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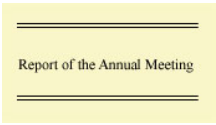

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Volume 43, Number 1, 1964

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300446ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/300446ar

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Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0317-0594 (print)
1712-9095 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Tucker, A. V. (1964). Politics and the Army in the Unionist Government in England, 1900-1905. *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada*, *43*(1), 105–119. https://doi.org/10.7202/300446ar

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POLITICS AND THE ARMY IN THE UNIONIST GOVERNMENT IN ENGLAND 1900-1905

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Of all the results of the Boer War for British politicians, none were more complex or more immediate than those which revealed the defects in British military organization. The British Empire had been augmented by 4,754,000 square miles since 1870, containing some 88,000,000 of subject peoples;[1] yet the military power to maintain imperial authority had not developed in proportion. Writing to Henry Asquith in 1906, in order to impress upon him the importance of imperial defence, Viscount Esher stated that in spite of territorial expansion, in spite of the greater rapidity of transit by sea and railway, and of more efficient communication by telegraphy, yet the "imperial distribution of our military forces is much upon the same plan as it was at the close of the Napoleonic wars."[2] Whatever the exaggeration in this criticism, the fact could not be denied that in 1899 a haphazard army of merely 60,000 Boer farmers had driven the British War Office to the very limit of its resources. The years were clearly over when small imperial expeditions could be assumed as the ultimate burden likely to be placed on the British army.

The Stanhope Memorandum of 1888, which governed British military policy until after the Boer War, listed the sending of an army corps to Europe as the least likely obligation to be placed upon the British army.[3] In 1890 Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Secretary of State for War from 1892-95, could say that British troops would not be involved in a European war at any time in the foreseeable future.[4] Throughout the eighteen nineties, while two army corps totalling 60,000 men were maintained in readiness at Aldershot, the primary function of the regular army was to provide replacements for British troops sent home from India, while coaling stations and imperial fortresses required only slight additions to sustain their garrisons.[5] After the Boer War these priori-

1 J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism, A Study* (London, 1902), 15-26.

2 Esher to Asquith, 1 March 1906, PRO/CAB 17/94.

3 The Memo was printed 1 June 1891, and may be found in *Parliamentary Papers* (1901), XXXIX [Cd. 607], 255. See also the speech of George Wyndham in the House of Commons, 1 Feb. 1900, 4 Hansard, LXXVIII, 322.

4 See his statement in the Report of the Hartington Commission, *Parliamentary Papers* (1890), XIX [C. 5979], 1. Parts of it are quoted in J. A. Spender, *Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman* (London, 1923), I, 118-19.

5 War Office Memo, 11 May 1903, in Report of the Royal Commission on the Militia and Volunteers (Norfolk Commission), *Parliamentary Papers* (1904), XXXI [Cd. 2064], Appendix A.

ties had to be changed, and the changes involved demands for which the British army was clearly unprepared.

In the first place, the number of troops eventually sent to South Africa had not nearly been anticipated. In February, 1900, when Lord Roberts requested a greater number of trained soldiers, he was told none were ready.[6] Britain was already denuded of troops, even of those who could defend the country against invasion. European reaction to the War had revealed an animosity which made it impossible to rule out the need for more adequate defence of the United Kingdom.[7] Above all, what of the security of India? If Russia were to divert attention from her difficulties in the East — difficulties which became ever more apparent by 1904; if Russia were then to take advantage of apparent British military weakness, a reserve of regular troops was essential for safeguarding the Northwest frontier. But if such a force were sent, what would be left of the regular army at home, either for defence or for additional contingencies? Had the solution lain simply in increasing the size of the army, or in relying upon the navy, there would have been few problems worth serious study by the historian. Most books on this short period do indeed gloss over the military controversy as inconsequential by comparison with the reforms of Haldane later.[8] But there is still a central question which needs explication.

The challenge of home and imperial defence raised a number of profound difficulties which went to the heart of British government and politics. The Conservative party, priding itself in its care for Empire, with so many ties to the army and to the court, could have been expected both to examine and resolve the question of more comprehensive military organization. Yet the Unionist Government of Lord Salisbury and Arthur Balfour, so strongly re-elected in 1900, floundered badly on the shoals of army reform and was forced to admit defeat in 1905, leaving basic problems of defence and military policy to be met far more successfully by its Liberal successor. Why should the Conservative Party or the Unionist Government have failed where a Liberal Government succeeded? The recent release of the Balfour and the Sydenham Papers makes this question well worth pursuing in greater detail. They place in clearer focus the vital relationship between politics and military organization during those five years. Broadly speaking,

[6] *Ibid.*, (1904), XXX [Cd. 2061], 3.

[7] Minute of the Committee of Imperial Defence on the possibility of invasion, with commentary by Sir George Clarke, BM, Add. MSS., 49700. Balfour Papers, fos. 43-51.

[8] The exception to this judgment is John K. Dunlop, *The Development of the British Army, 1899-1914,* (London, 1938). It still provides the most detailed description of the changes and controversies of these years, and contains a fair tribute to what *was* achieved in military reform. But the research is based chiefly on Blue Books, on the Army Debates from Hansard, and on the Journal of the Royal United Service Institution. All of it is published and official. The private papers and the minutes of the C.I.D., were not available to Colonel Dunlop in 1938.

what they reveal is a twofold answer. First of all, British institutions of defence had not developed with the expansion of imperial frontiers. Direction from the centre was needed, which could only have come from the cabinet. But the cabinet by custom took a negligible interest in matters of defence, leaving problems to be resolved separately by War Office or Admiralty. The result was a lack of co-ordination and interest which could prove exhausting for the politician who accepted the War Office as a challenge to reform an imperial military system. The temptation was great to make that system the result of deduction from comprehensive, strategic principles, as the Germans seemed so capable of doing; but any such attempt was bound to depend on support from within the government itself. That dependence leads on to the second answer. While the need for a settled military policy was evident by 1903, and much serious thought was being directed to the subject, yet policy was at the same time vulnerable to the chaotic condition within the Unionist Government, a condition which gave to politics a direct influence over military planning. These two divisions will be examined separately in this paper, though from time to time they must overlap.

—I—

Laying down strategic concepts of imperial military needs had never been one of the vital functions of the War Office. Domination by the Adjutant-General's division had gradually imposed an administrative character on the work of most officers within its walls. The effect was to involve far too many high-ranking officers "in the business of purely peace routine," so that when they did emerge to take command in the field they were likely to lead with the caution and excessive care of Buller in South Africa.[9] Without a strategic section, there were no high-ranking staff officers whose duty it was to integrate imperial responsibilities with those of home defence. The Director of Military Intelligence wrote in 1892 : "I have never been consulted regarding the scheme of mobilization for home defence, and have never heard of anything important until it was actually carried out."[10]

These defects in planning were due ultimately to the nature of authority over the War Office of the Secretary of State for War and to his relationship with the First Lord of the Admiralty. Only a portion of the War Office was run by civil servants. On the financial and clerical side the Secretary of State wielded a direct authority, and in these vital

[9] Sir George Clarke to Balfour, 2 Feb. 1906, BM, Add. MSS., 49702. Balfour Papers. See also Sir Gerald Ellison, "Lord Roberts and the General Staff", *Nineteenth Century and After*, CXII (1932), 722-32. Albert Tucker, "Army and Society in England 1870-1900," *Journal of British Studies*, II (1963), 119-22.

[10] General Chapman to Sir Henry Brackenbury, 2 Dec. 1892, PRO/WO 106/16.

areas the civil element dominated the War Office.[11] But all the work of recruiting, training, and equipping the Army was in the hands of soldiers whose subordination to the Secretary of State could never be the same as that of civil servants. To a degree the Secretary of State had to rely on his military staff, a fact which was more or less apparent depending on the person who held the seals of the War Office.[12] And since the officers were bound by a tradition which ignored the role of a strategic section, and politicians responsible for the War Office were generally preoccupied with economy, then military thought at the very top of the army tended to remain pragmatic at best.[13] Certainly, also, it was uninfluenced by naval strategy. The two offices of War and Admiralty had little contact with each other; not even in the cabinet were they forced to co-ordinate their responsibilities. The cabinet was indeed by the end of the nineteenth century composed of heads of departments, each of whom maintained autonomy within his own sphere of departmental administration.[14] Whatever the complexity of questions connected with imperial and home defence, they were not exceptional enough to be placed above or apart from this notion of departmental autonomy. The Colonial Defence Committee provides an excellent illustration.

Formed in 1885 as a result of the Report of the Caernarvon Commission, this Committee combined representatives of the Admiralty, the War Office, and the Colonial Office. It was originally to "consider representations as to their defence from colonies for which the Royal Commission on Colonial Defence had made no provision." The number of questions referred to it inevitably increased; representatives of the Treasury and of the India Office were added in 1888, and a trained soldier in engineering — the Inspector-General of Fortifications — acted continously as president until 1903. By then the Committee had issued nearly 680 reports and had defined the strategic condition of every colony in the Empire. Its work provided the nearest that British governments had come to a foundation for imperial strategy.[15] Yet in substance the Colonial Defence Committee was the creature of departments. They initiated all questions referred to it; members were not allowed to vote in meetings; and every phase of a report was referred back to each department for approval. No report was final until it had been approved by all of the departments represented, and they alone took action individually

[11] Clarke to J. Sandars, 25 Feb. 1904, BM, Add. MSS., 49700 Balfour Papers.

[12] Report of a Select Committee of the House of Commons to Inquire into War Office Reorganization (Dawkins Committee), *Parliamentary Papers* (1901), XL [Cd. 580], 4.

[13] Memoranda by Sir George Clarke, Jan. 1906, BM, Add. MSS., 50836 Sydenham Papers. And Feb. 1906, PRO/CAB 17/94.

[14] J. P. Mackintosh, *The British Cabinet* (London, 1962), 253-54. B. E. Dugdale, *Arthur James Balfour* (London, 1936), I, 137.

[15] Full details are to be found in PRO/CAB 17/93. W. C. B. Turnstall, "Imperial Defence 1870-97", *Cambridge History of the British Empire*, III, ch. 7.

as they saw fit. The Committee possessed no powers of supervision or control. Its functions were simply consultative and its members were never more than soldiers and civil servants acting on instructions from higher officials. When, therefore, the Adjutant-General decided to withdraw War Office participation in 1892, he could not be checked and the Committee ended as the victim of departmental jealousy, felt particularly from within the War Office.[16] In 1904 it was absorbed as a subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defence, which was by then making a real beginning to counter departmental separation.

The first secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, Sir George Clark, said in 1905 that one of its functions was to provide "a gentle pressure on Departments without interference."[17] Though barely two years old by the time Balfour resigned late in 1905, yet the C.I.D., under Balfour's direction, had superseded all other bodies which had attempted co-ordination on matters of imperial defence. Five cabinet ministers and five military and naval officers constituted its membership. Preoccupied with problems of strategy and organization, its secretary worked directly under the Prime Minister, kept elaborate minutes, and referred details back to the Colonial Defence Committee. The powers of the C.I.D., it is true, were also essentially consultative. Any department head, in addition to the prime minister, could refer questions for its deliberation, and its decisions took the form only of recommendations to the Cabinet. Their execution depended entirely on the department concerned. The authority of the prime minister, however, and the work of its secretariat gave the Committee a central position which induced naval and military experts to communicate with ministers of state and with each other in a far more effective way than ever before.[18] Hitherto, said Clarke, "there was no link between Departments of State as a whole, and no machinery for harmonizing their action except that provided by the Cabinet, largely occupied with domestic affairs. There were no regular

[16] General Chapman to Sir Henry Brackenbury, 8 Sept. 1892, WO 106/16.

[17] Clarke to Balfour, 20 May 1905, BM, Add. MSS., 49701. Balfour Papers. The most recent critical discussion of the C.I.D. in its early years is John P. Mackintosh, "The Role of the Committee of Imperial Defence Before 1914," *E.H.R.*, LXXVII (1962), 490-503.

[18] Basic sources for the beginning of the C.I.D. may be found in: PRO/CAB 17/94; Balfour to Lansdowne, 24 Aug. 1895; Balfour to Arnold-Forster, 28 Oct. 1903, in BM, Add. MSS., 49727 and 49722. Balfour Papers. His letter to Lansdowne shows that the form of the C.I.D. was already in his mind at that date, and suggests that if the Defence Committee of the Cabinet did not develop, it was because Salisbury and not Balfour, was Prime Minister. Salisbury's limited definition of the Defence Committee is to be found in a Minute of three typed pages, 11 Dec. 1895, Salisbury Papers (Special Correspondence, Fitzmaurice), Christ Church College Library, Oxford. Balfour's vital contribution is duly emphasized in: B. E. Dugdale, *Balfour*, I, 365; Franklyn A. Johnson, *Defence by Committee* (London, 1960), ch. 2; Maurice, Lord Hankey, *The Supreme Command* (London, 1961), I, ch. 5; and W. C. B. Tunstall, "Imperial Defence 1897-1914", *C.H.B.E.*, III, ch. 15.

means of settling interminable paper controversies between Departments, which frequently led only to waste of time."[19]

This lack was now to be filled by a Committee the functions of which were intended as a parallel to those of a General Staff. It would direct the continuous study of imperial resources, project the policies and calculate the forces required, and co-ordinate the work of different departments in the preparation for war. The object, said the Esher Committee in 1904, "should be to secure for the British Empire .... the immense advantages which the General Staff has conferred upon Germany."[20] With the establishment of a secretariat for the Defence Committee in that same year, there seemed little reason to doubt that a means had at last been found to develop and sustain an imperial strategy within the context of parliamentary government and the cabinet system. The Committee of Imperial Defence was undoubtedly Arthur Balfour's most notable achievement. What, then, went wrong ?

However substantial were the powers of the Committee or the abilities of its members, the Boer War had revealed that imperial strategy was involved only in high sounding words so long as the British army was not large enough or the War Office organized to plan for various contingencies. Strategy could only emerge from specific problems. There were four principal areas of the world where British troops must be maintained in some numbers. They were: Egypt, India, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. Distant requirements came first. The Stanhope Memo of 1888 had been vague about this priority, with too much emphasis on home defence. It was superseded by a new statement in May, 1903, drawn up by the Secretary of State for War, St. John Brodrick, the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts, and the Director of Military Intelligence, Sir William Nicholson.[21] This new War Office Memo stressed the oversea duties of the army and listed them as fourfold. The garrisons of India and of naval bases must be maintained; reinforcements kept ready to defend any land frontier, from Canada to the northwest frontier of India; small expeditionary forces provided to meet local attacks; and troops trained annually to replace those returning. When Lord Esher described the basic premise of his Committee on War Office Reconstitution in December, 1903, he said it was laid down by the prime minister "that any organic change in the constitution of the Army must be approached from the point of view of Indian requirements in the event of war with

[19] Clarke to Balfour, note on C.I.D., 1905, in BM, Add. MSS., 50836. Sydenham Papers.

[20] Report of a Committee on Reconstitution of the War Office, *Parliamentary Papers* (1904), VIII [Cd. 1932], 4.

[21] Report of the Royal Commission on the Militia and the Volunteers, *Parliament Papers* (1904), XXX [Cd. 2061], questions 1-9, evidence of Sir William Nicholson; and *Ibid.*, XXXI [Cd. 2064], App. A.

Russia." That would make the largest demand on the military resources of the Empire, leaving all other demands subsidiary.[22]

Responsibilities in India, however, could not remain separate from the occupation of South Africa and Egypt. To meet the total of these obligations the War Office estimated in 1903 that at least 288,000 regular troops must be maintained. If home defence were provided for, then an additional 60,000 troops were required. On paper, these numbers already existed; they were even exceeded; but when the medically unfit and the extremely young and untrained were deducted, then the establishment of regular and reserve troops was 35,000 short.[23] This was not a large figure, hardly cause for alarm in a time of certain peace, except that it touched only the surface of the problem. Numbers alone said nothing about the quality and diversity of these troops, about the lack of training among the reserves, about the regiments that would have to be filled with volunteers from the militia in emergency. Above all, the figures revealed little about the confused and negative consequences for the army of reforms attempted first by St. John Brodrick and then by H. O. Arnold-Forster.

Brodrick succeeded to the War Office late in 1900, when Lansdowne moved to the Foreign Office. He was a logical choice, since he had previously served as Financial Secretary and as Parliamentary Under-Secretary in the War Office. His new tenure was to be strongly influenced by the succession as Commander-in-Chief in 1901 of Lord Roberts, just returned from South Africa; and by the Report that same year of the Dawkins Committee on War Office Reorganization. Even before this last was published, Brodrick set out to meet one of its main recommendations. The war in South Africa was revealing the effect on officers of "a vast system of minute regulations," which tended to destroy their initiative. One possible solution was to delegate more effective authority away from the War Office out to the General Officers Commanding Districts.[24] Such a suggestion fitted also with Brodrick's desire to meet the criticism that the auxiliary forces in Britain were too far removed from the regular forces in training and organization. He therefore established a plan by which the country was divided into six districts, each one containing an army corps of three divisions broken down into six brigades of four battalions each. An army corps would thus consist of twenty-four battalions the officers of which would receive their regulations and orders only indirectly from the War Office. In addition to its decentralization, the scheme also had the advantage of combining regular with auxiliary troops, since only three of the corps were to consist of regulars while the other three included a varied number of militia regiments.

22 B.M., Add. MSS, 49718, fo. 24-37. Balfour Papers.
23 Norfolk Commission, App. A.
24 Dawkins Committee, 2, 17.

It was an arrangement which might also relate recruiting to territorial organization. Certainly the scheme had Roberts' approval and on paper it approached the efficiency of its German model.[25]

In practice, however, such a plan depended on the units being complete in their establishments. The training of a division could mean little if battalions within it were at only half their nominal strength. The defect did not seem immediately urgent because even in South Africa imperial needs were not likely to lead to the despatch of a whole division. Yet for the organization by corps to take hold on the military mind, a consistent flow of recruits was required in a country where conscription was out of the question. Brodrick therefore supplemented his scheme of six army corps with a programme of three-year enlistments. Recruiting was indeed his most urgent problem. While the nominal character of his corps might be gradually improved, so that fact would in time accord more nearly with fiction, yet the prospect of solution was a distant one, while each year immediate demands were made on the army for Indian replacements. From September to May the troop-ships went and returned and the soldiers had to be ready. Ideally, they should have been at least twenty years of age, have had two years training behind them, with four years of their enlisted period yet to transpire. To combine this requirement with that of his army corps, Brodrick tried an innovation.

Since 1870 the British soldier had enlisted for a six-year term with the colours followed by six in the reserve. Two-thirds of his colour-service was spent in India, Egypt, Malta, or South Africa. It was this foreign service which discouraged recruiting, in spite of the fact that it made the British soldier the best paid in the world.[26] In order to attract young men as soldiers, without adding to their pay and so competing with manufacturers, there was begun also in the eighteen-seventies the practice of enlisting a few men for three years with the colours who would then spend nine years in the reserve. Brodrick took this practice and made it a rule on the understanding that once men were in the army they might be encouraged and paid to extend their colour-service, thus giving to their officers a means of selecting the better men over the drunken and the derelict.

If Brodrick's plan had succeeded, it might have been the most significant reform since the days of Cardwell and have forestalled the achievement of Haldane later. But there were inherent weaknesses in Brodrick's reform which hope and effort could not remove. The militia seldom reached its establishment, many of its soldiers joined the regulars,

[25] David James, *Lord Roberts*, (London, 1954), 275-76; John K. Dunlop, *The Development of the British Army 1899-1914*, ch. 7.

[26] PRO/WO 105/43. Roberts Papers. Ian Hamilton, *Compulsory Service* (London, 1911), 65.

and as a result the auxiliary forces could not be integrated into the army corps. Indian demands reduced those corps to little more than they had been prior to the Boer War. The fundamental defect of the whole plan, however, lay in the expectation that three-year men could be induced to extend their service to seven years. By 1904 it was clear that instead of seventy-five percent extending their service, only fiifteen per cent had done so. Drafts for India had, therefore, to be sent from among the short-service men who, after training, might have only ten months left in their enlistment.[27] The results were both expensive and chaotic. Rotation of troops had to be accelerated, their effectiveness was diminished, plans were more difficult of prediction, and this at a time when British soldiers and diplomats could not be certain of Russia's designs toward Afghanistan. Combined with the reports of commissions and committees being prepared or published between 1901 and 1903, Brodrick's failure made his position untenable.[28] He was nevertheless an important member of the cabinet and could not be lightly dismissed. Nor must any impression of emergency be created over affairs in the War Office. For some months behind the scenes his replacement was sought, and when Chamberlain precipitated the cabinet crisis in the fall of 1903, the occasion was almost handed to Balfour to remove Broderick to the India Office and replace him as Minister of War by Hugh Oakley Arnold-Forster.

For many at the War Office, in the cabinet, or at the court, the change was a welcome relief. Brodrick's scheme by the summer of 1903 seemed to threaten breakdown in the whole military system of the empire. Arnold-Foster insisted that he had the answer; he had written on military affairs since the eighteen eighties and claimed to have studied the organization of every army in Europe.[29] This is not to say he was the Government's first choice for the War Office; he was in fact their last. But once in office he became the man with a mission, determined to prove the praticability of those ideas which hitherto had appeared only in print. As a price for being allowed to proceed with his plans for the army, he was asked at the outset to acquiesce in the project of the Esher Committee for reconstitution of the War Office.

I was an odd arrangement — a Committee of three men (Viscount Esher, Sir John Fisher and Sir George Clarke), having no connection

27 Clarke to Balfour, 1 July 1905 and 30 Sept. 1905, Add. MSS., 49702. Sir Almeric Fitzroy, *Memoirs* (London, n.d.), I, 203; Arthur, Lord Haliburton, *Army Organization: The Arnold-Forster Scheme* (London, 1905); and Dunlop, *Development of the British Army,* 160-61.

28 Fitzroy, *Memoirs,* I, 121; Basil Collier, *Brasshat* (London, 1961), 78-79.

29 Arnold-Forster to Balfour, 15 June 1897, Add. MSS., 49722. 4 Hansard LXXVIII, 345, 1 Feb. 1900; "I have been contending for years past that the system we have adopted has this fatal fault: that the very moment it comes into operation, and is called upon to do the thing for which it was created, it must instantly and necessarily fail."

with either parliament or War Office, on which the Secretary of State for War had no membership, setting out with the mandate of king, prime minister, and cabinet, to make proposals which must be made effective as soon as they were printed.[30] This very authority, however, exercised clear of entangling influences from the War Office, guaranteed a greater measure of success than any reform between Cardwell and Haldane. We begin, said Esher, constructing from the top, assuming the existence of the Defence Committee and setting up then a permanent secretariat and a new Army Council.[31]

