

A RACE FOR SUPERIORITY IN THE ENGLISH CHANNEL: NAVAL THEORY,
STRATEGY AND DIPLOMACY, 1870-1914

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Abstract

The British Empire is one of the most recognizable icons of the nineteenth century, as is the Royal Navy that built and maintained it. Both the empire and the navy gave the relatively small nation of Britain a disproportionately dominant influence in world diplomacy, which was itself dominated by European politics. However, nothing lasts forever, and during the early twentieth century British dominance was challenged and ultimately declined. Using Royal Navy documents and the works of naval leaders, theorists and historians from the late 1800s and early 1900s allowed a study of the Royal Navy during the nineteenth century. That study offered a better understanding of how British diplomatic power was expressed after 1815 and how it changed between 1870 and 1914. Ultimately, British dominance was based on the Royal Navy, but that dominance was challenged by a growing Germany at the end of the century. Going into the twentieth century Britain survived the German threat, but at the cost of overall dominance.

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Introduction

The British Royal Navy is a large organization with a long and storied history. Its origins stretch back more than five hundred years and it has been a part of such historical events as the defeat of the Spanish Armada under Queen Elizabeth I and of the French under Admiral Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar. Through its role in British colonialism the Royal Navy had a global reach and thus influenced British global relations and diplomacy. Since its inception, the goal of the Royal Navy has been to ensure free trade and passage of ships through control of the seas. During the nineteenth century, Britain became the preeminent global power through the use of the Royal Navy, and that dominance made it easier to carry out its goals. Despite this dominance throughout the century, by World War I, changes in Royal Navy strategies led to a new diplomatic position for Britain. Over the course of the nineteenth century, British diplomacy relied on naval dominance through the global presence of the Royal Navy. The Shifting European balance of power from 1870 to 1914, centering on the rise of Germany, forced the Royal Navy to focus more on the English Channel and to rely on global alliances. Britain's continued diplomatic emphasis on the navy over a diversified military ultimately limited its capability to adapt to modern, large-scale, land wars.

In studying the shift in the European balance of power after 1870 three main factors came into play: diplomacy, overall naval strategy and naval technology. However, in each area the activities of the Royal Navy between 1870 and 1914 were heavily influenced by tradition and the Navy's long history, with many trends beginning around the start of the nineteenth century. Looking back on the nineteenth century is important

because those events built up and laid the groundwork for the events and changes that occurred after 1870.

Throughout the nineteenth century the British used diplomacy, strategy and technology to maintain dominance. British diplomacy consisted of shifting relationships, including military action, with other nations and peoples over the course of the nineteenth century. Royal Navy strategy was largely unchanged for most of the century and only shifted in response to the shifting balance of power after 1870. These new strategies established Royal Navy policy in World War I. Technological innovations made the high death toll of World War I possible, but at the same time some of the technologies developed in the 1890s and early 1900s permanently altered warfare and military technology, even if some effects were not felt until decades later.

One of the more important factors changing British Royal Navy dominance in the 1890s was the way that naval theory really began to play in with diplomacy, strategy and technology. A leading figure in the field was US Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, an American naval officer and theorist who grew up at West Point. During his training, he was exposed to what little naval theory existed, most of which was British, and it was this early exposure that prompted him to write about British sea power and naval theory later in his career. Mahan's works in the 1890s informed national leaders on naval matters and helped to start the conversation about navies at the beginning of the twentieth century. Several other underlying factors influenced British naval and diplomatic power, and how the British dealt with changes in the 1890s. A look at the history of the British government and Royal Navy administration shows the influence shifts in Europe after 1870 had on Britain. At the same time, industrialism and nationalism in the earlier part of

the nineteenth century set the groundwork for the changes experienced after 1870, while the race for colonies in the 1880s revealed tensions which led to more changes between the late 1890s and 1914.

The British government ultimately controlled the Royal Navy, but the interaction between the two bodies was determined by the gradual evolution of the British government as shaped by its history. For many centuries the nation was run solely by a monarch with all of the authority, but a truly representative parliament began to form in the 1500s. The initial foundation of the modern system of a constitutional monarchy took place in 1688 and 1689. Under this system, the elected Parliament ran the nation with some input from the monarch. Power migrated to elected officials in the elected, lower House of Commons, and the appointed, upper House of Lords. Within those two houses, the lower house controlled the budget and was the one from which the Prime Minister, the executive, was drawn. As such, it was the more prominent partner in government. Ultimately, decisions were made by the Prime Minister with the help of his cabinet and possibly input from the reigning monarch, though he must have support in both houses to act. The elected nature that the government evolved to meant that public sentiment drove some policy. Thus, large public support for the navy led to investment in the navy and overseas colonies.

Because of industrialization, new technologies around the end of the eighteenth century necessitated a great deal of investment in new naval technology. Industrialization altered manufacturing and production in nations once they underwent the process. It is the shift to mechanized production of materials and an increased rate of technological innovation that made the advanced naval technologies at the start of the twentieth century

possible. Britain was the first nation to become industrialized, starting in 1750, so it had a head start over other nations both economically and militarily. Producing ships and weapons was made easier with mechanization, but more importantly, the changes of industrialization led to drastic changes in society. More people began to work as laborers and move to cities, though Britain did not become urbanized until mid-century. These shifts eventually led to low wages, overcrowding, poor living conditions and a new class of workers in the cities, yet at the same time the nation became richer. In one sense colonies became a relief valve for the extra people and wealth of industrialized nations. Other nations followed Britain and the same shifts eventually occurred across other European nations as well, resulting in the push for colonies in the 1880s.

Nationalism, a type of patriotism that revolved around a group identifying with the nation, came to play a role in European politics for much of the nineteenth century. In its infancy, nationalism took shape as a positive force. But in the mid 1800s, nationalism took on negative tones and became more of an issue at the international level in Europe. Whereas patriotism was pride in one's country, nationalism became a source of constant friction between European nations as they competed for dominance for the sake of advancing their nationality at the cost of another. This competition is part of what led to the race for colonies.

The race for colonies consisted of advanced, industrialized, European nations taking control of territories outside Europe for the resources and national prestige. In the process many ancient civilizations were destroyed. In addition, more often than not the people being ruled may have been of only one or two nationalities, but they were split up or combined however the Europeans desired. Stemming from the nationalistic

competition, the race for colonies in the Far East and Africa was a source of tension between nations. While it did provide internal population pressure relief, the friction with other nations over colonial control was another cause of conflict between European powers during the 1800s and early 1900s.

Industrialization, nationalism and the race for colonies affected the Royal Navy at the end of the nineteenth century, but so did the history and structure of the Royal Navy. Both affected the pace of change, and how outside trends affected the navy and the shape of internal trends within itself. The Royal Navy is the oldest military branch in Britain, and as such is considered the Senior Service. It grew out of the merchant marine ships and again largely coalesced during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I in the 1500s. Since its formation, it has gone through phases of expansion and contraction, largely dependent on the interests of the monarch and nation. With the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 Britain found itself with a great many overseas holdings, a desire for more, and a need to protect them and the trade that was vital to the economy. It was also during this century that there was a great leap forward in technology. For the first half of the century, ships were still just wooden sailing vessels and at the peak in 1809 there were 728 ships in the Royal Navy.¹ By mid-century, steam engines made ships faster regardless of weather, and in 1844 the Royal Navy had thirty-nine steam ships with another twenty-nine on the way. Technology also shifted the materials needed to build ships, resulting in iron-clad warships and eventually the steel battleships of today. To that end, the British had 65 iron

¹ David Evans, *Building the Steam Navy: Dockyards, Technology and the Creation of the Victorian Battle Fleet, 1830-1906* (London: Conway Maritime; Annapolis, MD: Distributed in North America by Naval Institute Press, 2004), 15.

and steel ships in the channel in 1888.² A century after the end of the Napoleonic wars, in October of 1915 the British Grand Fleet in World War I consisted of 151 warships.³ It is safe to say that the fleet of World War I looked very different from the fleet at Trafalgar.

Within the actual navy the Admiralty Board made the decisions about strategy and tactics. The board consisted of several lords admiral as well as several civilians, but they did not unilaterally make policy. The Admiralty made decisions about the fleet, but with a cabinet member and a secretary from Parliament, the Prime Minister had input. Also, since the House of Commons controlled the budget, the Admiralty could only act within the constraints placed on it. Finally, the head of all armed forces was the sovereign. The king or queen named lords to the upper house, and ultimately made calls about the disposition of the British military.⁴ Thus, the administration of the Royal Navy was rather complicated. All of the major people in the government had a say in what the navy did, but ultimately the Admiralty actually directed operations. Each of these topics helps form a foundation that is necessary when looking at the subjects and events over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And each one helped lead to some of the changes in Britain and Europe after 1870 that affected British diplomatic dominance and the Royal Navy.

² John B. Hattendorf, R.J.B. Knight, A.W.H. Pearsall, N.A.M. Rodger, and Geoffrey Till, ed. *British Naval Documents, 1204-1960* (Aldershot, UK: Scholar Press for the Royal Navy Records Society; Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1993), 615, 682.

³ Admiral Viscount Jellicoe, *The Grand Fleet, 1914-1916: It's Creation, Development and Work*, (New York: George H. Doran Company 1919), 31.

⁴ John B. Hattendorf, R.J.B. Knight, A.W.H. Pearsall, N.A.M. Rodger, and Geoffrey Till, ed. *British Naval Documents, 1204-1960* (Aldershot, UK: Scholar Press for the Royal Navy Records Society; Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1993), 669. After 1872 the board make-up consisted of a First Lord, First Naval Lord, Second Naval Lord, Junior Naval Lord and the Financial Lord, among which the First Lord is senior. The civilians included Naval Secretary, the Controller, the Parliamentary Secretary, the Permanent Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defense who is a member of the Prime Minister's cabinet.

1815-1870

In the nineteenth century, British diplomacy relied on the strength of the Royal Navy. The size of the fleets and the fact that the Royal Navy operated all over the world let the British influence and often control events around the globe. This control gave the British an advantage in diplomacy with local peoples where the navy was operating, but more importantly it gave the British an advantage in European diplomacy with other powerful nations such as France and Russia. This diplomatic advantage came out of the ability of the British to operate effectively in more places at once than their continental rivals.

By the start of the nineteenth century, the Royal Navy had been around and respected for several centuries, but during the 1800s the Royal Navy defended Great Britain at the height of its power. Throughout the century, the Royal Navy policed its empire and the world, and maintained what has been termed *Pax Britannica*. This century of dominance began with the end of the Napoleonic and Anglo-American Wars and the rapid expansion of the British Empire in 1815. After that year there were really no challengers to British naval preeminence, which is why William Laird Clowes, a prominent British naval historian from the late nineteenth century, used 1815 as a transition year in his seminal work, *The Royal Navy, A History*. For the next one hundred years the Royal Navy largely engaged in colonial policing and expansion, and only “during the Russian War (1854-6) [The Crimean War], Britain’s only European conflict

of the period,” did the Royal Navy have to prove its strength against another European navy.⁵

The Napoleonic Wars established the British as the naval power for the following century, as it served as an early example of how the size, scope and power of the Royal Navy influenced diplomacy. During the conflict, the Royal Navy’s ability to influence events around the globe was vital to Britain, as it gave the British the opportunity to not only attack France and other targets in Europe, but also French overseas possessions in the Americas, the Caribbean Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. In 1809 the Royal Navy had 728 ships of all classes, all military vessels.⁶ The merchant marine still had all of its vessels, and as such shipping, and thus the supply of materials to British industry and military forces, was not affected by reduced ship numbers during the war with France. Those 728 ships gave the British a large enough force to keep ships spread around the globe to harass the French, while still supplying continental forces and defending Great Britain from being invaded across the English Channel. This flexibility on the British part prevented the French from amassing naval forces in one place to really threaten the British Isles. The major naval engagement of the Napoleonic Wars was the Battle of Trafalgar, in which the British Admiral Nelson defeated the French forces after several days of fighting. The result was the end of French naval power for the rest of the conflict, and undisputed British mastery of the seas.

⁵ J.R. Hill, ed., assisted by Bryan Ranft, *The Oxford illustrated history of the Royal Navy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, c1995), 161.

⁶David Evans, *Building the Steam Navy: Dockyards, Technology and the Creation of the Victorian Battle Fleet, 1830-1906* (London: Conway Maritime; Annapolis, MD: Distributed in North America by Naval Institute Press, 2004), 15.

This mastery of the seas allowed the British to exert their diplomatic will during the peace process after the war. After the defeat of France a balance of power was established between the continental powers to prevent one from becoming too dominant. However, because the war resulted in a strong Britain and a weak France, the established balance of power among the European nations, including Britain, really kept any other European power from becoming dominant enough on the continent to be able to challenge Britain on the seas.

The British dominance that was established after the war lasted for most of the century. From 1815 until 1890 Great Britain was the only global power, as no other nations had a navy capable of challenging British dominance. This was true even in the middle of the century when, “all other navies of the world put together were hardly larger than the British navy alone. By the end of the century this was no longer the case.”⁷ Since they had a larger navy than everyone else, the British were able to exert influence globally where other nations could not. The sheer size of the Royal Navy made Britain dominant, as it allowed them to operate long term in more places at once than any other nation could sustain. Diplomatically it allowed the British freedom on colonial matters, without fear of a reaction from other European powers, while at the same time it meant that other European powers could not escape the presence and influence of the Royal Navy, and had to take it into account during planning.

The size and effectiveness of the Royal Navy were not the only factors that influenced its strength. Naval technology changed drastically throughout the nineteenth

⁷ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989, ©1987), 315.

century, and the Royal Navy took advantage of many advancements. At the start of the 1800s “all the ships were wooden and propelled by the power of the wind.”⁸ The vessels of this period were classic wooden, sailing ships, with rope rigging and cannons lining each deck. This was the type of ship that Nelson used when he fought at Trafalgar.

However, in the decade after 1815 coal-burning steamships began to become common in the form of paddle ships on the oceans, but sea-going craft still retained sails as back-ups until late in the century.⁹ The development of steam engines small enough for ships was a huge advancement, but because of the uncertainty of the new technology sails remained on ships as back-ups, and steam did not become the main form of power generation on ships until much later in the century. As technology developed, the British embraced the changes that the first and later second industrial revolution made possible to maintain an advanced and modern fleet capable of fighting effectively.

While the Royal Navy often had the largest number of technologically advanced ships, maintaining diplomatic dominance over the course of a century required a strong but simple strategy on the part of the Royal Navy. The two-power standard involved having enough force ready for action to take on the next two largest naval powers, and for most of the century these powers were France and Russia. This strategy represented the reality that those powers were the next strongest after Britain. Like Britain, both were older nations that had a history as strong nation states that were well developed by the nineteenth century. Playing into that, all three nations had competed with each other on

⁸ David Evans, *Building the Steam Navy: Dockyards, Technology and the Creation of the Victorian Battle Fleet, 1830-1906* (London: Conway Maritime; Annapolis, MD: Distributed in North America by Naval Institute Press, 2004), 15.

⁹ Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Technology: Invention, Innovation, and the Rise of the Machine* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger Publishers, 2009), 83.

the continent and abroad in the past, and thus shared a common, long-standing enmity. The threat these two nations posed to Britain was one more reason the Royal Navy was built up, able to fight both simultaneously, and large enough to be stationed globally.

Because the two-power standard meant the Royal Navy was very large, it opened the door to the second part of the British strategy. Force projection, when a nation uses its military to express its strength and interests by having its military stationed around the globe, served the British well until the late 1890s. By maintaining a presence near every colony across almost every region of the globe, the British were able to let their interest be known and thus possibly deter military threats. In the event the navy failed as a deterrent, then it was already on station with sufficient force to counter enemy actions. Some of the main regional bases of the Royal Navy were India, Hong Kong, Egypt, South Africa, Gibraltar, Australia and of course Britain, Ireland and Scotland. The only region where there was less of a presence was the Americas. Without a major contender for power, the British were able to decentralize their forces and locate them in strategic positions. This was a self-enforcing trend as the size and presence of British forces deterred potential enemies from even trying to challenge the British, thus allowing them to keep a presence spread out. Only in the 1890s when Germany seriously challenged Britain did the Royal Navy have to largely abandon this strategy, pull back and concentrate its forces in the English Channel.

The Royal Navy strategy of force projection placed ships all around the globe in places important to the British. Doing so allowed the British to maintain control of places already taken, and to expand into new areas that promised new wealth. Throughout the century the British expanded their holdings considerably, first by taking many French

colonies after 1815, and then by using the Royal Navy to take new lands elsewhere. South Africa, acquired during the Napoleonic Wars, provided wealth, materials and good ports. Difficult or impressive conquests that took longer to complete, such as Burma, China and Egypt, showed the strength and effectiveness of the Royal Navy and thus solidified British power while also expanding it. The continued use of the Royal Navy to influence events globally after the Napoleonic Wars show how the British relied on the navy for diplomatic strength.

When the British acquired South Africa, they probably did not realize how much military effort it would take to control it for the following century. The Dutch were the first Europeans to colonize South Africa, but French and Germans followed. During the Napoleonic Wars the British controlled the Dutch colony sporadically, and by 1815 the British had taken complete control of the area. To avoid the British, the mixed Dutch, German and French peoples, the Boers, migrated away from the Cape Colony and headed inland, eventually establishing The South African Republic (Transvaal) and the Orange Free State.¹⁰ South Africa, or Cape Colony, was one of the colonies the British gained over the course of the Napoleonic Wars and that the British would eventually become very heavily involved in at the end of the century. In the meantime, it provided several good ports on the Cape of Good Hope, the tip of Africa, which sat on an important trade route to India.

For the British, control of the Indian sub-continent provided control of the Indian Ocean and a base for the Royal Navy between Africa and the Far East. Through the

¹⁰ Byron Farwell, *The Great Anglo-Boer War* (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, 1976), 4-13. In addition to Boer, Afrikaner is another term used to describe the European settlers in South Africa

British East India Company, the British had been on the sub-continent since the 1600s, though mostly in coastal India. With the Empire growing after 1815 Burma became a target of expansion out of India. Expanding into Burma increased the territory of the Empire and protected India from any possible attack. Both of those objectives aimed to solidify British diplomatic power in the region through the Royal Navy. In 1824, despite fierce opposition from the locals, the Company attempted to take over Burma, starting the First Burmese War, 1824 to 1826. Most of the action centered on the rivers, so the Royal Navy played an integral part in bombarding enemy positions, covering assaults, scouting and assisting in the transport of the army from engagement to engagement. An 1826 treaty eventually resulted in a temporary peace.

