JÖRN LEONHARD

**Nations in Arms and Imperial Defence – Continental
Models, the British Empire and its Military before 1914**

Jörn Leonhard

Nations in Arms and Imperial Defence – Continental Models, the British Empire and its Military before 1914

In a classical liberal statement on the British Empire, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in 1903 stated «that we cannot provide for a fighting empire, and nothing will give us the power. A peaceful empire of the old type we are quite fit for».¹ Against the background of Britain's painful experiences during the Boer War he formulated a fundamental problem which affected the British Empire and also anticipated future challenges: How could Britain's traditional military structure be reconciled with the realities of military conflicts within the British Empire? How was Britain to respond to the new concept of a nation in arms, as it had decided the outcome of the European wars of 1866 and 1870/71 and was more and more regarded as a precondition for political survival of great powers in a period of increased international competition?

In comparison with Tsarist Russia, the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire which (under the dual impression of military defeats and an apparently successful countermodel of nations in arms) all introduced conscript legislation, Britain did so only in 1916 when in the context of industrialised warfare the number of volunteers no longer met the military demands of the western front. From that point of view, doing research on the British concept of a nation in arms and British conscription before the First World War is, at first sight at least, research on a non-phenomenon. Yet this article will show how important the continental European models actually were for British contemporary observers, and how they influenced the relation between the Empire and the military in the British case. In the first part, fundamental premises about the relation between British military, society and Empire are discussed. The second part concentrates on the changing image of the British military, the contemporary perception of continental warfare and the concept of a nation in arms since the 1870s. Thirdly, we will look closer at the

¹ Quoted in A. J. Spender, *The Life of Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman*, 2 vols. (London, 1923), II, 88; see R. Holland, «The British Empire and the Great War, 1914–1918», in *The Oxford History*

of the British Empire, vol. V: *The Twentieth Century*, ed. J. M. Brown and W. R. Louis (Oxford, 1997), 114–137, 114.

meaning of the Boer War in that context. Finally, in a brief overview, the complexities of imperial defence before 1914 and the empire's role for Britain in the First World War are discussed.

1. Military, Society and Empire: British Peculiarities

In stark contrast to continental European societies, Britain in the second half of the century did not witness a debate over national and people's wars as was the case in Germany, France, Italy, or in the United States during the American Civil War. Whenever these concepts were used in British discourses, they referred to other countries than Britain.² Already this symptom points to particular differences between war experiences and the meaning of the military on the continent and across the Channel. Historically, Britain's geographical position without direct neighbours allowed her to rely on a relatively small professional army. Even before 1914 its planned size was less than a fourth compared with most continental armies.³ Furthermore, large standing armies had always been regarded as symbols of absolutist despotism. But in contrast to the continent where, as a consequence of the religious wars of the seventeenth century, princes and dynasties had established absolutist rule on the basis of standing armies, the absolutist experiment had failed in Britain with the end of the Stuarts in 1688. The Whig interpretation of these conflicts and its continuous influence in the early nineteenth century provided ample room for the identification of standing armies with absolutist, potentially catholic, and therefore un-English principles.

When confronted with increased and intensified armament programs and the introduction of mass conscription in other European nation states, discussions in Britain after 1870 did not focus primarily on a conscript army. Even Lord Roberts, the popular President of the National Service League, did not demand a mass conscript army but favored specific military units capable of defending the British island in case of an invasion.⁴ There was no equivalent of continental experiences which, as in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars before 1815 and during the conflicts which developed in the course of nation-state-building in Italy and Germany from the late 1850s to the early 1870s, had catalysed discourses about the changing meaning and justification of war. In addition, the British perception of the American Civil War seemed to underline that the British society was far from turning into a military nation. Thus the concepts of a nation in arms or a people's

2 H. Strachan, «Militär, Empire und Civil Society: Großbritannien im 19. Jahrhundert», in *Militär und Gesellschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. U. Frevert (Stuttgart, 1997), 78–93; M. Paris, *Warrior Nation. Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850–2000* (London, 2000).

3 E. M. Spiers, *The Army and Society* (London, 1980).

4 R. J. Q. Adams and P. P. Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain 1900–1918* (Basingstoke, 1987), 16–18; *Defence of the Empire. Field-Marshal Earl Roberts' Appeal to the Nation. With an Introduction by the Earl of Meath* (London, 1905).

war retained a foreign connotation which, in the eyes of contemporaries, could neither be applied to Britain's present situation nor to her history.

Furthermore, and distinct from the ideal of a nation in arms according to which all groups of society at least in theory should be trained to defend the fatherland, the British army for a long time was regarded as a microcosm of rural society. According to this view, officers were recruited from the landed aristocracy and gentry. Together with volunteer soldiers from the countryside, they represented, in the eyes of contemporaries, the uncorrupted virtues of the non-industrial sectors of British society. When talking about the multi-ethnic aspect of the early 19th century British army, it referred to the high and over-proportional numbers of Scottish and Irish soldiers fighting in the British forces.⁵ Originally, only Protestants could serve as officers or soldiers in the Crown's armed forces. However, the Empire's rapid expansion during the eighteenth century as well as the military's development in general, necessitated the recruitment of Irish Catholics. Already in the 1770s enlistment of Irish Catholics had started. Very soon large numbers were recruited for the Marines and especially for the East Indian Company's army.⁶ By the time of the Indian Mutiny – in 1857/58, nearly 50 % of the Company's army of 14,000 soldiers were Irish, as were 40 % of the 26,000 British troops in India, mostly recruited from poor Catholic families. The fundamental role played by Irish regiments in putting down the Sepoy Mutiny revealed to many British people the extent of the Irish presence in India.⁷ An Anglo-Irish officer corps developed which played a highly disproportionate role in the British army in the nineteenth century. They accounted for approximately 17 % of all officers in the British armed forces, and at least 30 % of all officers serving in India. Whereas most of the Irish soldiers serving in the British armed forces were Catholics, the officers were mainly recruited from protestant lower gentry families who sought careers for their sons.⁸

Traditional interpretations of the British army in the nineteenth century have highlighted that it was this constellation which prevented any military professionalisation by adhering to an amateur ideal of gentleman officers and peasant soldiers.⁹ But in the light of more recent research this point of view needs a closer look. In comparison with France, Germany and Italy, it was not the concept of the national wars or people's wars of 1859/61, 1864, 1866 and 1870/71 that dominated contemporary war discourses in Britain, but the *small wars* which accompanied the

5 D. M. Henderson, *Highland Soldier, A Social Study of the Highland Regiments 1820–1920* (Edinburgh, 1989).

6 T. Bartlett, «Ireland, Empire, and Union, 1690–1801», in *Ireland and the British Empire*, ed. K. Kenny (Oxford, 2004), 61–89, 73–74.

7 T. Bartlett, «The Irish Soldier in India, 1750–1947», in *Ireland and India: Connections, Compa-*

rison, Contrasts, ed. M. Holmes and D. Holmes (Dublin, 1997), 12–17; K. Kenny, «The Irish in the Empire», in *Ireland*, ed. idem, 90–122, 104–105.

8 Ibid., 106–107; Bartlett, «Soldier», 20–21.

9 Strachan, «Militär», 79; see also I. F. W. Beckett, *The Amateur Military Tradition 1558–1945* (Manchester, 1991).

expansion of the British Empire.¹⁰ Throughout the long nineteenth century, Britain was engaged in more or less constant military actions in her colonies, and these war experiences were certainly distinct from the national wars on the continent between 1848 and 1871. It was also in this context that the army's image as a microcosm of rural Britain was challenged. The military crisis which the British faced in the Boer War, in the eyes of many contemporary observers, seemed to be the result of the social degeneration of officers and soldiers, due to urbanisation and industrialisation in the British motherland.¹¹ The difficult experience of imperial warfare thus led to a new and critical assessment of British industrial society's modernity and its price.

As a result of the colonial small wars not only the political role of the army changed, but also its social composition, with decreasing numbers of officers being recruited from the landed gentry and aristocracy. The army as a whole became more urban and, in contrast to the ideal of Irish, Scottish and Welsh soldiers, also more English.¹² This was not a multi-ethnic conscript army meant to integrate the many different ethnic groups within the empire. Multi-ethnicity in this context did not primarily refer to language but to a notion of otherness as it had historically developed in the different regions of the British Isles. The expectation that the army had to play a fundamental role in keeping the empire together was rather derived from a different collective image that was identified with the armed forces. According to this image, the army itself was a symbol of the Union with its high proportion of Irish and Scottish soldiers and officers. At the same time the Union was regarded as the very center of the British Empire. Hence the army's role for the Union could not be separated from that for the empire, as the Irish case demonstrated.

In order to understand this change in public perception of the military, the change in the liberals' attitude towards army and war needs to be taken into consideration. For a long time historians used to point to the antagonism between Gladstonian liberalism and its focus on Home Rule for Ireland on the one hand, and the army as a symbol of the Union under English dominance on the other. This relation changed fundamentally in the late nineteenth century. With the institutionalisation of regular police forces, the army was freed from domestic functions of maintaining law and order. In combination with the heroic and Christian image of the military in colonial conflicts, army and fleet became incarnations of the British Empire and an imperial connotation of Britishness. This dimension underlines the

10 C. E. Callwell, *Small Wars. A Tactical Textbook for Imperial Soldiers* (London, 1896).

11 W. E. Cairnes, *The Absent-Minded War* (London, 1900); L. S. Amery, *The Times History of the War in South Africa 1899–1902*, 7 vols. (London, 1900–1909) and H. O. Arnold Forster, *The Army in 1906: A Policy and a Vindication* (London, 1906).

12 Strachan, «Militär», 86; G. Harries-Jenkins, *The Army in Victorian Society* (London, 1977); A. R. Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home* (London, 1977); H. J. Hanham, «Religion and Nationality in the Mid-Victorian Army», in *War and Society*, ed. M. R. D. Foot (London, 1973), 159–181.

necessity to carefully distinguish between the armed forces' social composition on the one hand and the public view of army and navy on the other.

2. The Empire Nation and its Dilemma:

The Changing Image of the British Military and the new Meaning of the Continental Nation in Arms

British contemporaries of the German unification wars between 1864 and 1871 could not oversee the new meaning of large conscript armies and a new national connotation of the military. Hence the perception of continental warfare and the experience of the empire's military conflicts became essential factors in determining the relation between British society and the military prior to 1914.¹³ *Britishness* gained a new meaning which went far beyond the Union and received fundamental stimulations from the perception of continental and imperial warfare.¹⁴ The wars of 1870/71 seemed to reveal a new kind of mass warfare which went together with a «decline of the chivalry of war».¹⁵ The image of a professional army, composed of mercenaries, was challenged by large conscript armies symbolizing the apparent necessity of whole nations in arms: «The restless military spirit which produced the soldier of fortune is now on the wane».¹⁶

At the same time, the *leitmotiv* of the British military as a *Christian soldier* coined public perceptions of the army. It was essentially derived from the experiences of the empire's wars. Given the absence of large standing armies in Britain herself, the image of the *true Tommy* as the incarnation of national and Christian values became ever more popular and began to overshadow traditional notions of anti-militarism.¹⁷ That process had already started during the wars against France before

13 T. Preston, *Patriots in Arms* (London, 1881); J. F. Maurice, *War. Reproduced with Amendments from the Article in the last Edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, to which is added an Essay on military Literature and a List of Books with brief Comments* (London, 1891); G. F. Henderson, *The Science of War. A Collection of Essays and Lectures 1892–1903*, ed. by N. Malcolm, with a Memoir of the Author by Field Marshal Earl Roberts (London, 1905); G. F. Henderson, «The British Army», in *ibid.*, 382–434; *idem*, *Foreign Citizens*, in *ibid.*, 365–381; *idem*, «War», in *ibid.*, 1–38; R. C. Hart, *Reflections on the Art of War* (London, 1894); *idem*, *Moral Force in War. Extracted from the «Hibbert Journal»* (London, 1909); *idem*, *A Vindication of War* (London, 1911); C. Oman, *A History of the Art of War* (London, 1898); J. Shuckburgh Risley, *The Law of War* (London, 1897); F. N. Maude, «M. Bloch as a Prophet», *National Review* 37 (1901), 102–112; O. Browning, *Wars of the Century and the Development of military Science* (London, 1903); H. J. Foster, *Organization. How Armies are formed for War* (London, 1911).

14 C. D. Ely, *The Road to Armageddon: The Martial Spirit in English Popular Literature, 1870–1914* (Durham, 1987); R. H. MacDonald, «A Poetics of War: Militarist Discourse in the British Empire, 1880–1918», *Mosaic* 23/3 (1990), 17–36; G. R. Wilkinson, *Depictions & Images of War in Edwardian Newspapers, 1899–1914* (Aldershot, 2003); C. Jahr, «British Prussianism. Überlegungen zu einem europäischen Militarismus im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert», *Jahrbuch für Historische Friedensforschung* 8 (1999), 295–309.

15 J. E. E. Dalberg, Baron Acton, *The War 1870: A Lecture delivered at the Bridgnorth Literary and Scientific Institution on the 25th of April 1871* (London, 1871), 41.

16 J. Grant, *British Heroes in foreign Wars, or The Cavaliers of Fortune. A New Edition with coloured Illustrations* (London, 1873), VI.

17 O. Anderson, «The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian Britain», *English Historical Review* 84 (1971), 46–72.

1815 and was revived during the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny in 1857/58. The civic element of anti-militarism, derived from the conflicts of the seventeenth century and so important for the English national self-image, became more and more overshadowed by ethnic and racial connotations of the superior British Empire nation, thus at the same time integrating the different parts of the Union. Against the background of the Crimean War, Lord Panmure underlined the changing image of the army in 1855: «I trust our present experience will prove to our countrymen that our army must be something more than a mere colonial guard or home police; that it must be the means of maintaining our name abroad and causing it to be respected in peace as well as admired and dreaded in war».¹⁸ The *Times* in 1856 added that «any hostility which may have existed in bygone days towards the army has long since passed away. The red coat of the soldier is honoured throughout the country».¹⁹ The successful repression of the Indian Mutiny in 1858 provoked numerous reactions pointing to Britain's Christian mission, her pioneering role for civilisation and her superiority over the barbarian. As the *Baptist Magazine* remarked in 1858: «The tide of rebellion [has been] turned back by the wisdom and prowess of Christian men, by our Lawrences, Edwardes, Montgomerys, Freres, and Havelocks ... God, as it were, especially selecting them for this purpose».²⁰

God's mission in this view served to legitimise even the highest sacrifice: «Such a deed is done ... when a soldier, true to his Queen and country, is true also to his God and preaches while he practices the principles and gospel of the Prince of Peace, in the presence of those whom he acts his part in the world's drama».²¹ Thus the topos of the *soldier of Christ* generated a suggestive self-image: the British nation seemed to act in accordance with a godly mission. Officers and soldiers should act as Christian heroes or die as martyrs. Contrasted with the realities of British industrial society, the imperial connotation of the military generated an exotic counter-image of a non-conditioned existence. This also explains the enormous successes of contemporary war literature which time and again presented the British Empire as a counter-world to Britain's industrial society.²² «British gallantry» became a key-

18 Quoted in C. J. Bartlett, *Defence and Diplomacy. Britain and the Great Powers, 1815–1914* (Manchester, 1993), 126.

19 *The Times*, 22nd October 1856, 6.

20 *Baptist Magazine* 1 (1858), 323.

21 R. M. Ballantyne, *In the Track of the Troops. A Tale of Modern War. With Illustrations* (London, 1878), quoted in S. Hannabus, «Ballantyne's Message of Empire», in *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, ed. J. Richards (Manchester, 1989), 68; see also R. M. Ballantyne, *The Settler and the Savage: A Tale of Peace and War in South Africa* (London, 1877); idem, *Blue Lights; or Hot Work in the Soudan* (London, 1888).

22 E. Hodder, *Heroes of Britain in Peace and War*, 2 vols. (London, 1878–80); G. Rhodes, *Khartoum. Khartoum has fallen, and Gordon a Prisoner*. In *Memento et Memoriam: The Fall of Khartoum, the Fall of Gordon. The Soudanic War: strategically, diplomatically, religiously, and pacifically considered. Three Letters addressed to the Right Hon. H. C. E. Childers, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer* (Pontefract, 1885), 5; M. Howard, «Empire, Race and War in pre-1914 Britain», in *History & Imagination. Essays in Honour of H. R. Trevor-Roper*, ed. H. Lloyd-Jones (New York, 1982), 340–355; A. F. Walls, «Carrying the White Man's Burden: Some British Views of National Vocation in the Imperial Era», in *Many*

word in this context. It was used to characterise a collective quality of the British, as their example in India seemed to prove: «Every leaf in the history of the Indian campaigns shines with a brilliant record of British gallantry. In a country where all the forces of nature were often opposed to the advance of troops, now against a climate of unparalleled severity, and then under fierce burning rays of tropical sun ... England and Englishmen may well feel proud of the victories so hardly gained against native troops of exceeding valour in first-rate military training».²³

Apart from this change in the army's perception, the empire in the course of the 1870s gained a new meaning for Britain's military position in the world. When Russian troops started an attack against the Ottoman Empire, Prime Minister Disraeli ordered indigenous troops from India to intervene. It was now no longer the British colonial troops, but the combination of navy, colonial army and indigenous military that secured Britain's status and served as an integration of the whole empire. No doubt this was an idealised interpretation, but it explained why the nation in arms model as it had developed on the European continent was not regarded as a necessity for the British Empire: «England must have seen with pride the Mediterranean covered with her ships; she must have seen with pride ... the discipline and devotion which have been shown to her and her Government by all her troops, drawn from every part of the Empire. I leave it to the illustrious duke ... to bear witness to the spirit of imperial patriotism which has been exhibited by the troops from India».²⁴

This image and the focus on the differences between the British and continental military traditions was clearly challenged by the experiences of the continental wars in the 1860s and early 1870s. British contemporaries now had to respond to the implicit comparison between the ideal of a small professional army on the one hand and large conscript armies on the other. However, in contrast to the continental multi-ethnic empires these reactions did not lead to a complete overthrow of the British army's organisation before the experience of the First World War. However, they stimulated an increasingly intensive debate about the relation between the military and society in general and imperial defence in particular. The reason for not following the example of the Habsburg Monarchy, Tsarist Russia or the Ottoman Empire, to say nothing of Germany or France, may be seen in the geographically absent imperial wars conducted by Britain. The British, at least prior to the Boer War, were never confronted with the kind of direct military crises which Tsarist Russia had experienced in 1856, the Habsburg Monarchy in 1859 and 1866, or the Ottoman Empire in the 1870s and again during the Balkan Wars. There was no

are Chosen. Divine Election and Western Nationalism, ed. W. R. Hutchison and H. Lehmann (Minneapolis, 1994), 29–50.

²³ F. F. Armytage, *Wars of Queen Victoria's Reign 1837 to 1887* (London, 1887), 228.

²⁴ B. Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, «Berlin Treaty. Speech in the House of Lords, 18th July 1878», in *Selected Speeches of the late Right Honourable the Earl of Beaconsfield*, vol. II (London, 1882), 201–202.

similar pressure for the British to act, a factor which was also underlined by the dominance of the Royal Navy which was never really challenged.

Nevertheless the perception of the continental model of a nation in arms, accompanied by popular Social-Darwinism, stimulated a dynamic discussion about the British military organisation and the future prospects of the Empire. The imagined war of the future forced contemporaries to critically reflect and challenge the traditional view of the military and led to new concepts of war. When James Ram published his *Philosophy of War* in 1878, he insisted on the belligerent origins of the English nation in analogy of the Romans: «In effect the English nation ... grew out of a concourse of kindred tribes engaged in incessant warfare among themselves. In the course of time domination over the rest was achieved successively by tribes of higher and higher degrees of pugnacity, and so the lines of a great nation were laid down. It was just the same in ancient Italy and in Greece, where Rome and Macedon respectively took the final lead». In comparison with France prior to and after the defeat of 1871, Ram came to see the vitalizing effects of war which he applied to the English nation as well: «Was any pure nation ever known with whom war was not a sacrifice enthusiastically offered in defence of what it hold holy? In what country is public life so pure as in England? And the English are always at war in some part of the world. The lower French Empire was peace, but what a corrupting peace it was, and how much purer has France been since the Franco-German war». ²⁵ At the same time Ram saw Britain in danger of losing her reputation and power status if she continued to rely on volunteers for a small professional army. The military successes of disciplined and effective conscript armies had clearly demonstrated the superiority of the model of a nation in arms. Britain, in contrast, was about to lose the means to secure the nation's and hence the empire's survival: «If England cannot command voluntary soldiers enough to defend her homes or to maintain her empire, the sooner we give up the role of a powerful nation the better. A nation that cannot find voluntary soldiers of her own stock deserves to be conquered by any other that can». ²⁶ Ram's premises were derived from a Social-Darwinist model of selection, and he used them in order to criticise the traditional arguments against conscription as anachronistic and dangerous: «When nature ... erects the lists of natural selection ... are we English to give way to competitors really inferior to us? ... The arming and training of whole nations for supreme struggles with each other, is the latest call that she has made upon their energies, and will do more than anything else to determine with what races superiority really lies, and which are best fitted to occupy and replenish the earth». ²⁷

²⁵ J. Ram, *The Philosophy of War* (London, 1878), 32–33, 40, 47.

²⁶ Ibid., 72; D. Hayes, *Conscription Conflict: The Conflict of Ideas in the Struggle for and against Military*

Conscription between 1901 and 1939 (London, 1949); Adams and Poirier, *Conscription*, passim.

²⁷ Ram, *Philosophy*, 75.

For Ram the dual perception of both the European continent and the empire generated a military dilemma for Britain. The European wars fought in the name of entire nations highlighted the differences between Britain and the continent.²⁸ Whereas Britain focused on her fleet and the image of a naval power, the traditional military structure came under increasing pressure when confronted with the militarisation of continental societies: «Characteristic of the modern system is the increased interest evinced by all classes in each and every country in its military organisation, means and methods. This is very observable in the states of the continent, particularly where universal service has been longest established. In Germany conversance with things military pervades all classes. In France the army is enthusiastically supported». In Britain, he argued, the navy was «our first line» and he could not find any cause to complain of the interest the public bestowed on it. With regard to the army, the British legislature, «while equally responsible with that of any continental nation», seemed less endowed with the critical knowledge «requisite for the use of its controlling power». Ram attributed this to the «circumstances of our national history». But contrary to the ideal of a nation in arms, prepared to mobilise the resources of the whole nation, the British military continued to rely on the voluntary system as it seemed to correspond both to British historical experiences and her constitutional self-image: «Whether before the enemy, on the sea, or in the foreign garrison, the quality of spirit and the tone which the voluntary system confers are of incalculable value; nor is it only so in the regular army, the volunteer who gives willingly, as many as one does, more than the number of drills necessary to secure his grant, is equally an exponent of its value».²⁹

Despite the army's popularisation prior to and after 1815, the concept of a nation in arms remained a foreign, un-English one. The reality of the empire's small wars which were geographically distant events without a direct military impact on Britain herself added to the belief that a radical change in the military structure was not an imminent need. It was not until the 1890s that this position came under serious pressure. Not least against the background of an Anglo-German naval rivalry, a future European war which would directly affect Britain now became ever more realistic. This catalysed discussions about an adequate military structure, and imperial defence served as a key-word in these debates.³⁰ Still it was the Royal Navy which seemed to guarantee the status of the maritime empire nation: «The Royal Navy is to the British Empire all and far more than her army is to Germany... Naval

28 A. W. Kinglake, *The Invasion of the Crimea*, vol. VI (London, 1881); J. T. Barrington, *England on the Defensive* (London, 1881); «Imperial Defence», *Royal United Service Institution Journal* (1884); E. Hamley, *National Defence* (London, 1889).

29 J. C. Dalton and W. H. Goodenough, *The Army Book for the British Empire. A Record of the Deve-*

lopment and present Composition of the military Forces and their Duties in Peace and War (London, 1893), VI, 88–89.

30 «England's Unreadiness for War», *National Review* 9 (1887), 153–169; «Naval Warfare and National Defence», *Quarterly Review* 174 (1892), 534–566.

supremacy ... signified the promise of a mighty future. To the British Empire of today, it is the only possible guarantee of national existence». ³¹ But fears of a future invasion and the naval race between Germany and Britain challenged the premise of the geographically distant empire wars. Numerous novels about a future war and fictitious invasions of the British Isles contributed to collective hysteria prior to 1914. ³² Germany now took over the role of a prime national enemy which Spain had played in the sixteenth and France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. ³³ Confessional and ideological enemy images were now replaced by a structure of competing industrial societies. Military power was regarded as a direct consequence of national strength as it became visible in industrial effectiveness.

3. The Experience of the Boer War: The Crisis of Imperial Warfare and the Challenge of Industrial Society

After the perception of continental warfare in the 1860s and 1870s, the experience of the Boer War marked a major watershed in British discourses on the concept of a nation in arms. The combination of initial problems in British military operations, the Boers' successful campaigns and the character of the events as a modern media war with a global audience distinguished this experience from earlier small wars within the British Empire. ³⁴ In contrast to the 1870s, this time Britain was directly affected and experienced a serious crisis of her ability to effectively defend the empire. As a result, the self-image as a successful empire nation suffered severely. The Boer War also marked a watershed in that it demonstrated the realities of an imperial war. Thousands of volunteers from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand had joined the British forces in order to conquer two small states and integrate them

31 G. S. Clarke and J. R. Thursfield, *The Navy and the Nation or Naval Warfare and Imperial Defence* (London, 1897), 3; G. S. Clarke, «The German Strategist at Sea», *United Service Magazine*, reprinted in *ibid.*, 215–227; J. R. Thursfield, «Captain Mahan's Writings», *The Times*, 1st April 1893, reprinted in: Clarke and Thursfield, *Navy*, 188–198; *idem*, «The Jeune École Française», *Naval Annual* (1894), reprinted in Clarke and Thursfield, *Navy*, 199–214; see J. Rüger, «Nation, Empire, and Navy: Identity Politics in the United Kingdom 1887–1914», *Past & Present* 185 (2004), 159–188.

32 «The Battle of Dorking», *Blackwood's Magazine* (May 1871); P. H. Colomb et al., *The Great War of 189. [sic!] A Forecast. With numerous Illustrations from Sketches specifically made for 'Black and White' by Frederic Villiers* (London, 1893, 2nd edn. 1895); T. S. Cave and L. Tebbutt, *The British Army and the Business of War* (London, 1896); W. Le Queux, *Invasion of 1910, with a full Account of the Siege of London* (London, 1906); *A Second Franco-German War and Its Consequences for England* (London,

1907); H. G. Wells, *War in the Air* (London, 1908); E. Ford and G. C. Home, *England Invaded* (London, 1913); G. T. Chesney, *The Battle of Dorking, being an Account of the German Invasion of England, with the Occupation of London and the Fall of the British Empire* (London, 1871, new edn. 1914); A. C. Doyle, *Great Britain and the Next War* (London, 1914).

33 G. E. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and British Political Thought, 1899–1914* (Oxford, 1971); K. Robbins, «Present and Past». *British Images of Germany in the First Half of the Twentieth Century and their Historical Legacy* (Göttingen, 2000).

34 M. Hampton, «The Press, Patriotism, and public Discussion: C. P. Scott, the Manchester Guardian, and the Boer War, 1899–1902», *Historical Journal* 44/1 (2001), 177–197; A. Steinsieck, «Ein imperialistischer Medienkrieg. Kriegsberichterstattung im Südafrikanischen Krieg (1889–1902)», in *Augenzeugen. Kriegsberichterstattung vom 18. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert*, ed. U. Daniel (Göttingen, 2006), 87–112.

into the British Empire. Despite some Irish fighters on the Boers' side, the pro-Boer movement in Britain made the war initially quite popular, as the 'Khaki' elections in 1900 showed. Initially it had been decided not to include «coloured troops» from other parts of the empire in order to make it «a white man's war». However, both the British and the Boers were forced to include soldiers recruited from the African population in the course of the conflict. In that way, over 100,000 Africans served as scouts and labourers. Lord Kitchener, the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in 1900–02 had to admit the arming of over 10,000 men, but research on the topic has shown that David Lloyd George's estimation of approximately 30,000 was much more realistic.³⁵ What became more important was that the military conflict soon revealed the deficits of the British colonial military. Final victory was only achieved by quantitative superiority and radicalizing the means of war, especially by the systematic destruction of Boers' farms and the deportation of women and children into newly established *concentration camps*.³⁶

Below the surface of war enthusiasm, public responses to the events in South Africa and their interpretation by the new mass media also reflected a deepening crisis in the self image of the empire nation. William Lecky stated that the war meant a huge disappointment for the British nation.³⁷ In addition the military operations provoked widespread criticism which now turned against the traditional empire patriotism. For critical contemporaries the war had underlined that the empire was more and more founded on uncivilised violence and that it caused a huge financial burden for Britain which prevented her from following the German model of progressive social reforms at home.³⁸ In that context conscription, if ever introduced, seemed to become yet another burden for British workers: «Empire

35 C. Saunders and I. R. Smith, «Southern Africa, 1795–1914», in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. III: *The Nineteenth Century*, ed. A. Porter and A. Low (Oxford, 1999), 597–623, 618–619.

