

The Establishment of the Committee of Imperial Defence and the British-Dominion Relations, 1904–1911¹

Jaroslav Valkoun

Before the First World War, Great Britain faced serious internal problems the same as complications in foreign policy. Regarding the status and position of the island state in the world, first and foremost, many Britons viewed the gradually growing strength of the German Navy with great concern; however, even with this being the case, Dominions were not indifferent to the threats endangering the mother country and, on top of that, they were willing to help in case of an armed conflict. Britain's costly naval programme was one of the reasons why the Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George presented a draft of the state budget in 1909;² however, given the fact that the House of Lords was in the hands of the Conservative Party, it was vetoed and consequently rejected. The event in question was followed by general elections and by the commitment of the government and government Members of Parliament to break the resistance of the House of Lords. Eventually, the efforts led to the approval of the so-called *Act of Parliament* (1911), as a result of which the powers of the "Lords" were significantly restricted. When the Imperial Conference participants sat down to negotiate in the summer months of 1911, they found themselves in the whirl of major events. On the one hand, the coronation of King George V took place, on the other, the problem of Irish *Home Rule* re-appeared on the political scene. The reason for this was, indeed, simple. Asquith's government was dependent on the votes of Irish nationalists led by John Redmond for whom *Home Rule* was of paramount importance.³

At the turn of the 19th and 20th century, the British Government began to pursue defence matters intensively. A Defence Committee of the Cabinet operated since 1895. Its members, however, played more the role of passive observers of events than their



-
- 1 The study has been prepared under the students' scientific conference Central Europe and Overseas — Economic Relations (SVK1–2014–016), solved in the Department of Historical Sciences at the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts of the University of West Bohemia.
 - 2 According to the proposals, the budget was called "the Lloyd George's People's Budget", the gist of which was indeed social legislation; however, revenues from increased taxes were to be spent on the new naval armaments programme. See G. LEE, *The People's Budget: An Edwardian Tragedy*, London 2008.
 - 3 H. D. HALL, *Commonwealth: A History of the British Commonwealth of Nations*, London 1971, pp. 33–34.

active movers. In December 1902, when major combat actions died down in South Africa, the British Prime Minister, Sir Arthur James Balfour, reorganised the above mentioned advisory body, which newly convened as the Committee of Imperial Defence. On this occasion, the Secretary of State for War, William St. John Brodrick, future 1st Earl of Midleton, and the First Lord of the Admiralty, William Palmer, 2nd Earl of Selborne, put forward a lengthy memorandum on the nature and role of the newly set up Committee.⁴ Between 1902 and 1904, the Committee in concern found itself in some sort of a transition period. It consisted of permanent members — the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for War, and the First Lord of the Admiralty — and other invited persons working outside the Cabinet. In the opinion of the members, their main goal was to address the strategic military needs of the Empire in a comprehensive manner.⁵ The new structure of the Committee enabled the Prime Minister to convene meetings with flexibility and, if necessary, to invite other experts or representatives of Self-governing Colonies, or the Dominions respectively.⁶

A Reconstitution War Office Committee, chaired by Reginald Baliol Brett, 2nd Viscount of Esher, began working in 1903. Its task was to modernise the institution. Already at the beginning of 1904, they presented a report⁷ to the Prime Minister that supported organisation changes within the Committee of Imperial Defence. Esher made a good deal of work in the Committee and, therefore, he was euphemistically perceived as the “godfather” of the innovated Committee of Imperial Defence.⁸ In March of that year, based on Balfour’s initiatives, a stronger attachment of the Committee in imperial defence matters was realised.⁹ Once he received the promise of finances in May 1904, its provision in the new form took place officially.¹⁰

Balfour formed a committee to serve Prime Ministers as a consultative and advisory body when need arose to consider problems connected to imperial defence in greater context. For this reason, the Committee was not to possess executive power, determine policy or issue orders to armed forces. It consisted of only one permanent member — the Prime Minister — and persons invited on his part, be it ministers, professional experts, representatives of the Army and Navy, or representatives of

4 F. A. JOHNSON, *Defence by Committee: The British Committee of Imperial Defence 1885–1959*, London 1960, pp. 53–54.

5 United Kingdom, *Parliamentary Debates* [further only PD], *House of Commons* [further only HC], 4th Series, Vol. 118, 5th March, 1903, cc. 1579, 1582–1583.

6 JOHNSON, pp. 57–58.

7 Cf. Cd. 1932, *Report of the War Office (Reconstitution) Committee*, Part 1, London 1904; Cd. 1968, *Report of the War Office (Reconstitution) Committee*, Part 2, London 1904; Cd. 2002, *Report of the War Office (Reconstitution) Committee*, Part 3, London 1904.

8 M. P. A. HANKEY, *Diplomacy by Conference: Studies in Public Affairs, 1920–1946*, London 1946, p. 87.

9 B. E. C. DUGDALE, *Arthur James Balfour: 1848–1905*, Vol. 1, London 1939, p. 277; PD, HC, 4th Series, Vol. 118, 5th March, 1903, c. 1649.

10 See Cd. 2200, *Committee of Imperial Defence: Copy of Treasury Minute Dated 4th May 1904, As to Secretariat*, London 1904; J. P. MacKINTOSH, *The Role of the Committee of Imperial Defence before 1914*, in: *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 77, No. 304, 1962, p. 493; The National Archives, London-Kew [further only TNA], Cabinet Office [further only CAB] 17/77, Treasury Minute Dated 4th May, 1904, f. [111A].

Self-governing Colonies or Dominions. In addition, the Prime Minister had a small Permanent Secretariat at his disposal to take care of the necessary paperwork. The flexible structure of the Committee and no onerous rules made it a small, yet effective body that addressed effectively issues linked to imperial defence.¹¹ At the same time, Balfour did not belong among non-conception proponents of increasing the number of the Committee's members. He believed it would undesirably reduce its effectiveness, which would be reflected in agenda "fragmentation" with matters overlooked by different subcommittees.¹² The newly established Committee of Imperial Defence evoked a certain degree of mistrust among British Members of Parliament from the very beginning. This is why Balfour had to reassure them again in August 1904 that the Committee would not encroach on the powers of the armed forces or the Cabinet and that it would not establish any "branches" in the Self-governing Colonies and the Dominions.¹³

Establishing the Committee did not have an immediate impact on the Self-governing Colonies and Dominions. In practice, overseas affairs were often discussed without their participation.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the relationship between the autonomous overseas units and the Committee became one of the key factors affecting its functioning within the imperial structure in the years to come. Initially, representatives of the Self-governing Colonies and Dominions attended meetings of the Committee in order to advise on matters based on information that touched on their territory and that they gained from their British colleagues. This was the case even though they were subject only to their domestic governments.¹⁵ It became clear over time that it was necessary to define mutual relationships more precisely. Already during the Colonial Conference of 1907, the Australian delegation presented a resolution that would allow for a permanent, not just an *ad hoc* representation on the Committee of Imperial Defence. Representatives of the Dominions were to participate whenever questions concerning them were being discussed.¹⁶ Asquith's attitude to the permanent presence of the representatives of the Dominions at the meetings of the Committee of Imperial Defence, in fact, resembled Balfour's own earlier recommendations. For this reason, until the Imperial Defence Conference of 1909, local autonomous unions could not present their view on all the issues or nominate a representative who would attend the meetings.¹⁷

11 HANKEY, *Diplomacy...*, pp. 84–85; TNA, CAB 1/4/37, A. J. B[alfour], A Note on the Constitution of the Defence Committee, 29th February, 1904, ff. [1]–5.

12 DUGDALE, p. 276; JOHNSON, pp. 93–105.

13 *PD, HC*, 4th Series, Vol. 139, 2nd August, 1904, cc. 618–619.

14 A. M. CUNNINGHAM, *Canadian Nationalism and the British Connection 1899–1919*, M.A. Thesis, Burnaby 1980, p. 71.

15 A. G. DEWEY, *The Dominion and Diplomacy: The Canadian Contribution*, Vol. 1, London 1929, p. 295; P. A. B. SILBURN, *The Colonies and Imperial Defence*, London 1909, pp. 166–167.

16 Cd. 3523, *Colonial Conference, 1907: Minutes of Proceedings of the Colonial Conference, 1907*, London 1907, p. 83; TNA, CAB 17/77, Resolution of Commonwealth of Australia, ff. [1]–3.

17 Until the end of the 19th century, the dominions could express their stance on overseas defence through the Colonial Defence Committee. This body was replaced by the Overseas Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1908, later called the Overseas Defence Committee. See Cd. 3524, *Colonial Conference, 1907: Papers Laid and before the*

Moreover, increasing interest of Self-governing Colonies and Dominions in imperial defence likewise led to discussions on how to secure coordination between overseas land and naval forces, their training and unification of military equipment in peacetime. Until 1904, when the Committee for Imperial Defence came into being, individual army bodies in question evolved in a rather chaotic manner.¹⁸ The situation was somewhat stabilised in the subsequent years, yet, was only resolved five years later. In 1909, based on the principle adopted at the Colonial Conference in 1907, the Imperial General Staff was established. It brought order into the defence efforts even though it only possessed a purely advisory role.¹⁹ A Dominion Section was part of the Imperial General Staff; its members were in charge of coordinating military efforts of the Dominions, which reflected itself in the strategic document prepared for the eventuality of war — *War Book*.²⁰

The Resolution of the Colonial Conference of 1907 enabled to convene a meeting of Dominion statesmen and British officials in urgent matters that brooked no delay. For this reason, the British Prime Ministers decided to convene the Imperial Defence Conference²¹ in July and August 1909 that was to respond to growing fears of German naval armament²² and discuss common defence issues, recent proposals of the Australian and Canadian governments²³ and the offer on the part of New Zealand to participate financially in building the Navy.²⁴

Colonial Conference, 1907, London 1907, p. 16; M. P. A. HANKEY, *The Supreme Command, 1914–1918*, Vol. 1, London 1961, p. 125; PD, HC, 5th Series, Vol. 41, 25th July, 1912, c. 1388; TNA, CAB 2/2, Committee of Imperial Defence: Minutes of the 110th Meeting, 4th May, 1911, f. 6; TNA, Colonial Office [further only CO] 886/2/5, Dominions No. 12, M. Nathan, The Colonial Defence Committee, 11th June, 1909, ff. 45–48.

18 HALL, p. 40.

19 See L. S. AMERY, *The Problem of the Army*, London 1903, pp. 119–136; Cd. 3523, pp. 94–121; Cd. 4475, *Imperial Conference: Correspondence Relating to the Proposed Formation of an Imperial General Staff*, London 1909; TNA, CO 886/2/7, Dominions No. 14, Further Correspondence Relating to Proposed Formation of an Imperial General Staff, July 1909, ff. 45–48.

20 R. L. BORDEN, *The War and the Future*, London 1917, pp. 17–18; TNA, CO 886/3/2, Imperial General Staff, [Doc.] Nos. 92–102, ff. [73–81].

21 See TNA, CO 886/2/8, Dominions No. 15, Imperial Conference on the Subject of the Defence of the Empire, 1909: Minutes and Proceedings, October 1909, ff. [1]–93.

22 To German armament P. DUFEK, *Německé námořní zbrojení a vztah Velké Británie a Německa do roku 1906*, Ph.D. Thesis, Praha 2002.

23 Cd. 4948, *Imperial Conference: Correspondence and Papers Relating to a Conference with Representatives of the Self-Governing Dominions on the Naval and Military Defence of the Empire*, London 1909, p. 18. To the problems of the Canadian defence J. GOOCH, *Great Britain and the Defence of Canada, 1896–1914*, in: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1974, pp. 368–385.

24 New Zealand spontaneously offered a financial gift in order to be able to build another battleship of the Dreadnought type for the British fleet. D. J. McCRAW, *The Zenith of Realism in New Zealand's Foreign Policy*, in: *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 48, No. 3, 2002, p. 356; R. SARTY, *Canadian Maritime Defence 1892–1914*, in: *The Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 71, No. 4, 1990, p. 479.

In the past, when Self-governing Colonies emerged, the idea of securing local defence naturally developed. A Resolution of the House of Commons, adopted in 1862, confirmed that local authorities had the primary duty to defend their own territory and only in case of need should help London by sending an expeditionary force over.²⁵ As a result, most of the British land forces withdrew from the areas in concern in the 1870s.²⁶ The mother country, on its part, appreciated the help of Self-governing Colonies and Dominions in case of danger and, therefore, supported the establishment of local armed forces.²⁷ A certain “defence success” was the fact that Australian Self-governing Colonies pledged to contribute to the maintenance of the British fleet in local waters at the Colonial Conference of 1897.²⁸ Issues related to the protection of remote Self-governing Colonies in the Pacific or to the maintenance of coal-fired power stations were actively addressed since the 1880s;²⁹ however, German armaments gave them a totally new dimension.³⁰

In 1902, the British Admiralty expressed fear of losing their dominance in the case of major naval battles. They were of the opinion that it lost the ability to conduct offensive actions when circumstances required these.³¹ Admiralty leaders argued that the German fleet was being built in order to clash with the British at sea in the future.³² As a consequence, the Colonial Conference of 1902 confirmed financial contribution to the upkeep of the fleet in Australian waters³³ and adopted Laurier’s provisions aimed at establishing a Canadian Navy.³⁴ Even though the British Admiralty, back by New Zealand, attempted to enforce only one imperial fleet into prac-

25 TNA, CO 886/2/9, Dominions No. 16, Defence Conference, 1909: Confidential Papers Laid Before of the Imperial Defence Conference, 1909, September 1909, f. 33.

26 HALL, p. 35.

27 Cd. 1299, *Colonial Conference, 1902: Papers Relating to a Conference between the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Prime Ministers of Self-Governing Colonies; June to August, 1902*, London 1902, p. 3.

28 O. D. SKELTON, *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, Vol. 2, Toronto 1921, p. 75.

29 During the Colonial Conference of 1887, the Self-governing Colony in the Pacific agreed on a joint financial support of naval vessels in Australian waters.

30 To this problems see P. OVERLACK, *German Assessments of the British-Australian Relations, 1901-1914*, in: *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 2004, pp. 194–210; P. OVERLACK, *German Interest in Australian Defence, 1901-1914: New Insights into a Precarious Position in the Eve of War*, in: *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1993, pp. 36–51; R. A. SHIELDS, *Australian Opinion and Defence of the Empire: A Study in Imperial Relations 1880-1890*, in: *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1964, pp. 41–53.

31 See Cd. 1597, *Colonial Conference, 1902: Memorandum on Sea Power and the Principles Involved in It*, London 1903, pp. 4–6.

32 A. J. MARDER, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power*, New York 1940, p. 464.

33 To defensive importance of Australian waters see Cd. 3524, pp. 50–59. To the problems of Australian and New Zealander fleets see Cd. 4325, *Australasia: Correspondence Relating to the Naval Defence of Australia and New Zealand*, London 1908.

34 Cd. 1299, p. 60; M. OLLIVIER (Ed.), *The Colonial and Imperial Conferences from 1887 to 1937*, Vol. 1, Ottawa 1954, pp. 153–154; R. A. PRESTON, *Canadian Defence Policy and the Development of the Canadian Nation 1867-1917*, Ottawa 1970, p. 18.

tice, represented by the motto that “*there is one sea, there is one Empire, and there is one Navy,*” Australia and Canada, in particular, inexorably promoted the idea of building territorial fleets.³⁵

British officials had long refused to give up the idea of a great imperial army and navy. When, in 1907, the Canadian Minister of Militia and Defence, Sir Frederick William Borden, obligingly spoke about his country’s readiness to participate in armed conflicts in the interests of the Empire alongside Great Britain, the British Prime Minister, Asquith, took advantage of it when he said: “*That should the Dominions desire to assist in the defence of the Empire in a real emergency, their forces could be rapidly combined into one homogenous Imperial Army.*”³⁶ In January 1910, the Canadian Prime Minister Laurier highlighted the commitment of his country: “*When Great Britain is at war, Canada is at War.*”³⁷ Laurier, however, distinguished the level of involvement of Canada in a general armed conflict and in a “struggle-for-life-and-death” conflict, in which the Canadians would rush to help their mother country.³⁸

Indeed, the Imperial Defence Conference of 1909 was an important meeting because the participants from Britain, Self-governing Colonies and Dominions agreed on concerted action for the first time — they agreed on a systematically built defence. The strategy, based on the principle of equality and freedom of cooperation, represented on top of cohesion probably also the most effective project within the British Empire.³⁹ The memorandum presented by the First Lord of the Admiralty, Reginald McKenna, endorsed the principle that armed forces would not be built on the principle of one single imperial army or fleet under control of the mother country,⁴⁰ but their national character would remain. Coordination of the armed forces was to function on a common plan and in the case of war they would closely cooperated in the defence of the Empire.⁴¹

35 For instance, the Australian Prime Minister Alfred Deakin admitted Australian financial support for the construction of warships on the condition that they would be subsequently deployed in Australian waters. Cf. R. von ALBERTINI, *England als Weltmacht und der Strukturwandel des Commonwealth*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 208, H. 1, 1969, pp. 58–59; D. C. GORDON, *The Admiralty and Dominion Navies, 1902–1914*, in: *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 1961, p. 414; HALL, pp. 36, 37; W. D. McINTYRE, *The Commonwealth of Nations: Origins and Impact, 1869–1971*, Minneapolis 1977, p. 170.

36 CUNNINGHAM, p. 85.

37 H. B. NEATBY, *Laurier and Imperialism*, in: *Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association / Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 1955, p. 30.

38 Canada, *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons*, 5th February, 1900, pp. 64–72, in: R. M. DAWSON (Ed.), *The Development of Dominion Status, 1900–1936*, London 1965, p. 135.

39 GORDON, p. 412; HALL, pp. 34, 37.

40 Only in case of extreme danger the British Empire admitted creating an Imperial Army. Cd. 4948, p. 19.

41 To this problems Cd. 4611, *Army: Memorandum by the Army Council on the Existing Army System and on the Present State of the Military Forces in the United Kingdom*, London 1909; Cd. 5135, *Dominions No. 2: Report of the Dominions Department of the Colonial Office for the Year 1909–1910*, London 1910, pp. 3–4; JOHNSON, p. 107; R. A. PRESTON, *Canada and ‘Imperial Defence’*, Toronto 1967.

On a long-term basis, Canadians inclined to believe that the military weakness of the Empire meant greater threat to Canada.⁴² The enforcement of the extensive building of the Canadian fleet was, naturally, accompanied by heated domestic political debates. Conservatives led by Robert Laird Borden criticised Laurier's decision on the basis of expected significant costs, doubts about properly selected parameters of vessels and about the rejected conjunction with the Imperial Navy.⁴³ Subsequently, it was expected from the Royal Canadian Navy to lighten and ease the situation of the Royal Navy in the Pacific in order to enable the latter to concentrate fully on the threat coming from the German Navy.⁴⁴

The provisions on national navies, in particular, stressed the crucial importance of Dominions in imperial foreign and defence policy and, in like manner, contributed to the completion of the process of transforming colonies with responsible governments into Dominions.⁴⁵ Principles of cooperation between the British and dominion armed forces were finally specified in a memorandum released in 1911.⁴⁶ Despite the fact that the Imperial Defence Conference of 1909 confirmed the growing influence of the Dominions, Asquith had no intention to give in his stance on the issue of sharing imperial foreign policy.⁴⁷ In fact, British politicians considered the Dominions as too immature, inexperienced and too distant from Europe to be able to discuss matters appropriately in the maze of international relations. This was the case because it was believed that only one single authority should carry out imperial foreign policy.⁴⁸ However, all the dominion statesmen wished to shoulder such responsibility. The Canadian Prime Minister, Laurier, for instance, who had a domestic political reputation of a "war hawk",⁴⁹ protested against the desire of the British government to firmly wield the reins of imperial foreign policy. Indeed, as the first Prime Minister coming from the French-speaking part of Canada, he was content with full autonomy in local affairs and with powers to make and adopt independent decisions.⁵⁰

42 C. BERGER, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism 1867-1914*, Toronto 1970, p. 233.

43 See R. L. BORDEN, *The Naval Question: Speech Delivered by Mr. R. L. Borden, M.P. 12th January, 1910*, [Ottawa 1910]; R. L. BORDEN, *The Naval Question: Speech Delivered by Mr. R. L. Borden, M.P. 3rd February, 1910*, [Ottawa 1910]; *Canada and the Navy*, