West Pacific and at the loss of British predominance in Samoa and the New Hebrides. Some of them, like Canada, wished to pursue their own tariff policies unfettered by the most favoured nation treaties England had signed with European nations. Clearly such issues impinged upon Imperial policy. Wherever possible, the desires of the premiers were accommodated with characteristic vigour. 4

As a devotee of Imperial unity, Chamberlain wished to discuss plans to found relations between Great Britain and the self-governing colonies upon more than existing constitutional arrangements and sentiment. Inspired by colonial support for the Crown during the crises of 1896, he had declared:

To organize an Empire - one may almost say to create an Empire - greater and more potent for (the) peace and civilization of the world than history has ever known - that is a dream if you like, but a dream of which no man need be ashamed. 5

The first step towards making the dream a reality was to create a British Zollverein with free trade between all parts of the Empire and with duties imposed by the several parts on foreign products only. A common defence policy leading thus to a change in political relations and perhaps proceeding to some form of Imperial federation, Chamberlain believed, rested on a uniform commercial programme. 6

As a politician, Chamberlain was quick to perceive that this vision, no matter how desirable in itself, called for almost impossible sacrifices by the colonial governments, each of which had long pursued tariff policies to suit its own interests. What, then, if the concept of an Imperial Zollverein proved unacceptable, would the premiers consider a system of tariff preference? What would they demand in return? 7
With these questions in mind Chamberlain invited the premiers to meet informally at the Colonial Office. Those from the Australian colonies were thus compelled to face the problem of Imperial unity and the solutions Chamberlain had in mind. They were obliged, therefore, to summarize the attitudes of their colleagues and their electors towards the main aspects of the programme previously expounded by the Imperial federationists in Australia. In the spheres of commerce, political relations, and defence they had to consider the role their colonies, and the future federated Australia, could play in the Empire.

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First in seniority and acumen among the Australians was George Reid, Premier of New South Wales. The rotund, genial, and much-caricatured Reid had held that position since 1894 with the support of the Labour Party. A wonderful platform orator, his capacity for judging the tenor of public opinion had been much sharpened by that alliance. Though born in Scotland, he had come to New South Wales as a young child and there his interests and first loyalties lay. Contemporaries often argued that Reid's only interest in politics was to keep in power. He was, however, an astute political radical. At the time of the Conference he supported the federation movement in Australia. So, on all but tariff policy — for Reid was a free-trader — he proved an excellent spokesman for prevailing Australian nationalism.

Next in seniority, but by no means in acumen, was Sir George Turner, Premier of Victoria since 1894. He valued himself as a straightforward man of business and it was he who was given the task of reducing expenditure for the Victorian government during the crises of the early nineties. He tended to consider each proposal in politics and defence from the point of view of cost. The epitome of the shrewd and cautious colonial politician, he had taken a minor part in the federation movement and was later to be Federal Treasurer from 1901-1904. From that position he was to exercise great influence on Commonwealth defence policy.
GEORGE REID

"First in seniority and acumen ..."

SIR GEORGE TURNER

"... shrewd and cautious ..."
Of different temper was C.C. Kingston, Premier of South Australia from 1893 to 1899, later to be Minister of Trade and Customs in the first federal parliament. By conviction Kingston was a democrat prepared to pursue radical policies. Acute and quick-tempered, he stood out as a spokesman for Australian nationalism.

So, too, did Sir John Forrest, surveyor, explorer, and Premier of Western Australia for more than a decade. Though born in Western Australia and educated in Perth, Forrest held in esteem all things British. This has led some historians into believing that Forrest was an Imperialist with insufficient sympathy for Australian aspirations. His behaviour at this Conference and his actions as Minister of Defence for the Commonwealth Government from 1901 to 1903 belie this claim. He was not an active policy-maker, nor a progressive administrator, nor even an astute or lucid speaker. But he knew the temper of his fellow Western Australians and of federal parliament, and attempted, as a minister, to act in accord with it. Like his more prominent colleagues, Forrest had attended the federal conventions of the nineties. 10

Neither Chamberlain nor his proposals could easily overawe such men.* Each was sharply aware of his own interests and most had grasped that conference was a means of furthering them. On this occasion their confidence was reinforced by Chamberlain's manner. He had expressed the desire for a frank and informal meeting. As chairman, he displayed sympathy and quick understanding of colonial views and seemed more prepared to provoke discussion than to guide it.

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Imperial sentiment, Chamberlain argued, needed the support of material considerations. A common trading policy was essential. He made no secret of his belief that free trade within the Empire was best for

* Though Sir E.N.C. Braddon of Tasmania and Sir Hugh Nelson of Queensland were to differ slightly from the others, their contributions are of little consequence for this work.
everybody. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that it was impractical for the colonies to consider at this stage an Imperial Zollverein of the German kind because of the different tariff policies they had pursued. They might, however, raise their tariffs on foreign goods, leaving duty only for revenue purposes on British products. Sir George Turner's terse exposition of the protectionist policy of Victoria, and the probable resistance of vested interests, ruled out this course of action. Chamberlain was quick to let the matter drop. There remained the possibility that the colonies could pursue their own tariff policies while giving British trade a decided preference, as Canada had done. If the colonies felt they must have tariff autonomy, Chamberlain said, then the people of Great Britain would be "... much touched and gratified if they were of their own free will to offer us some preference". 11

What would the colonies get in return? Not enough, the Australians decided, after listening to Chamberlain at length. Sir John Forrest put the colonial view plainly. Kingston explained that distinct advantages could result only from reciprocal tariff arrangements. Such a step Great Britain could not consider. A common trading policy was not achieved. In the discussion of commercial relations it was obvious that the premiers considered Imperial autarky far less important than the freedom needed for local development. 12

This proved also to be true of political relations. Chamberlain remarked that the concept of Imperial federation had been widely discussed in Great Britain. Its realisation, he felt, would only come very gradually. But a beginning could be made. There was, he insisted, "a real necessity for better machinery of consultation". 13 Whatever form this machinery took, he warned, the greater the steps towards allowing the colonies a share in the management of the Empire, the greater would be their obligation to contribute money. 14

Richard Seddon of New Zealand was more impressed than any other by Chamberlain's proposal. The Australians, especially Reid, demolished it. He protested that no practical scheme had been put before the premiers.
Until imperial visionaries could present a practical proposal, which would not endanger colonial self-government, the imperial connection had better rest on sentiment and conference. Matters were most satisfactory as they stood. In the process of expounding Kingston's assertion that no desire for a change in political relations was to be found in the colonies, Reid gave an accurate statement of Australian attitudes to Empire, and a warning:

The test of our relations, I submit, will be the next war in which England is engaged. She is not likely ever to be engaged in an unrighteous war or in an aggressive war. If engaged in a defensive war you would find that sentiment would determine everything. Our money would come; our men would come; but you require some national emergency to show that ... (it) is only in those moments that you can make the people one in a sense of sacrifice. They are accustomed in the Colonies to mind their own affairs; they are accustomed to imperial defence without paying for it, and it has crystallized almost that relationship .... (The) present relations have produced an Empire, and a state of things within that Empire which is not paralleled ... in history ... Now it is no light thing to change those relations, and the onus, I say, is tremendous upon those who wish to. 15

Only in one significant respect was Reid's portrait not accurate. During the South African War Australians came to the aid of the Empire without any apparent pause to consider whether the war was just or unjust. Even so, until public demand for participation rose to a clamour Reid was to argue that the war was unjust and unworthy of Australian commitment.

Kingston drove home the final shaft of Reid's argument. Would the British government, he asked, be prepared to accept equal representation in an imperial parliament for all parts of the self-governing Empire, irrespective of population? In short, would Australia have the same weight as Great Britain? Answered Chamberlain: "I should say certainly not ... I think that would be clearly impossible." Retorted Kingston: "Better be as we are." 16

For the Australian premiers, imperial federation was a dead issue. They rejected larger schemes of imperial organization; they found in regular conferences the means of settling issues of common and imperial concern. The political attitudes bearing on defence problems carried no
longer any hint of separation or neutrality. Australians might be passively neutral in an unjust Imperial war; they would be actively belligerent in a just conflict. Sentiment was their foundation stone, not a Zollverein or an Imperial council. They therefore saw no contradiction between the pursuit of their local interests, the aspirations of Australian nationalism, and the desire for the unity of Greater Britain - so long as colonial autonomy was not endangered and no Imperial obligation pre-determined. 17

It remained to apply these sentiments to the particular problems of naval and military policy.

In his opening speech Chamberlain had sketched the dangers he thought might face the self-governing colonies. Canada, he predicted, could have conflicting interests with Japan, Russia and the United States. War, in all of these cases, was not uniformly probable, he admitted, but the Dominion might be compelled to make concessions if it were not for the might of the Imperial Navy. Likewise, Australia was threatened by a conflict of interests with European powers in the South-West Pacific; and it was quite possible for difficulties to arise - possibly from immigration policy - with Japan and China. Against these alarming prospects could be set the Imperial Navy that protected this portion of the outlying Empire.

In this spirit he recalled the parade of the Royal Navy that the premiers had just seen, a demonstration of might that Great Britain was compelled to maintain only because of the protection of Imperial interests and Imperial trade. All wars of the nineteenth century in which Great Britain had been involved, he suggested, had been for colonial interests. The interests of Great Britain had not been a prime consideration. Therefore, all had a common interest in maintaining the might of the Royal Navy. It behoved the self-governing colonies to pay financial contributions for its upkeep, the more so if the colonies aspired to partnership in the management of Empire. He instanced the Naval Agreement of 1887 with the Australasian colonies as a model for a system of contributions. 18
His choice of model was unfortunate and he made a tactical error in allowing discussion of the Agreement to proceed before the presentation of the larger scheme. Captain L.A. Beaumont, the Director of Naval Intelligence and a permanent member of the Colonial Defence Committee, was left, with neither Admiralty brief nor ministerial direction on the other issue, to address himself critically to the working of the 1887 Agreement. 19

He deplored the restrictions placed on Admiralty control over the vessels of the Australian Auxiliary Squadron. Under the Agreement that squadron was to remain within Australian waters and could only be used outside them in time of war with the permission of the colonies. Furthermore, the Australian colonies, he argued, looked upon particular vessels of the squadron as a means of local defence in its most restricted sense—that is for the defence of the harbours of capital cities. If the commonly accepted principle of this Agreement were extended, the consequence would be to split up squadrons and to destroy their use in times of war. Moreover, in peace, the Australian Auxiliary Squadron, hitherto restricted to coastal waters, was needed to fulfil the duties of the Australian Station which extended far into the Western Pacific. Chamberlain put the matter succinctly:

(The) interests of the Australasian Colonies are very great in those islands in the Pacific ... We have interfered again and again, and we are likely possibly to be called upon to interfere in the future, in order to secure those islands, and other islands ... as part of the future inheritance of Australia. Therefore ... the fleet which is called the Australasian Fleet should at all events be permitted to visit all the islands in which those interests exist. 20

The Australian premiers agreed that such a course of action was possible and just. In short, the colonies had some responsibility to uphold Australian—Imperial interests in the South—West Pacific. 21

But the Admiralty wanted more than that; it desired full strategic control over all its vessels in peace and war. Though for many decades the strength of the Royal Navy had been distributed to various stations throughout the world where Admirals were responsible for a
particular sphere of interest and though the Australian Auxiliary Squadron was created in accord with this practice and theories of coastal defence prevalent in the eighties, the Admiralty was reasserting its right to concentrate all fighting vessels at will.* The mere mention of the doctrine of fleet concentration by Beaumont and Chamberlain was enough to evoke protest from the Australian premiers. 22

Reid drew a clear distinction between Australian defence and Imperial defence. Insofar as the Australian Auxiliary Squadron was posted on the Australian coast under agreement it was part of an Australian defence system and should be only of peripheral concern for the Admiralty. It was viewed as the "outer line of local defence" — quite independent "altogether of Imperial naval defence of the (Empire) as a whole". 23

Australian politicians, therefore, could not allow the concentrations of this squadron in distant seas either in times of peace or war. Neither their colleagues nor their electors would tolerate such a stand. In another illuminating and realistic exposition of the Australian attitude to Empire in which both parsimony and sentiment were involved, he put the case thus:

In committee of supply in Australia there is an intensely critical and narrow local spirit at all times ... It does not perhaps fully reflect the opinion of the population, but it prevails. It is quite consistent that those very people, if war threatened, would be ready to vote any amount and go by the thousand to fight for the old country; but the Australians have two different feelings.

* Early in 1897, for instance, at the alarm expressed over the increase of Russian naval strength in the Far East the Admiralty had decided to make arrangements for the concentration of vessels of the Australian, China, and East Indian Stations. This was fully in accord with the doctrine of fleet concentration which postulated that the Royal Navy, by assembling its battle fleets and cruiser squadrons at decisive points, would compel the enemy to concentrate his strength lest his ships be destroyed piecemeal. Concentration, it was later clearly argued, would thus protect the colonies from attack by large armoured forces. However, the doctrine was not yet in the ascendancy though its prominence had been augured.
See below Chapter VII.
When it comes to business he is as keen a hand as you can deal with; when it comes to the patriotism on the platform, he is most gushing; and you have to reckon with him in those two ways; but when it comes to a time of action he is up to his form, and will be ready to make good all his demonstrations of loyalty; but it is very difficult to get him to take up this partnership with the British Empire, which is a gigantic concern in view of the fact that in most Colonies their financial position ... has been strained, especially of late years ... 

(If) Sir George, for instance, or Mr. Kingston ... were to propose £50,000 as a contribution towards the Imperial fleet ... we should be met with a tremendous outburst, I am afraid, that would do more harm than good, that would cast a slur on the feelings which prevail. 24

Mr. Goschen, the First Lord of the Admiralty, tried to soothe the Australians. While ready to welcome any direct and unconditional colonial contribution towards the Imperial Navy as a symbol of political cohesion, he promised that the government would be willing to continue the Naval Agreement of 1887 and that the Admiralty would find no administrative difficulty in keeping the Australian Auxiliary Squadron on the Australian coast. More reassuring was his statement of strategic principles. No large organized expedition, he stated, could be despatched from Japan, United States or France without the Admiralty knowing of it and meeting the threat aggressively by the concentration of its forces on the high seas. Neither principle nor practice, Goschen hastened to add, meant that the Australian Auxiliary Squadron would be withdrawn from Australian waters. That Squadron had been provided to protect floating commerce in a particular zone and there it would remain.

By this forthright statement Goschen put an end to Australian fears. He did, however, object very strongly to the prevailing view that ships of the Squadron should be used primarily for harbour defence, and that in times of danger, they should be parcellled out for the protection of the capital cities. The Admiralty demanded full control of all vessels in the Squadron within the zone to which they had been allotted. Just as the ports of England, he argued, were to be protected by the concentration of local
naval defence forces in coastal waters, so the Australian Auxiliary Squadron must be able to assemble as a unit in times of danger on any point on the Australian coast. 25

The Australian premiers were not only relieved. They were satisfied. * Along with Seddon of New Zealand, they formally resolved that the Agreement should continue along the lines Beaumont and Goschen had finally recommended. It was characteristic of this Conference - indeed a microcosm of Australian relations within Greater Britain during the turn of the century - that the views they expounded should be accommodated. 26

In the process much had been clarified. The Australian premiers had felt compelled to summarize both colonial and national views on naval defence. They had made it clear that the Naval Agreement of 1887 was a bargain from which they received adequate protection for the lowest possible sum. The Australian Auxiliary Squadron must remain in their coastal waters and not be used to reinforce the main fleet. It was an essential part of their local defence. Furthermore, they conceived naval protection only in terms of local squadrons ready to defend harbours and the coast-wise shipping routes. Even though the Squadron was freed to uphold British-Australian influence in the South-West Pacific, imperial interests on the high seas, whether mercantile or territorial, were not their concern in peacetime. Neither politically nor financially could they afford to be interested in such matters. It followed that Australia would not contribute to the maintenance of the Imperial fleet. The naval defence of the Empire was the responsibility of Great Britain. Then, as later, the most fruitful discussion of the relations between political attitudes and defence occurred in committee, not amid the rhetorical posturing in parliament.

* The only dissentient was Kingston, who had produced a memorandum calling for the formation of a Royal Naval reserve in Australia. The colonies, he suggested, ought to provide men rather than money for the piece of the Royal Naval shield guaranteed by the Naval Agreement. The issue had not, however, been discussed with his colleagues or the problems it presented considered. It was an isolated suggestion which we will examine more closely later. See below Chapter VIII.
The premiers had also expressed the views of the federation movement. In 1897 there were complaints that the hiring of fleets was unmanly, that the Australian nation should be responsible for all its defence, and that the Agreement involved taxation of colonists without representation in the Imperial government. Nevertheless, the campaign in Australia for a national navy had not yet taken a coherent shape. Nor did its champions wield any significant political influence. Partly through severe limitation of finance and partly through the experience of the Naval Agreement, the federalists were to see no dishonour in hiring a squadron. The clash between federalist and nationalist naval policies was yet to come. So, as we shall see, was a collision between the strategy enumerated by Goschen when he admitted that the seas could be divided into zones within which squadrons of the Royal Navy would be stationed to protect floating trade and harbours, and the doctrine of fleet concentration which assumed that the Admiralty had full control over all its naval strength.

The discussion of military problems avoided large Imperial issues. In the main the premiers were invited to consider details of organization. No agreement was arrived at; but important matters were traversed. It was tentatively suggested that the colonies might provide men for the wars of the Empire. Great stress was laid upon the benefits of cooperation between the forces of adjoining colonies that might federate in the near future. Self-sufficiency and the capability for self-defence were given a prominence that was to be perpetuated by the Commonwealth in all its military planning, especially after 1905. Even so, the discussion revealed great ignorance of military matters and suspicion of military men on the part of the Australian premiers. Only Reid faced even the more general problems of federal military defence.

The general principles of colonial military policy, as seen by the War Office, had been expounded in numerous memoranda from the Colonial Defence Committee. They were thought to be well-known. But to ensure a common basis for discussion the premiers were each given a copy of a memorandum drawn up by the Colonial Defence Committee in 1896.
After restating the reasons why the colonies should maintain fixed defences at major ports to counter enemy cruisers and units of militia to deal with raiding parties, the document broached the subject of field forces. Where the land frontiers of adjoining colonies were great, went the argument, and federation was possible or imminent - such as in South Africa and Australia - every move must be made for mutual support by common legislation, uniform arms, common military law and regulations, and common organization. Only thus could field forces for effective defence come into being. The document then stressed the importance of defence rather than offence as the principal role of the colonial forces. It did so with commendable insight into colonial problems:

Doubtless a time will come when the increasing strength and resources of the self-governing Colonies will enable them to materially assist the mother country, by placing at her disposal for operations in any quarter of the globe bodies of troops formed from the excellent material of strong, self-reliant colonists, but at present the development of their own vast resources in times of peace, and the effective protection of them in time of war, is undoubtedly the best contribution the Colonies can offer to Imperial defence.

Yet the Colonial Defence Committee did not envisage a policy of passive belligerency on the part of the colonies, nor neglect of their responsibilities in Imperial military defence. The document concluded:

To this, however, there is an important exception. England may be engaged in the future, as she has frequently been in the past, in a war which carries with it no danger of attack on the Colonies. In such a case the offer of assistance from them would be prized, as it has been on more than one occasion, not only for its real value, but also as evidence of that solidarity on which the greatness of the British Empire must ultimately rest. 28

This was an invitation and a hope. The colonies were not being pressed into providing any kind of formal Imperial military reserve. Too much had to be done within the colonies before that could be considered.

Neither the Committee in its tentative phrasing nor Chamberlain in his grandiloquent appeal for an interchange of military units so that all could share "in the dangers and the glories of the British army",
had suggested that any Imperial war could be unjust. The issue was understandably not discussed. Instead the premiers were invited to consider, one by one, the more detailed recommendations of the Colonial Defence Committee.29

Would the colonies accept the principle of interchangeability for military units? Once appropriate legislation for overseas service was passed and each section of the Empire had contracted to pay its own forces, it was suggested, there should be no difficulty in launching the scheme. Apart from the fares no extra costs need be involved. Reid and Sir Hugh Nelson, the Premier of Queensland, were quite agreeable to the proposal.* So, too, was Laurier of Canada. Turner, concerned at possible expense, wished to defer the matter until the Australian premiers met early in 1898. So the proposal, though by no means abhorrent in principle to the premiers, was left to colonial initiative.30

Would the Australians press ahead with the scheme of federal defence on the lines proposed by their military commandants in 1894 and 1896 before the achievement of federation? Would all the other colonies follow the example of South Australia and Queensland in this respect and legislate to allow Australians to serve outside their particular colonies for the defence of the British nation? Reid was the only man present who acknowledged the need for common legislation and common organization to produce a federal army rather than an untrained rabble. The other premiers, despite the reports of the commandants, had plainly not thought about the issue. Kingston, himself a one-time volunteer soldier, displayed a suspicion of things military and hostility towards Reid's previous forays into federal military policy. Australians should not allow, he insisted, the formulation of military plans without the strictest governmental control. There should be no federal force until there was a federal government. This project was also shelved. Cooperation for defence

* New South Wales did send a group of militiamen from the New South Wales Lancers for training in Aldershot in late 1898. No other Australian colony appears to have taken advantage of the offer. Members of the Lancers were in Britain when the Boer War began.
between federationists stopped short at the Australian Auxiliary Squadron and the defence of Thursday Island and King George's Sound, both of which were accomplished under the aegis of the British government. 31

Would the premiers accept the need for uniform military law and regulations throughout the Empire? This question had profound implications. Common military law was essential for the induction of colonial military units in the British army. Some Australian nationalists, particularly the radicals from Victoria, felt that their sturdy and independent troops should not be asked to suffer the unmanly servility nor be subject to the harsh punishments they thought resulted from service under the British Army Act and the Queen's Regulations. Most of their troops were citizen-soldiers, members of militia and volunteer units. They therefore had pressed for modifications in British military law. Such objections were given point when Australians were punished severely or shot by the command of British officers during the South African War. The premiers were asked on this occasion merely to agree in general to the principle and take what action they thought fit. Only Laurier and Turner expressed vague approval. 32

Would the colonies agree to a uniformity of arms and equipment? In Australia the guns of fixed defences were of various makes, calibres, and degrees of obsolescence. The same applied to small arms. The premiers of the Australian colonies had agreed in March 1896 to the principle of uniformity of arms. They were now told that the British government would soon offer new small arms at reduced prices. Canada was refitting its forces with a Lee-Enfield magazine rifle. Australia could at least convert its single-loading Martini-Henry rifle into a Martini-Enfield rifle and thus change the calibre to .303. However, the Australian premiers, like the others, wished to wait until a positive offer was made to them by the British government. 33

Would the colonies ensure their self-sufficiency in times of war by developing their own ammunition plants? In 1896 the Australian premiers had expressed a desire to establish a cordite factory. At the time they had
to depend upon a private firm in Victoria, the Colonial Ammunition Factory, and the importation of war-like stores. With their desire the Committee had heartily agreed. Yet on this occasion no such measure was approved. Turner's response was characteristic: how could the colonies establish such a factory with their meagre resources? Only Reid pressed for a factory like Canada's. 34

Would the colonies improve the education open to volunteers, militiamen, cadets, and members of the permanent forces? Would the Australasian colonies found a military school on the same lines as Kingston Military College in Canada? Again it was only Reid who was enthusiastic. The reluctance of the other Australian premiers indicated once again that they left military matters to military committees but took little notice of their recommendations. 35

Consideration of naval defence had at least produced agreement on the extension of the area of service of the Australian Auxiliary Squadron and satisfaction by the premiers in the continuation of the Naval Agreement. Consideration of military problems had produced nothing. Nevertheless, the exchanges of opinion were of some use. Once the Boer War had begun, one of many justifications for Australian participation by the despatch of contingents was that the premiers had arrived at a tacit agreement in 1897. This was not true. But the success of the Colonial Conference of 1897 must have played some part in getting the Australian colonies ready to commit themselves to the British cause.

One more matter deserves our attention. It seems strange that George Reid, noted by historians for his ambivalence towards the Australian federation movement, should have grasped so quickly the principles of federal military defence and urged them on his colleagues so insistently. He had of course his own reasons and was aided by men like Major-General Hutton, who as General Officer Commanding the Military Forces of Australia after 1901 attempted to solve the problems the premiers had so readily dismissed. Nevertheless, Reid would have made
an excellent Minister for Defence for the Commonwealth. Defence policy in his hands would have been direct and forceful and substantially different in some respects.