The difficulties were minor. Balfour himself had to be straightened out by Esher on the role of the secretary to the Defence Committee. If the latter were to act as the General Staff of the Empire, asked Balfour, would not its secretary cause confusion with the first members of the army and navy ?[32] Would not his status be like that of a German Moltke and so come into conflict with the officer holding the new military office of Chief of the Staff ? Not at all, replied Esher, since he would attend meetings and keep minutes but would not be a member of the Committee. His function would simply be to ensure that when naval and military members presented their plans to the prime minister, they would "find him posted in all the material conditions of the problems under discussion."[33] Similarly, in establishing a new Army Council on the lines of the Board of Admiralty, the Esher Committee faced the difficulty of removing the existing higher military staff. It was Esher's insistence and his semi-royal, semi-official position which made this possible. Despite the imputation of acting with insensitive haste, the Committee succeeded in preventing intrigue and compromise, so that by the spring of 1904 the office of Commander-in-Chief was at last abolished and the four military members appointed who were to constitute the Army Council. The first member was the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant-General Sir Neville Lyttleton, the second the Adjudant-General, Major-General C. W. Douglas, the third the Quartermaster-General, Major-General H. Plumer, and the fourth the Master-General of the Ordnance, Major-General Sir J. Wolfe-Murray. Meanwhile, Arnold-Forster proceeded with his reforms and presented them to the House on July 14, 1904. He had implicitly accepted the Esher reorganization, even to the details of selecting the Army Council, and he would now offer his own plans for an army which he expected would break with the Cardwell tradition and accord more efficiently with the high purpose of imperial rule.

[30] Arnold-Forster to Balfour, 16 Oct. 1903, Add. MSS., 49722. Esher persuaded the King that Arnold-Forster "had better not be upon it." *Journals and Letters* (London, 1934), II, 26.

[31] Esher to Balfour, 30 Dec. 1903, Add. MSS., 49718.

[32] Balfour to Esher, 14 Jan. 1904, *Ibid.*

[33] Esher to Balfour, 16 Jan. 1904, *Ibid.*

Very simply, what he proposed was based on his conviction that he knew exactly what was wrong with the present Army. There was no striking force ready for any declaration of war; even a small expedition depended on the reserve. The reserve in turn could only be used with parliamentary sanction and even then it was a substitute for the large number of non-effective men with the colours, rather than a supplementary or additional force. The three-year system of enlistment made the provision of foreign drafts almost impossible unless more infantrymen extended their service. The militia was deficient by 34,000 men and could not be improved to long as it was the principal recruiting ground for the army. These were all sound criticisms which could not be refuted.[34]

As solution he proposed to reduce the regular army from 161 to 142 battalions by cutting away the 19 least efficient units. He would then take 104 of these battalions and turn them into a general service army for overseas service. The other 38 battalions would be fused into a home service army with 33 battalions from the militia, making a total territorial army of 71 battalions. Soldiers in the general service army would enlist for nine years plus three in the reserve, while those in the home army would be recruited for two years plus six in the reserve. He would do away with the linked and double battalions, training men for service abroad in larger regimental depots and so dividing his general service army that it would have 26 battalions always at home and 78 in imperial possessions, where the men would have a continuous foreign service of at least seven years. The militia he would abolish, leaving the Volunteers as the only auxiliary force, and they would be reduced from their present nominal establishment of 350,000 to 200,000 men, one-third of whom would be organized into a field army of better paid and more efficient men capable of expansion in time of war.[35] Such in essence was the second major change which the British Army was supposed to face in three years. The central idea of the plan was the provision of adequate military defence for the Empire as a whole through a more professional army, in more reliable numbers, than the Cardwell system had been able to secure. Understandably, it was a former civil-servant of the War Office, a supporter of the Cardwell reforms, who printed the most detailed and lucid criticism. In a little book called *Army Organization: the Arnold-Forster Scheme,* Lord Haliburton said: "It proposes to abolish the Militia; to largely reduce the Volunteers, to split the British Infantry . . . into two . . . separate armies . . . , to revolutionise the regimental system . . . , to largely diminish its fighting strength, and to reduce the efficiency of two-thirds of the Infantry below any standard heretofore known to the British Army." But Haliburton need not have worried unduly. The plan came to nought. It did not indeed receive

[34] 4 Hansard CXXXVIII, 14 July 1904. Mary Arnold-Forster, *Hugh Oakley Arnold-Forster* (London, 1910), 236-37.