36 R. Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class. Working-Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War 1899–1902* (London, 1972); T. Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London 1979); P. Warwick and S. B. Spies, eds., *The South African War. The Anglo-Boer War 1899–1902* (Harlow, 1980); A. L. Friedberg, *The weary Titan. Britain and the Experience of relative Decline, 1895–1905* (Princeton, 1988); A. Grundlingh, «The bitter Legacy of the Boer War», *History Today* 49/11 (1999), 21–25; K. T. Surridge, *Managing the South African War, 1899–1902: Politicians v. Generals* (Rochester, 1999); P. Dennis and J. Grey, eds., *The Boer War. Army, Nation and Empire* (Canberra, 2000).

37 W. E. Lecky, *Moral Aspects of the South African War* (London, 1900), 7; see J. E. Ellam, «Capitalist

Patriotism and its Effects in South Africa», *New Century Review* 8 (1900), 281–292; C. Warren, «Some Lessons from the South African War», *National Review* 38 (1901/02), 181–196; J. M. Robertson, *Patriotism and Empire* (3rd edn. London, 1900); A. C. Yate, «The Spirit of the Nation in War», *United Service Magazine* 142 (1900), 14–21; A. T. Mahan, «The Influence of the South African War upon the Prestige of the British Empire», *National Review* 38 (1901/02), 501–512; W. H. Kent, «Patriotism or Imperialism?», *Westminster Review* 157 (1902), 126–135; C. Freiherr von der Goltz, «The military Lessons of the South African War», *National Review* 42 (1903), 371–394; V. Grey, *The Land we Love: Our Military Wilderness and the Way out of it* (London, 1906).

38 A. Maude, *War and Patriotism* [A Reply to a Pamphlet by John Bellows entitled: *The Truth about the Transvaal War and the Truth about War*] (London, 1900), 31.

and Conscription? ... What have you to say, John Smith, you who are to pay and bleed? No one dare seriously propose Conscription to-day, but in the histories of nations come days of imminent danger and panic; fears become excited and people lose their heads. If Conscription ever comes to England, it will come at some such crisis». ³⁹ Other observers pointed to the general unpopularity of conscription in British society and to practical difficulties in applying it to the empire: «Conscription is talked of, but that would not be popular, our people don't want to be driven. They will always answer the call in thousands, and storm any position to give their enemy the cold steel, there is no lack of pluck, but soldiers must be trained, and their training must be kept up these days, and the best trained will win the day. Again with India and our many Colonies and responsibilities how would conscription act, you would have three or four different armies, each under different rules». ⁴⁰

Yet, on the other hand, parts of the British public identified enthusiastically with the fate of the British *Tommy* who as a volunteer fought for the nation. According to this position, he deserved at least the same estimation as the military in continental conscript armies, if not more. The superiority of the volunteer over the conscript was defended: «Our hero is not a conscript. He enters the army of his own free will and choice ... It will be interesting to note whether any <snubbing> process will be inflicted upon him after he has done his best for the glory and honour of the country, – or whether hats will be touched as he comes and goes in places of resort and amusement, out of respect for the uniform he wears, as is the case with his brothers in Austria and Germany». As a soldier of the Crown and dressed in the Queen's uniform he ought to expect «as much respect throughout the English Empire wherever he goes, as a soldier of the German Emperor in the Emperor's uniform receives in every part of the German Empire, – nay even more, for the German <Tommy> is compelled to serve, while his English brother serves by choice». ⁴¹

Kenelm Digby Cotes' *Social and Imperial Life of Britain*, published in 1900 and widely read, tried to analyse the new relation between the British nation and the military in the light of the recent war experiences. For him as for many contemporaries, the Boer War had underlined the necessary ability to mobilise all resources of a nation. War had become a test of the nation's survival in an age of dynamic international competition which Britain could only stand on the basis of a community of citizens and not as a society of antagonistic classes. Hence political participation and imperial defence became necessarily interrelated: «The connection between war and the national character, important as it always was, is of immeasurably

39 A. M. Thompson, *Towards Conscription. Jubilee Patriotism: its Meaning, Cause, and Effects* (London, 1898), 16.

40 A. Godwin-Austin, *An Army without Conscription* (London, 1900), 1–2.

41 M. Corelli, *Patriotism or Self-Advertisement? A social Note on the War* (6th edn. London, 1900), 6–7.

greater importance at the present time ... Now that the citizen soldier has almost taken the place of the paid soldier, war will be, more than it ever was, an index of the state of the country». Following the classical premises of the Whig interpretation of history, military service and political participation had to go hand in hand. In the highly idealised sense of a linear process of uninterrupted constitutional progress the end of dynastic wars and arming the people seemed to come together. It was again the self-image of evolutionary continuity that served as a national self-affirmation: «In England, each stage in arming the people is a stage of industrial and constitutional progress».⁴²

The contemporary mass media's interest in the Boer War placed the army in the very centre of public interest. Yet at the same time, earlier questions about the British ability to lead a future war and to defend the empire against a growing number of European competitors were resumed.⁴³ Although conscription was still not an alternative, the contemporary war discourses around 1900 took a new direction, in that recent war experiences were related to the development of industrial society and parliamentary government as they had progressed in nineteenth century Britain. Hence the conscription controversy after 1900 reflected the different and controversial interpretations of Britain's modernity in comparison with continental nation states, in particular the second German Empire of 1871.

In a highly significant contribution to this debate Charles Ross stated in 1903 that the British nation had been falsely immunised against the vitalizing effects of wars by its economic successes. In comparison with continental societies that had only survived their critical moments in past wars as nations in arms, Britain was now threatened by decline: «The nation is ... over-civilised which, through the ease, comfort, and security of its existence, gives no thought to war ... Such a nation quickly degenerates; for it is by war, and by the constant study of war, alone, that a nation can maintain itself in such a condition as will enable it to combat and overcome its enemies». Ross and many of his contemporaries regarded war as a supreme test in the process of human evolution, and modern conscript armies seemed to be the quasi natural means for that test. From this point of view, nations in arms responded to a new stage in human evolution, caused by the development of industrial societies. The Boer War seemed to have underlined that, as a successful empire nation, Britain was already in decline. Ross also identified the structural causes behind this painful experience: It was the nation's one-sided focus on politics, administration and economic well-being as well as the traditional mistrust against the military that had long overshadowed the belligerent qualities and prevented the necessary autonomy of the military in

⁴² K. D. Cotes, *Social and imperial Life of Britain*, vol. I: *War and Empire* (London, 1900), 427–428, 642.