* *

So it was that the pomp and circumstance of the Jubilee did not overawe the Australian premiers. Nor were they beguiled by the vision of organized Empire. Cordial relations with Great Britain they wished to preserve; the freedom to fashion life after their own design they jealously guarded. Colonial autonomy and Imperial unity they felt had been achieved. Both would be perpetuated by sentiment and by consultation through such media as regular conference. Confronted by Chamberlain's schemes, they looked beyond immediate issues to dominant Australian attitudes. Some of the views expressed were colonial; others more nationalist; all reflected various strands in the federation movement. They drew a sharp distinction between the interests of a nation soon to be united and the difficulties of closer formal relations within Greater Britain. Of these the first was the more important. On this understanding, there was no conflict, it seemed, between nationalism and Imperialism and few difficulties that admitted no solution.

In the realms of both policy and attitudes there had come to pass a great change since the eighties, a change which was to guide defence policy in federal parliament — but not before its assumptions had been vindicated in imperial wars.

*  *  *  *
The Jamieson Raid had already introduced many Australians to the problems brewing in South Africa. Colonial response was at first ambivalent: wrongs existed on both sides but the British had blundered. Faith in the democratic rights of the Uitlanders was so balanced against the suspicion that Whitehall held insufficient respect for local autonomy that the Boers emerged as people to be admired for their sturdy independence and simple virtues. Yet once the Kruger telegram had been publicized and Jamieson feted in London, ambivalence and suspicion faded. In support for the British cause lay the seeds of a minor crusade. Colonial attitudes towards the later conflict were those of 1896 compounded and intensified.

From May 1899 until the outbreak of hostilities in October colonial parliaments followed, not led, the public demand for participation in Imperial war. Admiration for the Boer cause was undermined by resolutions of support for the Uitlanders, by condemnations of Krugerism, and by the growing conviction that nowhere within the Empire — nor outside it — should British superiority be questioned. There was no doubt about who should be paramount in South Africa. On the 16th of May, the Age growled:

It never occurs to the Boer that if he had the right to take the land from the natives in the interests of a semi-barbarous settlement, Great Britain has the same right to supersede the Boer in the interests of higher civilization.  

Scenting battle, both professional and citizen troops offered their services as soldiers of the Queen and some premiers informed Chamberlain of the spirit aroused in their colonies. By early September, supporting Milner to the hilt, the Age, like most other daily papers, had decided that war was inevitable. Had not the Boers challenged the military prestige of Britain? Did they not act — albeit with great efficiency — as if Britons could be defeated?

In their ignorance and folly the Boers think they can .... the present troubles therefore ... can only be removed by blood-letting.

Many were already convinced that Australians should assist in this crude surgery. Men had volunteered; war fever was mounting; white feathers were ready for distribution.
Despite agitation at home and appeals from the Uitlander Council abroad, George Reid had, from July 1899, attempted to restrain his fellow premiers. While Kingston suggested direct military assistance or the despatch of the Auxiliary Squadron, Reid, in the midst of an election, maintained that expressions of sympathy for the oppressed British in South Africa would be a sufficient gesture of solidarity. He did, however, agree in August to a conference of military commandants. Chamberlain had already intimated that the War Office would accept the offers of colonial units of 125 men which could be integrated in the British Army. The commandants were adamant that a complete Australian regiment, drawn from all colonies and commanded by Australians, should be sent as a symbol of a nation soon to be federated - if the premiers would agree upon cooperative action. All seemed to await the lead of the senior colony. Reid, however, lost the election without answering the questions that continued to worry him: Was the approaching war just? Did financial interests and the treatment of the Boer states point to an immorality Australians should not condone? His successor, one whit less dubious, sought the comment of Lord Milner who replied that the war "might ... be in a small degree a capitalist's war; but it was also much more. It involves the union or disruption of the Empire." In this spirit, the New South Wales government promised to participate. But no united Australian military contribution was to be made; each colony was to follow its own Imperial destiny. For, impatient at Reid's restraint, Queensland had offered a contingent as Chamberlain had recommended on the 10th of July - three months before the outbreak of war.

During the disasters of November-December 1899 colonial opinion was consolidated. Thereafter, Milner's stance was elevated into the simple proposition enunciated by Edmund Barton: The Empire, right or wrong! The failure of British arms and fear of European intervention justified the enthusiastic acts of those who had committed their governments without parliamentary approval. They and their supporters exulted in Anglo-Saxon superiority, suggested that the nation could not realize its destiny without blood, argued that Australians were fighting a war of secession, and held that their support for Great Britain demonstrated
BRITISH OFFICER : AUSTRALIAN OFFICER

"... a sense of national identity ..."
"... in bush-craft and initiative the future nationalization of the rifle."

N.S.W. Lancers acting as mounted infantry, covering the retirement of the 9th Lancers at the Battle of Belmont, November 1899.
the solidarity of Empire. The silken bonds of Greater Britain were as light as gossamer - but as strong as steel. Others pointed with pride to the colonial contingents arriving in South Africa and the calibre of native-born troops. War correspondents saw in the resourceful Australian citizen-soldier all the heroic qualities lacking in the British. Out of this grew, slowly, a sense of national identity. The occasional pause to pay tribute to the equality of Australian sacrifice irrespective of state often seemed to presage the unity that federation promised. Divisive forces proved more potent. Colonial rivalry and jealousy had led each government and each capital to outvie the other in expressions of loyalty writ large in action. Nor were they all content with involvement in South Africa where Roberts and Kitchener had been cast in Homeric mould by the daily press and children's magazines. The South Australian coastal cruiser, the Protector, was despatched to uphold the integrity of Empire in the Boxer Rebellion. These enthusiasms - Imperial loyalty, national pride, and national identity - and these excesses - Imperial fervour, national chauvinism, and internal rivalry - the colonies passed on to the Commonwealth.

The defeats of November-December 1899 also assisted those who had initially opposed colonial intervention. Appealing to Parkes' stand on the Soudan campaign, Labour members in each parliament, assisted by radicals like H.B. Higgins of Victoria, had denounced the suppression of Boer independence by a malevolent British government largely interested in upholding the interests of corporations on the Rand, denied the claims for British paramountcy, dismissed Imperial fervour as drunken jingoism, and pronounced the war unnecessary, immoral, and unjust. The golden bonds of Empire were as heavy as chains - and as strong as capitalist influence on Whitehall. The opponents did not lack stirring phrases and passionate argument. They lacked an indigenous set of ideas to make the fervent pause; and they lacked support. Within a week resistance had collapsed, most recanted and claimed that Britain and the Empire might now be in sufficient danger to justify a demonstration of Imperial unity. Like nearly all Labour politicians seeking election in federal parliament, W.M. Hughes followed somewhat this course; almost alone among the Liberals,
H.B. Higgins did not. Others remained reserved; they also remained guarded. Such was the fear of unpopularity and the calumny in the charge of disloyalty that lone figures like Cardinal Moran and Professor Wood were left to protest. They did so increasingly in the terms used by Campbell-Bannerman. Yet even this temperate opposition appealing directly to English Liberal tradition was of little avail. The anti-war league these men had formed distributed a petition: only 1,206 signatures were collected. So it was that among the politicians to enter federal parliament were the lone men who resisted and the few who remained reserved. There they were to review their strength and their stand.

A notable victim of this widespread impulse to war was the Bulletin. Foremost among the opponents of intervention, its circulation figures dropped disastrously. Not even a partial admission that those who thought the cause just had a right to fight restored popularity. Then, when a special appeal was made to bushmen so that units could be raised from the best Australian stock, the Bulletin felt once more on firm ground. No bona fide settler, no stereotype of national virtue would volunteer for service as a "Cohentinger". Confidentially, it predicted:

... the bulk of Australian bushmen, ready enough to fight in the defence of Australia, would know themselves disgraced if they permitted themselves to be exported to shoot Boers or any other race fighting for their own country - their Australia - against syndicates and politicians. 40

But the bushmen came in their thousands, and continued until the declaration of peace to demand the right to serve as soldiers of the Queen. The Bulletin was compelled to conduct a rearguard action declaring that they were city men giving false occupations, that they were economic conscripts seeking bread through service, and that the colonial governments were ready to use Imperial money to employ the unemployed. Finally, it shielded its views behind reprints of English "pro-Boer" propaganda. Thus was the prime nationalist newspaper compelled to re-examine the assumptions of the eighties. Thus did it slowly acknowledge that national sentiment was somehow inextricably interwoven with Imperial fervour - an apparent paradox that Reid and his colleagues thought they had solved in
1897, that Richard Jebb was to explore in his *Colonial Nationalism*, and
that Alfred Deakin sought to enrich after 1905.

In all some 16,000 Australians served with the British forces
in South Africa. Why did they volunteer? Would they do so again for home
defence or Imperial service? What did their response involve for future
military policy? Many contemporaries gave short confident answers:
Loyalty! Yes! Everything! A few perceptive observers were, however,
more reserved.

Three general reasons, they suggested, could be given for this
response to the call to arms. Many miners had spoken openly of the need to
assist their mates on the Rand; other men talked vaguely of the British
cause; more mentioned the excitement in each of the capitals which had led
to full-throated celebration at their departure and random accusations of
cowardice at those left behind; a few touched on their families' venera-
tion of the Queen. A few officers had examined the causes of the conflict;
more spoke of the need to represent Australian federation in the British
world; many dwelled upon the potency of colonial rivalry - and made sure
they would be attached to British, not other Australian, units. Whatever
the term meant, then, "a sentimental feeling of patriotism" was clearly
involved. As important was the lure of adventure and the promise of
settlement in South Africa - or recognition by colonial governments on
return from the wars. The depression and droughts of the nineties had not
only kept many men single but led to restless wandering for work and for
other opportunities. Colonial borders had been no barrier for this erratic
migration, nor had the seas between Australia, New Zealand, South Africa
- and even Hong Kong. If some had been "economic conscripts" as the
Bulletin had argued, most were in search of far more than bread. The
legend of Breaker Morant - which will be presently examined - demonstrated
one aspect of this. Conflict on the veldt became for many a romp; for
some it did satisfy a sense of adventure; but only a few were allowed to
take the land grants Milner had offered. The third general reason offered
lay in the need that many felt to escape the boredom and the onerous
conditions of the honest labour so many politicians praised. This was
particularly evident in the elder sons of farming families who saw no prospects for themselves and were untouched by the golden myths of the bona fide settler. Equally untouched by the great Australian democratic experiment were thousands of clerks. One military officer who had organized the despatch of eighty groups of men from Melbourne later concluded that such had been the failure of the states to fulfil their vague promises and such had been the effect of the Commonwealth decision to dissuade Australian settlement in South Africa that the response to another Imperial war in 1903 "would have been very different". Nevertheless, even he acknowledged that men would serve in the Australian peacetime citizen forces - if they were well-paid; that thousands would again volunteer for Imperial campaigns - if the conditions of service were clarified; and that most would rush to arms to defend their country - if it was really in danger. 41

The response of 1899 had also led many contemporaries to believe that the problem of military resources for federal defence had been solved. And although no systematic record was kept, many were impressed by the rapidly broadening social base of improvised units organized for the later contingents. Peacetime regiments included between eight and twenty percent skilled or semi-skilled workers depending on locality. In general all were led by citizen officers with careers in the professions, commerce, the land, and the civil service. The first contingents, small in size, had been drawn from these sources and from the permanent forces. Yet within a month of the outbreak of hostilities larger contingents were being organized from unmarried volunteers with no military experience whose only qualifications were a high level of physical fitness and the ability to ride and shoot. In New South Wales, for instance, at least two-thirds of the 6,000 men who served overseas had had no contact with the military forces at the time of their enlistment. The most fragmentary evidence suggests that the composition of this second wave of volunteers may have resembled the following pattern:
Professional .... .... .... .... 8%
Small Business .... .... .... .... 5%
Artisans .... .... .... .... 30%
Clerks .... .... .... .... 15%
Farmers .... .... .... .... 23%
Skilled, Semi-Skilled Workers .... 5%
Labourers .... .... .... .... 5%
Soldiers and Policemen .... .... 9%

Other evidence suggests that of the two major groups, "farmers" were often the first sons, not land holders in their own right, and that the "artisans" were very often craftsmen in the country towns or those who had, within one generation, shifted to the cities. Later contingents, particularly the bushman units, included a higher proportion of workmen who gave as their occupation: "miner"; "boundary-rider"; "shearer"; or "bushman". The Age was among the first to draw one lesson for the future. It saw in bushcraft and initiative on the veldt the future nationalization of the automatic rifle. A national army could be improvised within a month of the declaration of an emergency:

The Australian levies which went to the war were raw from the plough, the desk, the cattle-run. Yet with instinct, the spirit of individual initiative, and a few weeks of drill they formed a body of soldiers equal to anything that Lord Roberts ever commanded ... 42

Others went further, and began to hope that the national army of the future would include all classes and not be marked by the exclusiveness of the colonial regiments. But the prime military problem was clearly to devise a scheme which would satisfy both the Age and the incipient nationalists without leading to chaos and improvisation in time of war — and which would ensure forces more effective than those sent to South Africa.

For the efficiency of those "Australian levies" had often been obscured from contemporaries by the decorous eulogies of British commanders. It was obscured further by the attachment, division, and capricious regrouping of small colonial units in the huge and often incoherent British military machine. That Australians, both trained and untrained, were able to display considerable potential as fighting troops there was no doubt. The action of the trained men at Diamond Hill and the untrained at Elands River demonstrated that the colonials could fight valiantly under
British direction or from fixed positions. There was more doubt about their ability for independent action in fluid warfare. During the first phases of the war they had played very little part. When Australians claimed Poplar Grove and Paardeburg in their battle honours, they had in fact fought in very small units playing subsidiary roles. Though later contingents were larger, it was the practice to place them on the lines of communication to enforce discipline and improve military efficiency. This was followed by patrol work, usually in quiet areas. And when they were committed to battle, it usually was in pursuit of a retreating enemy. The deduction that Australian troops could do battle on their own, especially against a professionally trained enemy, was not at any time justified.

War, as Clausewitz had observed, is not a continual act of violence. It was this that many Australians found difficult to understand and to tolerate. Combat in the open against an unseen enemy was often an excitingly unreal experience; skirmishes were sudden and shortly over; but the waiting, the incessant drives against Boer commandos, and the trials of guerrilla warfare - nearly always under British direction - revealed weaknesses in colonial fighting material. Australian officers were often deprived of experience in strategy, tactics, regimental administration, and responsibilities for large bodies of troops. Many left Australia inexperienced and returned untested. Like their men, they often smarted under the treatment of British superiors, especially as they were left the menial task of discovering the appropriate means of training and disciplining the inexperienced troops in their care. And this, particularly in the later phases of the war, they found difficult. The number of courts martial rose alarmingly. Insubordination of a serious nature and neglect of duty indicated how inefficient Australians could be as soldiers and how low their morale could become when faced with the varied stresses of war. Riot, looting, and the intimidation of civilians amply justified the myth of the wild colonial boys. Romanticism obscured the immediate problem of how such men could best be trained as efficient and reliable soldiers in the military forces of the new Commonwealth.
As Prime Minister responsible for national policy, Edmund Barton had soon to face the political problems of colonial intervention. As first General Officer Commanding the Commonwealth Military Forces, Major-General Hutton returned to Australia to solve federal military problems in the light of experience in the Boer War.