[35] *Ibid.*, 239-40. Arnold Forster to Balfour, 5 May 1904, Add. MSS., 49722.

even the test granted to that of Brodrick. By the time of Balfour's resignation late in 1905, Arnold-Forster had been two years at the War Office, yet his reforms existed only on paper and in his disappointed and rather haunted mind. The reasons for his defeat and failure were largely political, growing out of personal disagreement and political issues within the Conservative Government. These differences must be examined more closely if we are to understand why army reform sprouted such varied and confused stems until Haldane took it in hand.

II

For Arthur Balfour, the party leader, other men would have been preferable in the War Office, men like Esher or Akers-Douglas, the ex-Conservative Whip.[36] Since they refused, Arnold-Forster was the only choice left. In spite of the King's objection that he was not a gentleman, there was a good chance that his military studies would make him an effective war minister. At least he might be expected to prevent army affairs from complicating further the divisions within the cabinet over tariff reform. But Arnold-Forster proved far more doctrinaire than could have been anticipated. And though he approved originally of Sir George Clarke as secretary to the C.I.D., yet he soon developed a suspicion that Clarke was sitting in judgment on all his plans for reform. Certainly Clarke opposed those plans and wrote to Balfour frequently, not only criticizing but offering alternatives of his own.[37] As secretary to the C.I.D., Clarke conceived it one of his functions to give to the prime minister detailed plans for army reform from the light of his long training and experience. He could be deeply hurt if those plans were ignored.

At the same time, Clarke's arguments were enforced by the more prudent but not less articulate criticism of Viscount Esher. Indeed, the letters of Clarke and Esher suggest that they were as much Secretaries for War as was Arnold-Forster himself.[38] Balfour had to arbitrate, always with a view to blocking the fulfilment of Arnold-Forster's scheme yet simultaneously placating him. The only means of combining these two intentions was through the appointment of small and informal committees. Ostensibly their purpose was to reduce the army estimates from thirty million to twenty-five million pounds, and while this reduction was imperative, yet the committees generally included Esher and Clarke, who saw only chaos in Arnold-Forster's plans. "Forgive me," wrote Arnold-Forster when another of these committees was to be appointed,

[36] A number of others refused before Balfour and Edward VII agreed they would have to appoint Arnold-Forster, though he was the least acceptable. See Viscount Esher, *Journals and Letters*, II, 14; and Viscount Chilston, *Chief Whip* (London, 1961), 313-20.

[37] Clarke's correspondence with Balfour is in BM, Add. MSS., 49700-02. Balfour Papers.

[38] Esher to Balfour, Add. MSS., 49718, folios 24-37.

"but I am beginning to feel a little hunted, as if the dogs had been turned loose upon me a little too often."[39]

He had good reason to feel so, especially in relation to Sir George Clarke. The latter wrote to his friend, Valentine Chirol, that the best part of his life was spent "trying to make great and eminent people do what I think is right."[40]

> I have usually failed and the occupation palls. In April of last year when it became clear, even to the Cabinet, that Arnold-Forster's so-called scheme was absolutely impossible, I promptly supplied Mr. A. B. with another. He was impressed but nothing happened. The Arnold-Forster plan was scotched not killed, with the result that nothing has been done. I am quite prepared to reorganize our military forces. I have trained myself for the task, and I have not the faintest chance of being permitted to carry it out. I am tired of pulling wires : . . and while a man of A. B.'s intellect is worth trying to influence, . . . what do you suppose it would be like to try and impress C-B ?

Understandably, Arnold-Forster reached a point early in 1905 where he insisted that the secretary of the C.I.D. must not be allowed to sit in judgment on a great department of state. Balfour had to assure him that neither he nor the C.I.D. wished "to usurp the authority of the Secretary of State for War."[41] Under these circumstances, the C.I.D. could hardly have developed executive powers, whether Balfour had wished it to go that far or not. He had on his hands a most complex challenge — both to develop the C.I.D. and to maintain stability within the organization of the army. The two problems were contradictory given the mind and personality of Arnold-Forster. Balfour could not have both, and for the sake of the army he directed the C.I.D. towards a negative and advisory rather than a positive or executive role over the War Office.

In doing so, Balfour had to rely on the counsel of Sir George Clarke, who kept him continuously informed on issues like the militia and the Army Council. Arnold-Forster's plan for abolishing the militia was sensible in terms of efficiency, but it raised an unexpected opposition from the large number of Tory militia colonels who saw themselves being robbed of social prestige.[42] Their protests were supported by Clarke's letters to Balfour arguing that the militia should be regenerated because of its social importance.[43] Pressures like these led Balfour and the

39 Arnold-Forster to Balfour, 29 Feb. 1904, Add. MSS., 49722.

40 Clarke to Chirol, 14 Sept. 1905. Add. MSS., 50832. Sydenham Papers.

41 Arnold-Forster to Balfour, 31 Jan. 1905 and 3 Feb. 1905; Balfour to Arnold-Forster, 10 Feb. 1905; Add. MSS., 49723. Balfour Papers.