⁴³ [W. E. Cairnes] *The Army from within. By the Author of 'An absent-minded War'* (London, 1901), I, 148.

a modern society. For Ross it was a fundamental weakness of representative government that «soldiers and sailors ... are placed in a position subordinate to civilian officials, whose duty it should be ... to confine their attention to civil matters». ⁴⁴

Ross reflected upon the primacy of politics which he regarded as a central problem of European societies around 1900: were democratic systems at all capable of leading a future war, or would their complex decision-making processes on the basis of parliamentary governments and a primacy of the civil over the military not render them incapable of effectively defending themselves in time of war? Here the discussion went far beyond the practical problems of changing a professional into a conscript army. ⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, Ross developed his argument on the basis of an explicit comparison with Germany and against the background of highly increased international competition. According to him, the German Empire after 1871 had successfully established a political and constitutional system which corresponded adequately to her military necessities as a new nation state: «A military despotism which consists of a whole nation in arms, each man of which is as it were his own despot in peace-time and in matters connected purely with his personal comfort, but who is a disciplined member of a great force wielded by the head of the nation in war, is not, it would seem in reality, despotism. The German nation appears to have succeeded where the Romans failed, inasmuch as it would seem to have found a form of government which is not incompatible either with success in war or with true liberty. All other nations liable at any moment to invasion have followed this lead». In a future war against a nation in arms constituted like Germany, Britain seemed inevitably inferior. ⁴⁶

The British Empire's particular situation with its ethnic groups and heterogeneous structures made the situation still worse. In the light of these fundamental problems integrative institutions were needed to compensate for the lack of unifying war experiences which characterised the continental concept of a unifying and integrative nation in arms. In contrast, the British Empire only meant a «conglomeration of ... nations» which could neither be kept together through language or family ties nor on the basis of economic relations. Ross argued in favor of military cohesion and advocated an imperial military community, which he called a «brotherhood in arms». For him the lack of such a military community explained many of the empire's problems. According to him, it had been military service within the British Union which had brought the different ethnic groups of the British Isles together: Only this experience of common military service had

44 C. Ross, *Representative Government and War* (London, 1903), 7, 11, 162–163.

45 H. W. Wilson, «Democracy and the War», *National Review* 34 (1899), 506–514; idem, «The anti-national Party in England», *National Review* 37

(1901), 294–305; H. Quelch, *Social-Democracy and the Armed Nation. Written for the Social-Democratic Federation* (London, 1907).

46 Ross, *Government*, 221–222, 292.

finally integrated Scots, Welsh and Irish into the Union of Great Britain. The Union model of a successful military community now had to be applied to the empire at large. The military experience of the Union served as a model for integrating the whole empire, and this allowed Ross to link the South African crisis to the Irish problem when referring to the role played by Irish soldiers in the British armed forces: «The assimilation of South Africa is no more a complicated problem than is the suppression of rebellion in Ireland. The sole difficulty lies in bringing an uneducated nation governed by sentiment and a popular government to grasp the necessity for action. A whole race, related to the Empire in blood, but distinct from it in language, in tradition, and in religion, must be brought to form an integral part of the Empire. No more loyal man than the Irish soldier exists; he has fought side by side with other men of his race, and knows their worth, even as they know his. He is proof against the wiles of the pedagogue and the politician. A brotherhood in arms, the great bond which establishes fast friendship between nation and nation as between man and man, will alone bind South Africa to the remainder of the Empire, as it will alone bring to a termination the intrigue and covert rebellion in the South of Ireland».⁴⁷

4. The Complexities of Imperial Defence prior to and after 1914

The link which contemporary observers established between the war in South Africa and the crisis over Ireland is of high significance for the British Empire's complexity before 1914. The military was in many ways the very link between these different scenarios. Ireland was, as Engels had once put it, England's first colony, but it also formed part of the empire's metropolitan centre by supplying the empire with soldiers, settlers and administrative personnel, thus taking advantage of possible careers in the military, the colonial administration or in commerce and trade.⁴⁸ That was per se no exception: Indians also helped to govern India, and colonial subjects of the French Empire engaged in similar functions.⁴⁹ But nowhere did the dual role generate such a paradoxical constellation. The example of the Boer War is a good example to demonstrate this: Two Transvaal Brigades were formed by the Irish on behalf of the Boers, but serving on the opposite site were about 28,000 Irish soldiers in the British army. Ireland's role as both colonial and imperial became obvious during the war: if pro-Boer agitation inspired the Irish republican movement, serving the empire against the Boers in South Africa was an important aspect of Ulster Unionism. Yet comparing Irish and Boer secessionist nationalism ignored the Boers' treatment of black Africans. Pro-Boer

47 Ibid., 362–363, 365.

48 Kenny, «Empire», 92–93; M. Holmes, «The Irish in India: Imperialism, Nationalism and Internationalism», in *The Irish Diaspora*, ed. A. Bielenberg (London, 2000), 235; K. Jeffrey, ed., «An Irish

Empire»? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire (Manchester, 1996).

49 V. G. Kiernan, *Colonial Empires and Armies* (new edn. Montreal, 1998).

agitation certainly radicalised nationalist feelings in Ireland before 1914, in that parliamentary representation was increasingly seen as irrelevant.⁵⁰

This highly complex identity as both colonial and imperial is also obvious from many biographies of leading Irish Home Rulers in the last third of the nineteenth century: They were proud of Irish feats within the British forces, yet critical towards the British army itself, which they often regarded as a repressive force in the hands of protestant Unionists. They welcomed the individual careers of their children in the colonial forces or in the imperial administration, but were critical of the rulers of the empire as such. Hundreds of Irish nationalists exemplified this paradoxical constellation in their own biographies and careers: they welcomed Home Rule, but they also fought in the British forces after 1914, and yet later proceeded in the ranks of the Irish Republican Army.⁵¹

The interrelation between imperial and colonial identity also continued after 1914, but now the constellation began to change. An estimated 200,000 men from all parts of Ireland served in the British forces during the First World War. Thus Irishmen made up about 10 % of the British army recruits in 1913 compared with still 20 % in 1870. In the Dominions, enlistment during the First World War varied between 13 and 19 % of the overall white population, but for Ireland the figures were down to only 6 %. Recruitments from Ireland declined especially after the Easter Rising 1916.⁵² At the same time a very influential anti-war movement emerged that included veterans from the Transvaal Committee. The complexity of empire relations meant that serving the British forces did not exclude secessionist and radical nationalism. There was still a complex overlapping of military service and revolutionary agitation against London.⁵³

Finally, the contemporary reference to Ireland in the context of coming to terms with the experience of the Boer War certainly overshadowed the fact that, prior to 1914, it was with regard to the Home Rule debate that serious tensions arose between parts of the military elite and the government in London. The army presented itself as the most important integrating force of both Union and empire, as the Curragh mutiny demonstrated. When in March 1914 officers of the 6th Cavalry Brigade in Ireland declared that they were not prepared to march to the North to implement autonomy, Lord Roberts, the popular President of the National Service League, openly supported their position and demanded the resignation of the Chief of the General Staff.⁵⁴ Here, the army's self-image as the guarantee of the

50 Kenny, «Ireland and the British Empire», in idem, *Ireland*, 1–25, 19; *ibid.*, 193.

51 A. Jackson, «Ireland, the Union, and the Empire, 1800–1960», in *Ireland*, ed. Kenny, 123–153, 137–139.

52 Kenny, «Empire», 108–109; K. Jeffrey, *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge, 2000), 39, 107–

143; idem, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918–22* (Manchester, 1984), 1.

53 Kenny, «Ireland», 20; Jackson, «Ireland», 142.

54 I. F. W. Beckett, ed., *The Army and the Curragh Incident 1914* (London, 1986); E. A. Muenger, *The British Military Dilemma in Ireland: Occupation Politics 1886–1914* (Lawrence/Kan., 1991); see also

British Union as the empire's centre became obvious. Ireland and not the maritime empire was the testing ground for this process which, because of the outbreak of the First World War, was postponed until 1918. The example of the violent actions of demobilised soldiers in Ireland after the end of the war underlined the role of the military at the periphery.⁵⁵

It was the First World War which brought about a new role of the colonies and dominions and a fundamentally new relationship between Britain and her empire. Radicalizing the earlier experience of the Boer War, the empire now came close to a single military entity with joint military operations in various war theatres.⁵⁶ Pan-British sentiments dominated in the white Dominions, and the outbreak of war was often used to defend the very different positions held in the hierarchy of the empire. Thus reactions from Canada or Australia differed from India, where the annual Indian National Congress in Madras during December 1914 was poorly attended.⁵⁷ What became clear, however, was the growing importance of imperial troops for the military theatres around the world, as the numbers of imperial soldiers sent abroad and lost in military operations demonstrate:⁵⁸

	Estimated Population in 1914	Troops sent abroad	% of population	Killed, died, and missing	% of sent abroad
British Isles	46.000.000	5.000.000	10,9	705.000	14,1
Canada	8.000.000	458.000	5,7	57.000	12,4
Australia	5.000.000	332.000	6,6	59.000	17,8
New Zealand	1.100.000	112.000	10,2	17.000	15,2
South Africa	1.400.000	136.000	9,7	7.000	5,2

A particular role was played by the Indian army. From summer 1914 to the end of 1918 it recruited another 826,868 combatants and 445,592 non-combatants. Indian army casualties officially included 64,449 killed and 69,214 wounded. In sum, 16,2 % of all Indian soldiers recruited during the war were killed or wounded in action. In 1918, all in all 943,344 Indian troops were serving in major war theatres: 14.1 % in France, 5.0 % in Africa, 62.4 % in Mesopotamia, 12.3 % in Egypt, 1.0 % in Salonica, 5.2 % in Aden and in the Gulf. Making India the «barrack in

Speeches and Letters of Field-Marshal Earl Roberts on Imperial Defence (London, 1906); idem, *A Nation in Arms. Speeches on the Requirements of the British Army, delivered by Field-Marshal, The Earl Roberts* (New York, 1907); idem, *Lord Roberts' Campaign Speeches. A Continuation of 'The Message to the Nation'* (London, 1913).

55 A. Gregory, «Peculiarities of the English? War, Violence and Politics: 1900–1939», *Journal of Modern European History* 1/1 (2003), 44–59.

56 Jeffrey, *Army*, 1.

57 Holland, «Empire», 114–117.

58 All data, except percentages, are taken from table 5.1 in Holland, «Empire», 117.

the Eastern seas» also meant changing her weight within the empire, and the result was a new equation between war contributions and political status. A new tacit principle emerged that anticipated future developments: «no contribution without representation». ⁵⁹

5. Outlook and Conclusion:

The British Peculiarities and the Dilemma of Nations in Arms

Whereas French, German, or Italian societies experienced their war ideal in national wars, fought by nations in arms in their collective imagination, the British referred to the empire's *small wars*, in which the army came to represent an imagined empire nation, which contained many ethnic and racial connotations. In contrast to continental societies, the tendency to anticipate a major future war in Europe as a conflict over the existence of the entire nation was a rather late development in Britain. Only after 1890 and in the context of the naval race with Germany, a possible German invasion led to hysterical reactions among the British public. These invasion panics had their origins in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century when they had been focusing on Spain and France as the main political and confessional enemies, a perception that was renewed before 1815 and again during the three anti-French panics of 1848, 1852 and 1859. ⁶⁰ It was only since the 1890s that Germany began to replace France as the anticipated invader of the future. This collective perception increased both the army's and navy's popularity before 1914. But in contrast to continental countries, it was not a cult of a nation in arms that characterised this development, but rather a belated militarisation of society, as the numerous paramilitary activities of army and navy leagues, boy brigades and boy-scout movements illustrated. ⁶¹

National wars, shaping the religious and national identity of the British, had rather characterised the conflicts with Spain and France in the early modern period and during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Instead of the short national wars on the continent between 1859 and 1871, Britain witnessed more or less constantly military actions in her colonies. The absence of large conscript armies on the British island and the colonial small wars allowed the imagination of an empire nation, symbolised by the army abroad which came to represent British and Christian values. In contrast to continental cases, belligerent images of the British nation paradoxically developed both earlier and later: earlier in the wars

59 Ibid., 122–123; J. Brown, «War and the Colonial Relationship: Britain, India, and the War of 1914–18», in *War and Society*, ed. M. R. D. Foot (London, 1973), 85–106.

60 L. Colley, *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (London, 1992).

61 Strachan, «Militär», 90; H. Cunningham, *The*

Volunteer Force: a Social and Political History 1859–1908 (London, 1975); H. Strachan, *History of the Cambridge University Officers Training Corps* (Tunbridge Wells, 1976); I. F. W. Beckett, *Riflemen Form: a Study of the Rifle Volunteer Movement 1859–1908* (Aldershot, 1982).

from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century against Spain and France, and later, in the context of armament races, in the anti-German invasion panics during the decade before 1914. With the disappearance of traditional anti-militarism, ethnic and racial connotations of Anglo-Saxon superiority and British-Christian civilisation more and more dominated contemporary war discourses.

Before 1914 a large spectrum of connotations associated with modern warfare characterised the British case. The presence of positive and affirmative or critical positions reflected the complexity of a modern industrial society which felt under increasing pressure from the Empire's overstretching and international competition. War was accepted as a necessary means and a ferment of state-building.⁶² War could be seen as a universalised principle of competition, selection and rationalisation: «The science of organisation must raise and standardise the art and practice of all organisations, whether employed in military warfare, in the warfare which society or a nation wages as a whole, or in a warfare which a section of society wages – must apply to an Empire as to a municipality, to a public department as to a private business».⁶³ If Britain did not experience the nation in arms model by the introduction of conscription, she certainly experienced a process of militarisation of society. Popular notions of a belligerent jingoism were a prominent feature of pre-war mass culture. Veterans', voluntary and military associations, youth movements and students played an important role in this militarisation of British society before 1914.⁶⁴

Yet at the same time the numerous articles, essays and books on imperial defence also underlined the impact of implicit comparisons between the British Empire and continental powers which were perceived as belligerent nations in arms.⁶⁵ Conscription remained a controversial issue. This comparison was made even more difficult in the light of British workers' distance towards the military, which was regarded as a potential weakness in a future war: «The mass of the people is utterly oblivious of sound military principles ... there are millions of the working classes

62 R. Holsti, «The Relation of War to the Origin of State, Helsinki 1913», *Suomalaisen Tiedeakatemia Toimituksia – Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae*, Series B, 13 (1914), 1–313.

63 Marshall B. Williams, *Military and Industrial War and the Science of Organisation* (London, 1912), 14.

64 R. N. Price, «Society, Status and Jingoism: The Social Roots of Lower Middle Class Patriotism, 1870–1900», in *The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 1870–1914*, ed. G. Crossick (New York, 1977), 89–112; S. Pryke, «The Popularity of Nationalism in the Early British Boy Scout Movement», *Social History* 23/3 (1998), 309–324; P. Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and*

the British Left, 1881–1924 (Woodbridge, 2003); S. Levens, *Elite, Männlichkeit und Krieg. Tübinger und Cambridger Studenten 1900–1919* (Göttingen, 2006), 123–125, 171–173.

65 C. Dilke and H. S. Wilkinson, *Imperial Defence* (London, 1892); H. S. Wilkinson, *The Great Alternative. A Plea for a National Policy* (1894, new edn. London, 1909); idem, «Preparation for War», *National Review* 39 (1902), 197–208; idem, *The Brain of an Army. A popular account of the German General Staff* (London, 1909); idem, *Britain at Bay* (London, 1909); idem, *War and Policy* (London, 1909); T. C. Horsfall, *National Service and the Welfare of the Community* (London, 1906); →

to whom England, as England, does not exist. They recognise ... no allegiance to a country in which their whole stake is the chance of wresting a bare subsistence from the blind commercial force by which they are wholly dominated». ⁶⁶

This was no exception in European comparison. In stark contrast to his belief in maintaining of political and military control of war, the military hero of the German Wars of Unification, Helmut von Moltke, who had benefitted so much from the military power of a disciplined conscript army, in one of his last speeches in the Reichstag in May 1890, pointed out that the traditional concept of cabinet wars had now irrevocably come to an end. Reflecting upon the dilemma of the nations in arms, he saw traditional cabinet wars being replaced by new peoples' wars as they had developed since 1848. Wars were no longer fought on the basis of a political and military primacy, but seemed more and more influenced by social interests, social conflicts and public opinion. Moltke argued that the causes which made peace so difficult to maintain were no longer princes and governments, but the peoples and classes, pointing in particular to the lower classes' social interests and their will to use revolutionary force in order to improve their socio-economic position. Nations in arms would ultimately mean to arm the people – with all the social and political consequences this would have. Under these circumstances, a short and decisive war seemed no longer possible. Given the enormous armaments of all European powers, a future war was likely to last indefinitely. A decisive reason for this prospect was the fact that mass conscription had transformed the limited size of earlier armies into nations in arms with virtually unlimited human resources. Anticipating an experience which all European societies would share after 1914/18, he argued that no power could be totally defeated, and that consequently peace treaties would only have a temporary significance. Moltke was convinced that the war of the future would no longer be fought for territorial gains or power positions, but for the very existence of nations and nation states. The future wars would therefore transform the complete social and political basis of existing nations and of civilisation itself. ⁶⁷

W. C. Underwood, *A Plea for National Military Training in Britain* (2nd edn. London, 1907); H. O. Arnold-Foster, *Military Needs and Military Policy. With an Introduction by Field-Marshal Earl Roberts* (London, 1909); W. James, «The moral Equivalent of War», *McClure's Magazine* 35 (1910), 463–468; C. E. Callwell, «Introduction», in *A Nation Trained in Arms Or a Militia? Lessons in War from the Past and the Present*, ed. Baron von Freytag-Loringhoven (New York, 1918), V–XXII.

⁶⁶ L. C. Cornford, *The defenceless Island. A Study of the social and industrial conditions of Great Britain and Ireland; and of the Effect upon them of the Outbreak of a maritime War* (London, 1906), 235–236.

⁶⁷ H. v. Moltke, «Speech in the Reichstag, 14th May 1890», in *Kriegstheorie und Kriegsgeschichte. Carl von Clausewitz und Helmuth von Moltke*, ed. R. Stumpf (Frankfurt/Main, 1993), 504–506; see also Graf A. von Schlieffen, *Über die Millionenheere* (1911), in *Cannae. Mit einer Auswahl von Aufsätzen und Reden des Feldmarschalls*, ed. H. Freiherr von Freytag-Loringhoven (Berlin, 1925), 286–287; J. Leonhard, «Nation-States and Wars», in *What is a Nation? Europe 1789–1914*, ed. T. Baycroft and M. Hewitson (Oxford, 2006), 231–254.

Confronted with the wars against revolutionary and Napoleonic France, Prussia at the beginning of the century had introduced universal conscription and, in contrast to the France model, exemptions had not been allowed. However, and again in contrast to France, Prussia denied any coupling of conscription and citizenship rights. Moltke noticed how far the new tendencies towards nations in arms and people's war which he saw advancing after the conflicts of the 1860s and 1870s, would ultimately include the right of political and social participation of all classes of society and hence question the foundations of the new German Empire of 1871. The war discourses of the late nineteenth century anticipated what would become reality only after 1914: a new concept of national service, based upon common war sacrifices, by which all classes of society could demand to equally participate in a democratic society. Britain, prior to the First World War, had experienced a different path towards this development, but the consequences of relating national war service to political participation after 1918 became a common feature of all Western societies which had experienced the Great War.

Nations in Arms und Imperial Defence – Kontinentaleuropäische Modelle, das Britische Empire und sein Militär

In Großbritannien fehlten im Vergleich zu anderen zeitgenössischen Empires die fundamentalen Aspekte des kontinentaleuropäischen Zusammenhangs zwischen Militär und Nationsbildung. Dem entsprach auch die Tatsache, dass die Vorstellung einer Nation in Waffen und die Wehrpflicht bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg als kontinentaleuropäische und damit unenglische Einrichtungen angesehen wurden. Das hatte Folgen für die soziale Zusammensetzung der Armee, aber auch für ihre Funktion innerhalb des Empires. Als multiethnisches Integrationsinstrument auf der Basis der Wehrpflicht kam sie jedenfalls nicht ohne weiteres in Frage. Der multiethnische Charakter der britischen Armee ergab sich demgegenüber aus den militärischen Notwendigkeiten der imperialen *small wars*. Multiethnizität schlug sich hier lange vor allem im hohen Anteil der Iren und Schotten in der Armee nieder. Erst der Burenkrieg erzwang eine größere Beteiligung der Dominions und der indigenen Bevölkerung. Aber nicht zuletzt mit dem Burenkrieg als *imperial war* und dem deutsch-britischen Flottenantagonismus wurde die Idee einer multiethnischen, auch das Empire einbeziehenden «*brotherhood in arms*» als Sicherung der imperialen Existenz intensiv diskutiert. Das antizipierte nicht zuletzt die Rolle des Empires in beiden Weltkriegen.

ABSTRACTS

Nations in Arms et Imperial Defence –**Modèles continentales, l'Empire britannique et son militaire**

Contrairement aux autres empires contemporains, en Grande-Bretagne les aspects fondamentaux d'un lien étroit entre le militaire et la formation d'une nation n'existaient pas. Cela correspondait au fait que l'idée d'une nation armée et d'un service militaire obligatoire étaient perçues comme institutions typiques pour l'Europe continentale et qui, par conséquent, étaient considérées comme «non-anglaises». Cette perception entraînait un nombre de conséquences non seulement pour la composition sociale de l'armée mais aussi pour sa fonction dans le cadre de l'Empire. Elle ne pouvait pas tout simplement servir de moyen d'intégration. Son caractère multiethnique était une conséquence des exigences militaires des *small wars* impériales. La multiethnicité se manifesta longtemps dans la part considérable principalement d'Irlandais et d'Écossais dans l'armée. Seulement la Guerre des Boers rendit nécessaire une plus grande participation des Dominions et de la population indigène. Mais c'était la Guerre des Boers comme *imperial war* aussi bien que la concurrence navale anglo-allemande qui suscitaient de discussions vives sur l'idée d'un «*brotherhood in arms*» multiethnique, s'étendant également sur l'empire colonial pour assurer l'existence future de l'Empire. D'autant plus, cela était une anticipation du rôle de l'Empire dans les deux Guerres mondiales.

Professor Dr. Jörn Leonhard

Universität Freiburg

Historisches Seminar

Lehrstuhl für Westeuropäische Geschichte

Werthmannplatz, KG IV

D-79085 Freiburg im Breisgau

e-mail: joern.Leonhard@gmx.net