While there was no war for the following twenty-five years, peace did not reduce the tension between Burma and Britain. By 1851 those tensions were high enough that British leaders called for new action. The Royal Navy Commodore in India delayed and attempted to prevent escalation, but in early 1852 the Royal Navy systematically destroyed all of the Burmese garrisons and captured cities with minimal losses. In late 1852, a proclamation claimed the province of Pegu in Burma for the Empire and stopped all advances in favor of removing enemies from captured territory. There was no actual treaty, and peace was elusive until 1862, when normal relations between Britain and Burma resumed.¹¹ The Royal Navy performed well and achieved its goals in the river fighting. Since the rivers are the only effective way to travel in Burma, without the Royal Navy to support it, the British army could not have moved so effectively. The fact that

¹¹ William Laird Clowes, assisted by Sir Clements Markham, Captain A. T. Mahan, Mr. H. W. Wilson, Col. Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States, etc, *The Royal Navy, A History From the Earliest Times to the Present Volume 6* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company Ltd., 1901), 237-250 & 371-384.

the British stopped advancing after taking Pegu did not reflect a naval failure, but rather the reality that enemy forces had been harassing British forces throughout the conflict and the British leaders decided to take one area and secure it rather than try to advance past an unsecure holding. This series of wars demonstrated Royal Navy strength, suppressing the locals to serve as a global demonstration of power. The navy served as the engine of expansion, bringing wealth and prestige to the British that could then be used as leverage in European diplomacy.

The river fighting that the Royal Navy used in Burma was also used to open China to European trade. By working in China, the Royal Navy increased the wealth of the Empire and demonstrated its own effectiveness for other nations to see, both of which strengthened British diplomacy. Collectively called the Opium Wars, a series of conflicts in China brought down the last Chinese dynasty and installed Western dependent regions, and the British were at the forefront of that push. The First China War was fought between 1839 and 1842. The tension that led to that war had to do with a culture clash and trade. Culturally, the Chinese saw the British as weak and not willing or prepared to fight, and thus easy to defeat, whereas the British trusted in superior technology as a guaranty of success. Trade in opium from India was the other major issue. Opium had been flowing into China, quite profitably for the British for some time, but in 1838 the Chinese officials restricted the importation of the drug and wanted the British to leave. Because China offered a large and profitable market, the British were unwilling to do so. When the diplomatic officer on station did not achieve a solution advantageous to the British, the military was sent in to force the issue. Over the course of three years, the army and navy worked their way up the rivers of China from city to city. Finally the

British forced a treaty that opened many cities to free trade, and Hong Kong became a permanent British possession. The Chinese were soundly defeated in every engagement, but since the British did not press the attack militarily or diplomatically the Chinese did not feel defeated. Thus, the groundwork was laid for tensions to rise again.¹²

The next time tensions flared up was 1856, and the Second China War ran on until mid 1861. Since none of the issues from the first war had been resolved, it was not surprising that the Chinese ignored the treaty and did not show the respect the Europeans felt was owed them. In 1858, after heavy river fighting in which the Royal Navy had to contend with constant harassment from Chinese junks and fire ships, there was another treaty. Since the Europeans still had not captured the Chinese capital of Peking or destroyed all military resistance, the Chinese disregarded the treaty by 1859, when they fired on British and French diplomats. After a twelve-month buildup, the British and French militaries attacked in force and went all the way to Peking. With the imperial city sacked and the emperor's palace burned, the Chinese had to finally accept the terms of a much more stringent treaty.

The Royal Navy achieved its goals in both China Wars, providing support to the army when attacking cities and engaging Chinese vessels. If the British military had forced a total victory by taking the Chinese capital in the first conflict, rather than accepting some military success and two diplomatic compromises then the issue could have been resolved sooner. As the issue stood unresolved for so long, the French saw an

¹² William Laird Clowes, assisted by Sir Clements Markham, Captain A. T. Mahan, Mr. H. W. Wilson, Col. Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States, etc, *The Royal Navy, A History From the Earliest Times to the Present Volume 6* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company Ltd., 1901), 279-304.

opening to advance their colonial and economic position by joining with the British. Though drawn out, the Royal Navy victory over the Chinese with the support of the British Army and their French allies did several things. It showed the strength of the British military, which advanced Britain's diplomatic position, while at the same time expanding the Empire and regaining some lost trade and wealth.¹³ The opening of China was an ultimate success for the British Empire and the Royal Navy that gave the British a stronger position in European diplomacy.

Each colonial action served as part of the Royal Navy force projection strategy. Each successful action of the Royal Navy showed that it was present in a region and thus the British were interested. It also demonstrated the force that the ships in the region provided to back up British diplomatic goals if needed. Additionally, those actions repeatedly demonstrated the operational capabilities of the Royal Navy for all other European powers and local peoples to see.

In the middle of the century, a European war against Russia strengthened the British diplomatically even more than colonial expansions. Colonial actions increased the wealth of the Royal Navy and served as demonstrations to deter enemy action. European wars demonstrated the power of the Royal Navy when directly compared to other European powers, and potentially altered the balance of power significantly in favor of the victors. The Crimean War was the major naval engagement of the mid-nineteenth century that served to demonstrate the dominance of the Royal Navy, but also

¹³ Sir William Laird Clowes, assisted by Sir Clements Markham, Captain A. T. Mahan, Mr. H. W. Wilson, Col. Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States, etc, *The Royal Navy, A History From the Earliest Times to the Death of Queen Victoria Volume 7* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company Ltd., 1903), 93-136.

strengthened its position of dominance by weakening a powerful enemy, the Russians. From 1854 to 1856, the war pitted an alliance of Great Britain, France and the Ottoman Empire against Russia. The war started when Russia attacked the Ottomans over a religious dispute to gain more influence in the Middle East. To maintain the fragile balance of powers that existed in Europe at the time, Great Britain and France eventually dispatched large forces to push the Russian forces back and protect Turkey. The British fleet consisted of 365 ships, while France supplied 217. On the other side, between the Baltic, Mediterranean, Black Sea and Pacific fleets, the Russian navy had 164 ships.¹⁴ The war gets its name from the main theatre of operations, the Crimean peninsula in the Black Sea, where the British and French Navies blockaded Sevastopol for a year before it surrendered in a final assault. Action also took place in the Baltic, where the British effectively blockaded the Russians in the Baltic Sea, destroyed the Russian port of Sweaborg and prepared to take Cronstadt, the most powerful sea-fort in the world, before the Russians accepted peace terms. At the end of the war, Russia's naval might in both the Baltic and Black Seas was destroyed and the Royal Navy was at its peak.¹⁵

The Crimean War is significant because it is the only major European conflict that the British engaged in between 1815 and 1914, and thus it is the only time that European fleets can be compared against the Royal Navy. As evidenced by the numbers, the British still had a larger fleet, allowing them to devote many ships to the conflict and still protect

¹⁴ David Evans, *Building the Steam Navy: Dockyards, Technology and the Creation of the Victorian Battle Fleet, 1830-1906* (London: Conway Maritime; Annapolis, MD: Distributed in North America by Naval Institute Press, 2004), 153.

¹⁵ William Laird Clowes, assisted by Sir Clements Markham, Captain A. T. Mahan, Mr. H. W. Wilson, Col. Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States, etc, *The Royal Navy, A History From the Earliest Times to the Present Volume 6* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company Ltd., 1901), 395-506. Information drawn from Clowes is largely corroborated by more contemporary authors such as Evans, Hill, Marder and Parkinson.

other overseas possessions. It was around the same time that metal ships were being developed, so that innovation on the British side made some of their ships of the line more powerful than the enemy's vessels. The defeat of Russia and the dismantling of its military strength made France the only threat to Britain until 1870. That being said, following British victory in the Napoleonic Wars, both France and Russia had suffered defeat at British hands in the nineteenth century, setting their naval capabilities back comparatively and giving the British an advantage. That advantage solidified British dominance and gave them a stronger diplomatic position.

Keeping up with technological advancements was one part of how Britain maintained Royal Navy dominance, and the technological advancements made by navies in the period immediately following the Crimean War are some of the most important changes of the century. In the late 1850s the shift towards iron-hulled ships, iron muzzle-loading guns in turrets and propellers instead of paddles began. The advance in weapon and propulsion technology led to new tactics in naval combat as well as how far and how fast ships could travel. However, while iron was cheaper, it had downsides that prevented it from becoming the main building material. So it was not until steel became usable that wood was completely replaced as the primary construction material in ships. Even though it was slow to catch on, the first shift to metal ships is one of the most radical advancements made in the nineteenth century. It changed the very nature of ship building, as building navies relied on access to mines rather than large forests. In addition, metal allowed for much larger ships with totally new designs and eventually new tactics, making it one of the most visual changes over the course of the century. By

taking advantage of the new technology, Britain was able to maintain an advanced navy, which contributed to its dominance.