42 A section of the informal Service Committee of the House of Commons waited personally on Balfour in May, 1904, urging him to stop Arnold-Foster from going further with his plans for the militia. See Arnold-Forster's angry letter to Balfour, 5 May, 1904, Add. MSS., 49722.

43 Clarke to Balfour, 28 Dec. 1904. Add. MSS., 49700.

cabinet to decide that Arnold-Forster must not be allowed to carry out his plans for the militia, and they were never included in his proposals before the House of Commons. It was Clarke, too, who warned Balfour that the Army Council might be driven to resignation. His suspicions were well-founded in the clash between Arnold-Forster and Sir Neville Lyttelton, the first Chief of the General Staff. Lyttelton expressed his apprehension at the degree of reform being pressed by Arnold-Forster, and he spoke out publicly. His speech of December 11, 1904, said Arnold-Forster, "makes the continued association of Sir Neville and myself quite out of the question."[44] It was a foolish demand, since Lyttelton had hardly held his office for six months and he was, as Sandars said to his chief, "the brother of a Cabinet Minister and a great friend of many more."[45] The incident drove Balfour to investigate more closely, only to discover that the Army Council would not associate themselves with the proposed changes unless assured of support from both cabinet and House of Commons. Since Balfour could not possibly summon such support, again he had to lead a majority decision in the cabinet that Arnold-Forster not be allowed to initiate recruiting for the two separate armies.

Within a few months, however, the conflict erupted again. In March, 1905, three members of the Army Council sent to the Secretary of State a memorandum which they wished to be presented to the cabinet. In it they expressed strong doubt that two armies could be recruited in Britain, that the casualty in the end would be the "Long Service portion of our Army, upon which the maintenance of our garrisons abroad depends."[46] On these grounds, they implied that unless assured the Arnold-Forster scheme would not be enforced, the cabinet could expect their resignations. With Clarke's help Balfour worked out a compromise proposal, maintaing the *status quo* of the army, which enabled the Army Council to resist the Secretary of State for War until in June, 1905, he again insisted on Lyttelton's resignation. This time, Balfour soothed Arnold-Forster by enabling him to carry within the cabinet the project of converting eight regular battalions into short-service units as an experiment.[47] For the prime minister it was an experiment based on desperation, the last resort to prevent a further crisis. Over the following months he watched and waited, while Arnold-Forster talked of his success; he had "beaten the Cabinet." Resignation of the Government in December, 1905, came to Balfour as a welcome relief.

III

His role as prime minister was over. In it, he had initiated a new step toward the capacity of British governments to study imperial

[44] Arnold-Forster to Balfour, 12 Dec. 1904, Add. MSS., 49722.
[45] Sandars to Balfour, 14 Dec. 1904, Add. MSS., 49762.
[46] Arnold-Forster to Balfour, 16 March 1905, Add. MSS., 49723.
[47] PRO/CAB 17/94, and Clarke to Sandars 10 July 1905 and 17 Nov. 1905, in Add, MSS., 49701-02.

strategy. His achievement may not have been so substantial as his admirers have argued, since the C.I.D. did not develop executive powers over the War Office and the Admiralty. Balfour must nevertheless be considered one of the most intelligent and sensitive men who have ever held the office of British prime minister, and whose energies have been directed to problems of defence. He had no choice but to appoint Arnold-Forster, and he could not have foreseen the latter's conduct. Subsequently, Balfour's tact was outstanding. He understood his War Minister as did few others around him. "The truth is," said Balfour,

> that, though the best of good fellows, he is at once unconsciously inconsiderate of other people's feelings, and unduly sensitive in his own, — a rather unfortunate combination. And he has a most curious habit of considering... an argument not wholly on his side as something in the nature of a personal attack.
>
> He has another curious habit of carrying away from an interview at which he has done all the talking an impression that the person to whom he has talked entirely agrees with him: so that he is perpetually quoting eminent soldiers to me as being among his supporters, though I suspect they look with considerable coldness on many parts of his scheme.[48]

This insight was one of Balfour's finest gifts. It enabled him to step warily in his relations with so doctrinaire and naive a man, while his patience and tact sustained a constitutional approach through the cabinet. If in the course of two years the C.I.D. did not become an instrument of higher strategy above the War Office and the Admiralty, to argue that it should have done so is to see the problem in a vacuum. It may be more historical to conclude that equally essential at the time was the problem of maintaining stability within the War Office and the Army. In light of the personal and political complications which he had to face, Balfour's leadership surely deserves more favourable judgment for having stalled and compromised as long as he did.

[48] Balfour to Esher, 30 July 1904, Add. MSS., 49718.