This dominance went largely unopposed until the arms race between Britain and Germany that started in 1900. This meant that for most of the century Britain was able to benefit from being the “only great power with genuinely worldwide political objectives.”¹⁶ Britain planned for the defense and development of its overseas possessions throughout the century, while many European powers never gained colonies, or only did so late in the century. Most of Europe spent the century focusing on continental politics, and only took up global issues as related to trade or the influence of the Royal Navy. For the British, developing a navy, commerce shipping and eventually colonies was a result of necessity. Being an island, the British did not have all of the food and raw materials needed to maintain their economy and growing urban population, and thus needed trade and colonies to provide the needed supplies. Once the shipping and colonies were established, Britain needed to maintain a strong navy to defend them. It was not until the end of the century when the rest of Europe began looking towards Africa and Asia that it was necessary for other nations to have large navies and thus challenge Britain. It was then that Britain had to respond with a shift in strategy.

Royal Navy strategy was always designed to make sure the British maintained the stated goals of the British Empire, free trade and control of the seas. Admiral Jellicoe of the Royal Navy, writing about World War I and the British navy’s involvement began a section by discussing the basic British needs that the navy fulfilled. In his book he

¹⁶ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989, ©1987), 315.

specifically discusses strategy during World War I, but the basic needs he writes of did not change over time, and they were essential to Britain's survival, and had to be met:

The main objects for which our Navy exists may be shortly summed up under four heads:

1. To ensure for British ships the unimpeded use of the sea, this being vital to the existence of an island nation, particularly one which is not self-supporting in regard to food.
2. In the event of war, to bring steady economic pressure to bear on our adversary by denying to him the use of the sea, thus compelling him to accept peace.
3. Similarly in the event of war to cover the passage and assist any army sent overseas, and to protect its communications and supplies.
4. To prevent invasion of this country and its overseas Dominions by enemy forces.

The above objects are achieved in the quickest and surest manner by destroying the enemy's armed naval forces, and this is therefore the first objective of our Fleet. The Fleet exists to achieve victory.¹⁷

The British felt that to ensure free trade they had to control the seas. This was partly to ensure their merchant ships could travel freely, but also to ensure contact with far-flung colonies was safe. During war the navy would be the most important military branch for the British. For continental nations, shipping was the fastest mode of transportation, but it was only one option. For Britain though, shipping was the only option, so British thinking centered on the idea that cutting off sea traffic would force continental enemies to sue for peace. When it comes to communication and transportation by sea during war, the British had an advantage because even in peace time they used ships for that purpose. During war it just became a matter of using the Royal Navy to block the enemy at the same time. Invasion of the home island was a fear that went back to British history, such as the Norman invasion and the Spanish Armada. Even in the 1860s, the British feared a

¹⁷ Admiral Viscount Jellicoe of Scapa, *The Grand Fleet 1914-1916: Its Creation, Development and Work* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1919), 12.

French invasion.¹⁸ Defense of Britain itself was the primary purpose of the Royal Navy, followed by defense of the Dominions and protecting shipping. Admiral Jellicoe's last statement again shows the mentality that the British live in, with the focus on destroying an enemy's navy to prevent invasion and ensure British naval supremacy, thus playing to Britain's strengths during a war. The strategies of the two-power policy and force projection were tailored specifically to meet these basic needs. By controlling the seas through a global presence the Royal Navy could deter enemy action, or counter it if needed, giving the British options during war to affect the enemy.

The defense of trade that Admiral Jellicoe discusses was the most important role of the Royal Navy outside of national defense. When it came to protecting British merchant vessels the Royal Navy had two options, patrols and convoys. Patrols consisted of having ships spread out along trade routes, using main regional ports and smaller supply stations for support. Those regular patrol routes ensured that the trade lanes were free of natural disturbances as well as enemy action, whether pirate or national. This plan was more cost effective for the navy because it spread out the navy's ships to allow for force projection and ensured quicker response time for regional issues. However, patrols could not guarantee the safety of cargo, as there was not a constant presence with the cargo ships. This option was thus less effective for protecting trade, but more effective for military needs. The other option when it came to protecting trade was convoys. Rather than run cargo ships alone, convoys waited and grouped up, under the protection of military ships. As far as protection for cargo goes this was the much better option as there

¹⁸ John B. Hattendorf, R.J.B. Knight, A.W.H. Pearsall, N.A.M. Rodger, and Geoffrey Till, ed. *British Naval Documents, 1204-1960* (Aldershot, UK: Scholar Press for the Royal Navy Records Society; Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1993), 564.

was a constant defense around the merchant vessels. However, this plan tied up a large number of military ships at once, and reduced the number of ships available for response at any one time in a particular region. And if all groups of cargo ships were likewise protected, while there were many Royal Navy ships around on the sea lanes, their presence was not felt in the regions they would otherwise be stationed in. For most of the century the Admiralty board opted for the regional versatility of patrols over convoys. By choosing patrols they felt that the sea lanes were safe enough while still providing the military strength needed on station in each region. For the most part the sea lanes were safe enough to not force a change, and convoys only became the mainstay during World War I because of the German U boat threat. Until the change, the decision to go with patrols aided the strategy of force projection. This helped the British diplomatic position through global presence and the fact that British ships protected trade routes for all merchant vessels. That fact gave the British added prestige and leverage in diplomacy.

Throughout the century, British diplomacy was boosted by the maintenance of the two-power standard and force projection strategies. But underlying those strategies were the basic needs of Britain that the Royal Navy met. Because only a large navy could supply and defend Britain during peace and war, planning was already looking at maintaining a large navy. The two strategies that were decided on complemented the goals and needs of Britain. Only the changing situation of the late 1890s forced a reevaluation of British strategy, though the goals and needs remained the same.

1870-1890

While the British were still the dominant global power going into the late nineteenth century, by 1870 the balance of power in Europe began to change, eventually forcing a shift in British strategy. Newly formed nations were changing the status quo, and Germany was the most prominent one. Germany had only formed after its victory in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, and as a brand new Empire, the Germans initially had no colonies and no global power or influence in non-European regions. While the German army provided plenty of force on the continent, the German navy that did exist was only for coastal defense and had no international reach. However, nationalism, the large and growing German industrial base and a drive to be great pushed the new nation to quickly rise to prominence. By the mid 1880s Germany had acquired colonies abroad and joined the ranks of great powers, but the ruler of Imperial Germany, Kaiser Wilhelm II, wanted his nation to be the greatest European power. His desire for power was not unique to European leaders or even people of the period. Ideas of nationalism and racial superiority were common in Europe at the time and they fueled the expansion of European rule into new regions such as Africa in the 1870s. However the growing strength of his Empire gave Wilhelm more opportunity than some nations to expand and shift the balance of power in his favor. Going into the last part of the century the British had to adjust the Royal Navy strategy for the potential German threat.

At the same time that a new potential threat was developing in Germany, the British faced a crisis at home. One major aspect of Royal Navy power in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was its technology. For most of the century, the British did not just have the most ships, but also some of the most advanced ships, and

most of the time they were constantly innovating and building more ships. The Admiralty board understood that having the most ships was not enough. As new technologies were developed British leaders saw the potential to fall behind if they did not adapt and incorporate those advances into the fleet. Despite this, there were times when spiraling costs and lack of political support led to reduced investment in modernization. When exactly that happened in the 1870s, the navy stagnated. The size of the fleet shrank as ships were decommissioned, new building was reduced and innovation slowed. It could be considered a lost decade as far as British naval advancement goes. This was dangerous as the strategies of the Royal Navy required large numbers of ships, both for being on station around the globe and to meet the requirements of the two-power standard. If the navy shrank too much it would no longer be capable of fulfilling its basic functions.

Only the growing threat of a strong German navy, combined with doubts from the British press and public about the navy's ability to meet that threat sparked action to reinvigorate the navy in the late 1880s. Once the new threat had evolved the political will to maintain the largest and strongest fleet in the world was reignited. Despite the setback, the navy still advanced further technologically in the late nineteenth century, in part because with the return of funding the navy underwent a huge overhaul. Since many ships had been decommissioned during the 1870s it was necessary to build all new ones, and thus new designs and technologies could be tested. When combined with the second industrial revolution after 1870, the result was a series of new, advanced ships right before the real arms race began in 1900. It was this new, reinvigorated navy that made it possible to maintain the British strategies until the end of the century, as after it was

rebuild the navy was large enough to meet all of its obligations until the end of the century.

After a decade of stagnation in the navy, the British army was forced to fight in South Africa in the First Boer War, 1880-1881. Since the British took the Cape Colony in 1814, there had been tensions and small conflicts between the Boers and the British. But, since the Boers kept moving inland, that meant that the navy could not fight them. The British had a professional army, which was used in almost all major campaigns, but normally in conjunction with the Royal Navy. In South Africa the army had to operate largely alone. The 1880 war was the first actual war the Boers and British fought, and the British lost. The war being fought entirely inland with the army, and the army having difficulty, were both indications of issues the British had to face at the end of the century, brought on by a second conflict. It was defeats during the war that forced the British to concede quasi-independence to the Boers.¹⁹ The conflict was temporarily over but nothing was resolved, as the Boers still wanted to be left alone and the British still wanted control over the entire region.

A year after the army lost in South Africa, the navy opened a campaign in Egypt that gave the army a chance to redeem itself. The conflict in Egypt provided a late century chance for Britain to demonstrate its might, despite stagnation and the loss in South Africa the previous year. The Sultan and Khedive of Egypt had come into conflict with Britain and France over financial issues, and the British military took action to protect British investments in the country, despite resistance. Alexandria, a major Mediterranean port and the point of entry into Egypt for the British, was not a modern or

¹⁹ Byron Farwell, *The Great Anglo-Boer War* (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, 1976), 13-21. The Boer Wars are also known as The South African Wars

difficult target to defeat, however the defenders were determined to protect it. The successful and speedy assault of the city showed off the modern ships of the Royal Navy and demonstrated the effectiveness and efficiency of the new ships, armor and guns of the Royal Navy. In several days, the garrison of the city was pounded into submission to the point that the defenders fled the city before the British ground troops landed.

Ultimately the Royal Navy carried out the assault very well, with damage on only a few ships because of new armor, and it served as the start of a larger army assault that eventually took over all of Egypt and gave control of the Suez Canal to the British.²⁰ The entire campaign brought more prestige, wealth and power to the British Empire, and the Suez Canal provided a shorter connection to India and the Far East, a boon to trade and the Royal Navy. Egypt also added to Britain's influence in Africa, which was the focus of European expansion from the 1880s on. By taking Egypt and the Suez, the British demonstrated the strength of the Royal Navy in the initial attack and then increased their wealth and power exponentially. The Suez eventually generated huge profits as new steam ships used it to ship goods faster than sailing ships that had to travel around Africa. In addition, the shorter link to the Far East was a military advantage that the Royal Navy took advantage of in later conflicts. Finally, the British gained diplomatic advantage because of the role the Suez played in shipping. Controlling such a vital route meant the British could control who used it, and that helped during diplomacy.

²⁰ Sir William Laird Clowes, assisted by Sir Clements Markham, Captain A. T. Mahan, Mr. H. W. Wilson, Col. Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States, etc, *The Royal Navy, A History From the Earliest Times to the Death of Queen Victoria Volume 7* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company Ltd., 1903), 321-339.

The Royal Navy's actions in the Russian War and in China, Burma, Egypt, and many other locations around the globe in the nineteenth century were a constant reminder of why the British Empire was the global power. Great Britain, through the Royal Navy, had the ability to project power around the globe, influence events and implement policy whenever it was necessary or desired. The ability to project force helped to advance British goals and maintain a lead in naval competition through the need for constant innovation. All of the actions the Royal Navy undertook strengthened the British Empire financially and diplomatically. Without the strength of the Royal Navy the British would have been in a very weak diplomatic position. The British relied on the ability of the Royal Navy to engage any chosen foe around the globe to maintain their dominant position in European diplomacy.

The strategy of the Royal Navy had been to establish colonies and naval bases from which to establish control of a region, and losing even part of a colony was a blow to British global dominance and prestige as well as control in that region. In 1815, holding South Africa meant the Royal Navy controlled the shortest path from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and Cape Town and Port Elizabeth were safe havens for their own ships. Over time with the introduction of steam engines and the Suez Canal the path around the tip of Africa became a longer, secondary route, which meant that the colony was less important for trade. The ports still served as safe havens for British ships and the trade that did follow the African coast, but South Africa had less global significance by the mid-1880s. That was going to change with the discovery of precious minerals in the Boer republics.

It was that mineral wealth, in the form of diamonds and gold found in the two Boer republics from 1887 on, which was largely responsible for renewed British interest in controlling the Boers.²¹ For the British, controlling access to this new fountain of wealth was extremely important to the Empire. Not only would the income increase the wealth and prestige of the Empire, but wealthy individuals and corporations wanted to invest in the mines and their investments would be safest if the territory were under British control. So while the British ceded some control of the Boer territories in 1881, given the chance they wanted to regain the lands and all of the potential wealth. Retaking the Boer Republics would also recover some of the prestige that was lost when the Boers won in 1881. The mineral wealth in the Boer republics made South Africa important again. If the British controlled all of the wealth then the Empire was much richer, had more resources, and as such had more diplomatic power to use against other European powers. If the British did not control South Africa and the Boer Republics, then it was possible another nation could move in to take control of the vast wealth available.

Not only did the minerals increase the importance of South Africa, they also provided a cause for British action in the Boer republics. As diamonds and gold were discovered in the Transvaal, people of all nationalities came to work in the mines to make a fortune, but many were from the British Empire. This meant that their well being and rights were the concern of the British, specifically when the Boers refused to give any rights to the workers, known as Uitlanders. The Boers knew that the workers outnumbered them and could control the nation if they were given the vote. Thus, the workers had no vote even though the wealth of the mines meant they paid a considerable

²¹ Byron Farwell, *The Great Anglo-Boer War* (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, 1976), 21.

portion of the taxes. British imperialists interested in gaining control of the mines and wealth tried to cover and justify their expansion plans by championing the rights of the mine workers. At the same time, the British imperialists felt completely justified in trying to ensure basic rights for their citizens, even if it was only a cover to gain control of the mines.²² With a legitimate cause, the British imperialists were able to pursue a policy of taking back the Boer lands to increase the wealth and diplomatic clout of the British Empire.

By 1889 Great Britain was getting very worried about security. Germany had been a growing military and industrial power for two decades, France and Russia were moving towards an alliance, and the public was concerned about the state of the navy. In 1884 the Royal Navy had not recovered from the stagnation of the 1870s. In that year W.T. Stead wrote an article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* questioning the state of the navy and whether it would be capable of protecting the Empire.²³ In 1885 Parliament responded with rebuilding programs, but the major move came in 1889, when the growing German threat prompted real action. The 1889 Naval Defense Act not only continued the rebuilding program of the Royal Navy to return it to its former size, but committed, “Britain to maintaining a navy equal to that of its two largest competitors combined.”²⁴

²² Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (New York: Random House, 1979), 3-17.

²³ John B. Hattendorf, R.J.B. Knight, A.W.H. Pearsall, N.A.M. Rodger, and Geoffrey Till, ed. *British Naval Documents, 1204-1960* (Aldershot, UK: Scholar Press for the Royal Navy Records Society; Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1993), 565.; William Thomas Stead, “What is the Truth about the Navy?” *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 September 1884, <http://www.attackingthediabol.co.uk/pmg/navy.php#sthash.FDgIkZlO.dpbs> (accessed 28 November 2012).; Joseph O. Baylen, ‘Stead, William Thomas (1849–1912)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004: online edn, Sept 2010, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36258>, (accessed 28 Nov 2012).

²⁴ Jonathan Sperber, *Europe 1815-1914 Progress, Participation and Apprehension* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2009), 207.

Roger Parkinson, *The Late Victorian Navy: The Pre-Dreadnought Era and the Origins of the First World War* (Woodbridge, UK; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2008),

This act stated in law the two-power standard that Britain had strategically been following for decades, though being put into law meant that the Admiralty had political and public backing. On the other hand, the fact that the two-power standard had to be required by law showed how big of an issue the stagnation of the 1870s was. This crisis of faith destroyed the previous assumption that the Royal Navy would maintain the standard, so there was more scrutiny of the navy after 1885. One important note about the bill is that when it was drafted it was largely aimed at France and Russia, who were allying for mutual defense against Germany. While not targeted at Britain, that agreement was still perceived as a threat because it meant two potentially hostile nations were working together and could turn on Britain. So until the end of the nineteenth century Great Britain was still attempting to maintain a fleet large enough to take on any threat to protect the empire and the mother country. Such a large fleet meant that the British were also holding on to the diplomatic dominance that came with being the global naval power.

In 1890, the year after the British reaffirmed their dedication to maintaining global dominance through the Royal Navy, US theorist and naval historian Alfred Thayer Mahan began studying the Royal Navy and its dominance. His research and historical analysis of Britain's dominant diplomatic position in the nineteenth century brought Mahan to an explanation in *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, by explaining what factors allowed a nation to have sea power like Britain and thus become a great nation. At the same time there was a shift in the balance of power among European

nations in the 1890s and early twentieth century, this work helped inform leaders of other nations as they began to build larger navies.

By the 1890s the Germans were looking at building a large navy to challenge Britain with and completely upset the balance of power in Europe. German industry had grown enough to support the construction of a fleet of large ships, the nation had enough wealth to invest in a navy in addition to its army, and the publishing of Mahan's work built upon political and military ideas of power. Germany had participated in the 1870s scramble for Africa, and it had also acquired a handful of other colonies. As such, its empire was growing, and part of that growth naturally included naval expansion. As part of this expansion Wilhelm's top naval officer, Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz did everything in his power to promote the navy to equal or greater standing than the army. Tirpitz and the Kaiser had both read Mahan, and taken the ideas that were useful. Both felt that Germany needed to build a large, powerful navy to challenge Great Britain. Admiral Tirpitz was the force behind most of the growth of the German Navy until World War I and it was this growth and its inherent challenge to British supremacy that led to a naval arms race.²⁵ When Germany began building its "risk fleet" its leaders took what was relevant from Mahan and used it to their advantage. Because of the growing nature of German military strength, British foreign policy began to revolve around competition with Germany.

In addition to any German intentions towards Britain, there was a more basic reason for tensions between the two nations, geography. Because Germany sits in the

²⁵ Holger H. Herwig, "The Failure of German Sea Power, 1914-1945: Mahan, Tirpitz, and Raeder Reconsidered," *The International History Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1988), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40107090> (accessed May 2, 2012).

center of Europe it does not have direct access to the oceans. Thus, to reach the Atlantic, any colonies it acquired and to really exert global naval power, the German fleet had to pass through either the North Sea or the English Channel. Both passages were controlled by Britain by virtue of its physical location. So any attempt by Germany to build sea power was automatically a threat to British security, meaning the British had to perceive the German buildup in the late 1890s as a threat. When the tensions were high enough, the two nations entered a full blown arms race.

While Mahan's work is extensive, a focus on several key points can convey the ideas that form the basis of his naval theory. The theory reflected Mahan's ideas as to why the British were dominant throughout the century, right at the time that that dominance was beginning to be challenged. One passage lays out Mahan's argument, the points that shape the sea power of a nation, and it comes down to six factors: geographical position, physical conformation, extent of territory, number of population, character of the people and character of the government.²⁶ While he elaborates much more, and uses many historical examples to support his assertion, these six conditions form the basis of his argument, affect how much sea power a nation had and thus affect its ability to become a great power. In the larger discussion on navies going on in the 1890s, these ideas started the conversation for other nations starting to build navies at that time, and Britain provided the example.

Being an island Britain had to develop and depend on a navy while it was forming. Its location also put it in control of the English Channel, giving Great Britain an

²⁶ Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1896), 28.

advantage against any northern European nation looking to challenge it. Physical conformation concerned harbors and access to raw materials. In Britain, a large number of harbors and rivers helped foster the growth of the navy, and the lack of sufficient food and material necessitated a navy for trade. Extent of territory had to do with the proportion of sea coast and good harbors to the size of the population and its ability to utilize the advantages. In Great Britain's case, the great amount of coast and good harbors was met by a population normally large enough to make use of it. The number of population dealt with the percentage of people who were inclined to work on the ocean, such as fishermen, merchants and sailors, and in Britain any merchant or trader or traveler of any sort was required to be sea faring, so most often there was no shortage of skilled sailors. The character of the population had to do with the mentality of the people as a whole, and in Britain, the people invested and built up the navy and the colonies slowly over time. The final condition was the character of the government. Great Britain had a constitutional monarchy, consisting of a monarch, Parliament and Prime Minister, and the second two were very accountable to public opinion, which was focused on naval might. So for most of the nineteenth century, parliament was consistent in building sea power.²⁷

Drawing from Britain's geography, history and culture Mahan arrived at these six conditions that led to the British having sea power and reaching a dominant position among European nations in the nineteenth century. By articulating it just as nations were building navies in the 1890s, his work entered the conversation on naval power. The interest of other nations, specifically Germany, in building navies began to threaten

²⁷ Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1896), 29-58.

British naval dominance and thus British diplomatic power in the late 1890s and early twentieth century.

1890-1914

Throughout the 1890s Britain faced a growing challenge from Germany that culminated in an arms race from 1900 on. That arms race built on the changes since 1870 and drastically altered Europe and Britain even more in the build up to World War I. As part of the arms race, Britain finally had to shift its strategy and diplomacy from those used throughout the nineteenth century to meet the German threat.

In the 1890s a ship of the line looked very different from one in 1815, largely because of the changes brought on by industrialization and mechanization. Late-nineteenth century naval vessels used coal-fueled steam engines to power propellers, housed electrical generators, and had long, large caliber, steel, breech-loading guns in turrets, and were made of steel in different patterns and levels of protection.²⁸ Thus in less than a century very great strides had been made in changing the basic technologies behind naval vessels. Ships of the line in 1900 were more expensive, but larger and more powerful, meaning naval combat was different. Each advance in technology was incorporated into new ships as it was developed. Not all advancements were made by the British, but the incorporation of new ideas, designs and technology kept the Royal Navy modern and often ahead of the competition. In short, the innovation of the Royal Navy was one of its greatest assets. That is why the stagnation of the 1870s was such a blow to the Royal Navy. At a time that other navies were starting to build up, the Royal Navy was falling behind, and then had to catch up in the 1890s. By 1900 the Royal Navy was once again not just the largest navy, but also the most advanced technologically.

²⁸ Roger Parkinson, *The Late Victorian Navy: The Pre-Dreadnought Era and the Origins of the First World War* (Woodbridge, UK; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2008), 119-122, 152, 159, 160.

South Africa featured prominently in British activities in the 1890s, as tensions built off of events in the 1880s. The region saw increased British activity as the British looked to maintain diplomatic dominance through demonstrations of force. In 1895, as tensions between the Boers and the British peaked, the most prominent British investor looking to take the republics was Cecil Rhodes. He was a devout imperialist who wanted to see the British control Africa from the ‘Cape to Cairo.’ He led a group of British imperialists who tried to begin a second conflict by starting a British rebellion against the Boers. While the Jameson Raid failed completely, both in rebellion and in immediately starting a war, it did raise tensions.²⁹ Following the raid, the South African Republic and the Orange Free State formed a defensive alliance, leading to several years of political standoff with the British government.

While the raid was organized by imperialists and capitalists, British military leaders also had several reasons to go after the Boer Republics. First, the British army smarted under its losses in the first Boer War, and wanted a chance to defeat the Boers. While the army had suffered several major losses it did not feel in any way beaten, so when the government allowed the Boers a measure of self rule the army felt humiliated. So the army leaders were willing to support a second conflict to reclaim their prestige and honor. But the second, more pressing concern for British military leaders was security. The Boers had taken full advantage of the mineral wealth that was found in their land and used it to purchase a great number of weapons to defend their independence again. The army felt those weapons could potentially be turned on the Cape Colony, which was still an important colony on the trade route around Africa.

²⁹ Byron Farwell, *The Great Anglo-Boer War* (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, 1976), 21-27.

At the same time, growing Boer wealth also threatened British influence in the area. By not exerting complete control over Boer lands, the British appeared weak. With Mahan's theory, other nations building navies and scrutinizing the Royal Navy and Germany challenging British dominance, Boer independence would have been an even larger blow to the British diplomatic position. However, the British imperialists thought that if Britain reasserted complete control over the Boers their political influence and prestige in Europe and around the globe would increase.³⁰ Thus, just as the competition between Germany and Britain was really starting, it was absolutely necessary to do all that was needed to appear strong, and ceding control of even part of a colony was not an option.

Late in the nineteenth century, Britain was trying to maintain the two-power standard and its global presence. By the start of the twentieth century the British had to adjust their strategy because of the threat that the German naval buildup posed. By 1900 Germany had passed a naval law that, while "solely for defensive purposes," was to be based on "Tirpitz's 'risk fleet' theory. This theory was that Germany's overseas trade and colonies could be effectively protected only by constructing a fleet so strong that even 'the strongest naval power' could not fight it without seriously weakening its own naval power and leaving it helpless against a coalition of other naval powers (i.e., France and Russia)."³¹ The 'risk fleet' strategy seems limited to just challenging the strongest navy, not necessarily defeating it. But that limited goal has larger implications, particularly the aim to become the dominant global power. The idea is similar to MAD, mutually assured

³⁰ Aaron McKenna Kent, *The Boer War: Changing Perceptions of Empire* (San Marcos, Texas: Texas State University, 2005), 22-27.

³¹ Arthur J. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History Of British Naval Policy In the Pre Dreadnought Era, 1880-1905* (New York: Octagon Books, 1976), 456-457.

destruction, from the Cold War, just on a much smaller scale. The United States and the USSR had enough weapons that any full scale war would result in the destruction of both nations, thus presumably assuring neither would instigate a war. In the early 1890s, Germany built up enough ships to counter most of the Royal Navy, to the point that the British would not risk starting a conflict. With risk fleet theory Germany posed a threat to Great Britain and eventually challenged her. The British saw that even if the conflict did not destroy their nation, if the Royal Navy suffered defeat it would no longer be seen as invincible. Germany would become the world power because Great Britain was unable to counter the threat completely. Germany had started an arms race to become the next global power.

Just as tensions with Germany were peaking with the start of the arms race, the British faced another conflict in South Africa that raised serious questions about the British military. Because of the tension that had continued building after the Jameson Raid, the Boers finally attacked the British Cape Colony and started the Second Boer War. The war began in 1899 and dragged on until 1902. The early stages of the war were dominated by Boer successes and the heaviest fighting. The Boer fighters caught the British forces unprepared and without sufficient men, and quickly captured several British towns and many troops. However, once enough soldiers arrived, the tide slowly turned in favor of the British and their superior numbers. The British captured the capital of the Orange Free State, Bloemfontein, in May 1900 and the capital of Transvaal, Pretoria, followed in June. Most British thought the war was over.³²

³² Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (New York: Random House, 1979), 122, 252-265, 444, 460.

While the fighting was over, the Boers carried out a sustained guerilla campaign against British infrastructure. The campaign proved very effective against reduced British forces that were less willing to fight. In response the British put many more troops in the field to patrol the countryside and protect rail lines, rounded up civilians into concentration camps for holding and began to destroy anything and everything that could aid the Boer guerillas in a 'scorched earth' policy. These policies were effective in limiting the Boers' mobility and support. In May 1902 the last Boer fighters surrendered and the Treaty of Vereeniging ended the war. The Boers received compensation and the Orange Free State and the Transvaal came under British rule, with the promise of eventual self rule. The conflict was finally over.³³

The Second Boer War was different from previous engagements throughout the nineteenth century. Both Boer Wars were odd in that both were land wars. While the British Army had been around just as long as the Royal Navy, it had almost always had a less important role. Even in places like Burma and Egypt the army played a role in concert with naval action. In South Africa, the only ports were held by the British, so there was no blockade or assault. All of the action took place well inland, meaning all of the modern ships with advances in armor and armament were not used in battle. However, the technology invested in the navy was still useful to the army in certain places. The British used armored trains to move around the countryside. The trains used techniques from naval vessels in their armor and the large weapons were usually borrowed naval guns.³⁴ So while the large and expensive ships were not used in combat,

³³ Byron Farwell, *The Great Anglo-Boer War* (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, 1976), 324, 348-354, 392, 393, 397.

³⁴ Celia Sandys, *Churchill wanted dead or alive* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2000), 45.

the techniques that went into designing and building them helped the army during the war.

While not used in combat, the ships of the Royal Navy were put to use in one extremely important job. Since South Africa was so far from Britain, all of the troops had to be transported by sea as it was the fastest way to move so many men and supplies. The ships were faster because of new technologies in power generation and propulsion. And as techniques in design improved the ships got larger and able to carry more troops and supplies at once. Throughout the war the navy supplied troops, food and equipment to the army as it battled the Boers in the interior. Without that much needed logistical support the army would not have been able to engage in battle at all. While merely serving as the logistical supply train for the army was a serious misallocation of Royal Navy resources, the logistics job that it filled during the war was crucial to British success. While the Royal Navy did not participate in the fighting, the technology invested in it helped the British army and the strategic and logistic implications of the navy made the war possible.

In the years following the conflict Royal Navy strategy changed drastically. The need to strengthen the Channel Fleet and rely on alliances because of the German threat was a major departure from tradition. As the British pulled back they were less inclined and less capable of engaging in such large-scale actions as the Boer War. As such it was the last major British colonial intervention before the Great War. With all available resources focused on home defense it was no longer a priority or a possibility in the opening years of the twentieth century to engage in naval activities outside of the English Channel. That shift was a major change, but it did not change the British goals of free

trade and control of the seas or the fact that the navy was the most important military branch.

The British defeated the Boers and held on to South Africa just in time to reduce their presence globally to focus on home defense. But that does not diminish the advantages the British gained by winning. In addition to prestige and increased diplomatic power, the new wealth was very important going forward into the arms race. The victory also meant South Africa was one more colony solidly under British rule, it set the tone that Britain would do what was needed to hold on to its colonies, and the army got experience in more than just colonial action. All of these things played a role in British policy as the arms race intensified.

Another work by Mahan, *Naval Strategy*, captured another important aspect of the arms race. In the book Mahan took lectures he gave from in 1887 to 1911 and fleshed them out, and one line of thought was that “The power to control Germany does not exist in Europe, except in the British navy.”³⁵ This idea reflected the geo-political reality of the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the 1900s. Since the unification of the German Empire during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870-1871 Germany had been a powerhouse. All of the Western powers from Russia to the United States were concerned about Germany’s growing influence. It had come into being while defeating France, its army was unparalleled on the European continent and its industry was growing fast. All of these factors made the European powers fear Germany as a real and growing threat to their supremacy. As far as the Royal Navy controlling Germany, it

³⁵ Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Naval strategy compared and contrasted with the principles and practice of military operations on land: lectures delivered at the U.S. Naval War College, Newport, R.I., between the years 1887 and 1911* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975, c1911), 109.

was still true in 1902, but the arms race of the early 1900s cast that line of thought into doubt. In the end Britain prevailed because of its industry, a large head start and necessity. Germany never achieved a larger navy, but the challenge did reveal an inherent weakness in the idea of naval supremacy and sea power. Sole mastery of the oceans only worked if there was no nation to seriously challenge the dominant nation's sea power. Britain had no real competitors for control of the seas during most of the nineteenth century, so the Royal Navy easily maintained control of the seas. But when Germany pushed to surpass Great Britain, it forced Britain to devote increasing forces and new production to directly face the threat. That meant that there were fewer resources to protect the empire. Had any enemy taken advantage of the situation, there was little Britain could have done on its own about it. As it was, Britain was still able to produce more and newer ships to stay ahead of Germany as far as production went, but all new ships were used in home waters, defending against Germany. This meant that ultimately the damage dealt to Royal Navy capabilities around the globe was felt in its reduced influence, as ships tied up in home waters could not be used elsewhere in the Empire.

During the arms race naval technology advanced rapidly, but British diplomacy and strategy also changed drastically. As more resources were devoted to defense in the English Channel, Britain realized it could not face the threat from Germany alone without sacrificing global influence. This led to Britain entering a series of regional defense alliances and eventually a general defense treaty. In 1902 Great Britain and Japan signed an agreement that allowed Japan to take more of a lead in Far East defense. 1904 saw an alliance of Great Britain with France that allowed France to take the lead in Mediterranean defense. In addition to the regional alliance with France, in 1907 Britain,

France and Russia entered into a general defense alliance. This alliance entered World War I against Germany and Austria-Hungary, and the United States joined during the war after Russia collapsed. 1912 also brought an important change in Britain, this time in strategy. That year the Royal Navy formally shifted from the two-power standard to one in which the Royal Navy only had to match the next largest foe plus 60 percent.³⁶

These changes in British diplomacy and strategy had several implications for how the Royal Navy operated and what it was capable of. The two regional alliances allowed the Royal Navy to reduce its commitment elsewhere and focus on the English Channel, but they reduced Britain's effective military clout to back up diplomacy in those regions. At the same time the alliance with France and Russia was of mutual support in the event of war and really provided a safety net for all three nations by ensuring support against Germany. While Britain had cooperated with the French in the past, such as in the Crimea and China, they began to rely on allies, a complete shift in the way Britain operated, and only out of necessity. It is also interesting to note that the threat posed by Germany was perceived, correctly, to be great enough to justify allying with both France and Russia, both of which were formerly the focus of the two-power standard. It was truly an alliance of necessity on all sides, but was also a major diplomatic step forward. The shift in 1912, while only formalizing what had essentially been evolving into policy since the turn of the century, openly devoted the Royal Navy to outmatching Germany. Each step reduced British diplomacy around the globe by focusing its main instrument, the Royal Navy, on the English Channel and the German threat. By remaining focused on

³⁶J.R. Hill, ed., assisted by Bryan Ranft, *The Oxford illustrated history of the Royal Navy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, c1995), 281, 282, 289, 292.

the Royal Navy rather than strengthening the army as well the British kept all of their diplomatic clout in a body that was increasingly tied down in home waters.

Significantly, for part of the race Britain was not just competing with Germany. While Germany was in a race for supremacy with Great Britain, for the first part of the rivalry Britain still followed the two-power standard and still had global commitments. Thus Great Britain had to build and maintain a fleet big enough to fight Germany, the next biggest power, defend its series of colonies around the globe, and patrol the trade lanes. Great Britain needed control of the seas for survival. For the British, having a navy was part of the culture, and it was essential. For Germany the navy was a luxury, built for the prestige of power and to connect the nation with its new African possessions. Building off of Mahan's ideas, the Germans saw a navy as a means to power, not something with its own purpose. As such, the Germans did not have the same need that drove the British. When this is considered, even once Germany surpassed Britain in manufacturing capacity in the late 1890s the difference in drive, perception, purpose and culture pushed the British to prevail.

Despite the drastic shift of naval technology that had occurred between 1818 and the 1890s, each major step forward took time. The naval arms race that Great Britain and Germany were engaged in at the turn of the century saw a shift that was just as drastic but over a period of just fifteen years. The period is characterized by rapid shipbuilding in large numbers every year by both sides. The sheer number of ships being built allowed many designs to be tried, and each class of ship was larger than the last, while at the same time attempts were made to reduce cost, vulnerability, necessary manpower, and offensive capabilities. But 1906 brought one of the greatest shifts in design, a new and all

big gun ship called the H.M.S. Dreadnought, which “marked a quantitative leap in warship construction. Her size, all big gun armament, and turbine propulsion (never before employed in a ship of such dimensions) made it spectacularly clear that a new era in naval history had begun.”³⁷ British ship builders tried various designs throughout the century, particularly during the arms race, as each side tried to gain the upper hand, but the Dreadnought changed the face of naval warfare. Once it was built every other navy, especially Germany, built its own dreadnought-class battleships.

A revolution later in the arms race was the ‘Queen Elizabeth’-class battleships. This class was “fully oil fired, which allowed both increased speed and range while providing spare displacement for the improvement of other military qualities in what was to be an outstandingly successful class of ship.”³⁸ While not many ships used oil during this period because of logistics issues, the fact that all ships later in the twentieth century adopted oil as fuel showed how technologically advanced this class was. In fact the British already saw the geo-political importance of oil, as evidenced by their establishment of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in 1908 to secure future access to oil. The development of airplanes also led to new naval technologies. In 1913 the Royal Navy developed the first aircraft carrier when “a tanker was converted into a seaplane carrier named at first the Hermes and a year later the Ark Royal.”³⁹ During World War I airplanes were a new technology and saw some use both as weapons and as observation

³⁷David Evans, *Building the Steam Navy: Dockyards, Technology and the Creation of the Victorian Battle Fleet, 1830-1906* (London: Conway Maritime; Annapolis, MD: Distributed in North America by Naval Institute Press, 2004), 200.

³⁸J.R. Hill, ed., assisted by Bryan Ranft, *The Oxford illustrated history of the Royal Navy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, c1995), 291.

³⁹Christopher Lloyd, *The Nation and the Navy: A History of Naval Life and Policy* (London, Cresset Press, 1961), 220.

tools, while carriers expanded the ability and range of the planes. In World War II aircraft carriers overtook battleships as the center of naval power, so their inception during this period of arms race is significant, as it shows the long term influence of this period in developing naval technology.

The primacy of the navy in British minds showed itself in many ways, even in technology. During the arms race airplanes were first invented, and almost immediately they were turned into weapons. During World War I the skies were full of planes serving as scouts, fighters and bombers. In Britain, planes were pursued as a branch of the Royal Navy, and in line with that in 1913 the Ark Royal was created as a means to carry planes on ships. Putting planes on ships allowed the navy to be part of a new shift that was mostly land based. While a good tactical move, as it allowed transport of the new air power anywhere, the decision was also based in primacy of the navy. Since tradition made the navy the most important branch, then every new technology had to be tied in to the navy for both the Royal Navy to stay ahead and the new technology to be used to its fullest.

During The Great War the biggest new threat the British faced was the submarine threat to shipping. While the idea of submarines had been around since the Revolutionary War, modern submarines were really developed during the arms race on the German side. Submarines have played almost as heavily in twentieth-century naval warfare as aircraft carriers have and submarines were being developed first. While submarines go all the way back to the American Civil War and earlier, they were not truly effective until the widespread use and militarization of diesel engines and electric batteries. With both of those technologies usable in naval ships around the turn of the century it became possible

to develop more effective submarines like the Holland Boats. These ships radically altered the strategy needed during wartime in defense of ports, blockades and defending trade. The rapid improvement of submarines during the arms race is again due to the convergence of new technologies available to naval engineers and the rapidity with which both sides were building ships. With so many ideas being tried, there was a greater chance that drastically new technologies would be developed and introduced much faster.

The idea of the navy being the most important branch had never gone away, and it was in fact deeply rooted in theory. Even the need to defend the English Channel, a strategic change for the navy, had not reduced its importance as the primary defense for the nation as Mahan and later Jellicoe discuss. This was because the British failed to learn from the several lessons the Boer War offered. One was the deadliness of modern rifles and machine guns, which would go on to kill millions in the trenches during World War I. But the biggest missed lesson was the need for more emphasis on the army. The army did not need to supplant the navy as the Senior Service, but the British failed to realize that a stronger army was needed to counter potential threats that rested far inland, such as the looming continental war. The British failed to take this lesson away and in World War I the army only engaged with the British Expeditionary Force while the Royal Navy continued to fight in one set piece battle, Scapa Flow, and use blockades to try to force German submission. The relative inability of the Royal Navy to engage in the Boer War should have made the deficiency clear, but the navy did not learn in time for The Great War.

In the end, despite ‘winning’ the arms race and the major innovations as a result, the Royal Navy still lost sole, global control of the seas. With the rise of the German

navy in Europe, Britain was forced to devote more resources to the English Channel just to defend the British Isles. This meant that the Royal Navy could not adequately defend all of Britain's global colonies, commitments and interests. As a result, Britain had to completely adjust its strategy for the Royal Navy. The result was Britain entered into alliances to cover the regions it no longer had the ships to protect.

Conclusion

Prior to 1870 the European balance of power was extremely favorable to Britain. The system checked the power of continental nations, and left the Royal Navy free to dominate the world's oceans. After 1870, the rising trajectory of Germany and the relative decline of France upset the delicate balance of power. By 1900 the balance had been completely changed to the point that British strategy was no longer adequate for the defense of Britain. The Royal Navy had to adjust its strategy, in how it operated alone, how large the navy was and where ships went. Ultimately the new British strategy was only successful in the short term.

When it comes to diplomacy there is a clear distinction between the way Britain operated throughout the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the 1900s. The Royal Navy exhibited a global dominance after 1815 that it carried out thoroughly and for the most part without allies, and that did not go unnoticed to Mahan when he researched the Royal Navy or the Germans when they built their navy. The German challenge finally led to the arms race at the start of the 1900s that had such an impact on British diplomacy. After the start of the arms race Britain began to rely more on allies and was no longer able to engage in naval action around most of the globe. The new reliance on allies did two things, the first of which was to increase the ally's strength. For most of the century Britain had maintained a strong lead over other naval powers, partly by resisting their advances. But in agreeing to work with France, Russia and Japan, Britain was in effect no longer working against them, instead supporting their growth to bolster Britain's position against Germany. At the same time that allies' strength was increasing, Britain's strength in some places was diminishing. Since the navy was the main conduit of diplomacy, in the sense of expressing power and interest in a region, the

reduced usage of the navy in such a manner after 1900 is a marked change, tied intricately to the shift in strategy, but important in its own right. If the navy was not in regions around the globe expressing British interests as it had for a century, then British diplomats on station had to adjust how they interacted with locals and find new ways to enforce British diplomatic presence. Major shifts in British diplomacy meant that Britain interacted with the world very differently in the twentieth century.

The strategy of the Royal Navy was tied closely to the changes in diplomatic power after 1900. Throughout the nineteenth century the Royal Navy followed the two-power standard that ensured its supremacy over not just the next threat, but the next two threats to the Empire. That overwhelming strength ensured that the Royal Navy could be strategically spread out across the Empire to defend key points and help exert diplomatic pressure. By the late 1890s, the growth of the German navy meant this was no longer the case. Instead, the majority of Royal Navy ships had to be reallocated to the English Channel to match the growing German navy, nearly all of which was focused on the English Channel and North Sea. The removal of ships from stations around the globe threatened British interests in key regions because of a lack of ability to respond to crisis and just not having a constant presence to exert influence. This is where the diplomatic agreements with France and Japan made the strategic shift possible. With France and Japan defending and having a presence in the Mediterranean Sea and Pacific Ocean respectively, British interests could still be supported to an extent without Britain having to devote scarce resources to do so. Only a threat as big as the German navy right across the English Channel could have required such a shift in strategy to match the changes in diplomacy of the early 1900s.

The revised strategy that the Royal Navy pursued in the early twentieth century worked for the short term goal of fending off and defeating Germany. The Germans were never able to invade Britain and never had enough ships to destroy the concentrated British forces in the English Channel. When the Triple Entente fought Germany and its allies in World War I, the Entente won and Britain was safe. But these victories concealed two underlying issues with Britain's strategy. Britain survived the threat that it faced, but in doing so it sacrificed the very basic needs that the Royal Navy fulfilled. As Admiral Jellicoe discussed, the navy filled four needs on a global scale, but by World War I the Royal Navy could only carry them out within the region of the English Channel. Outside of the Channel the influence of the Royal Navy, and thus British diplomacy, was greatly diminished. While it was sacrificed as a necessity to survive the arms race and the war, Britain depended on that global reach and influence, and now it had to depend on other nations to supply it. Once that dominance was lost, it was impossible to regain.

The loss of global dominance and influence was a big blow to Britain, but at least the British and the Royal Navy had survived. However, the very reliance on the navy proved to be a liability for the British in World War I and other conflicts. The model of relying on a navy with a small, army was proved to be insufficient by the British experience in the first two decades of the twentieth century. South Africa provides a good early example of this underlying issue with the British model. For a century the British had invested in the navy as the expression of diplomatic and military power. The army was small, and while professional, was largely geared towards maintaining the colonies. That is precisely what it was sent to do in South Africa, but it had a much harder time of

it than anyone expected. Because of the inland nature of the conflict, the naval support the army normally received was unavailable in South Africa. The navy became a shuttle service for the most part, running the vital logistical side of the war, but unable to participate in military actions. The reliance on a naval model precludes major force expression in any major, inland conflict. That was the problem for the British going into World War I. Outside of the navy Britain had the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) which was stationed in northern France. The BEF was woefully inadequate compared to the number of troops all other nations had in their armies and compared to the number of men eventually drafted by the British to fight. By relying on just the Royal Navy for so long, the British had reduced their ability to engage in any conflict that was not mostly a naval conflict, or in which the navy could not have a major role. In large scale land wars the Britain had to adapt quickly to a plan that was outside its main strategy. The sole naval dominance exerted by the Royal Navy in the nineteenth century was upset by the new balance of power after 1870. As a result the Royal Navy was forced to focus on the English Channel to counter Germany while new allies supported it globally. But, the shift in strategy did not address the underlying issue, which was that the British model of relying on the navy limited its options in other types of conflicts.

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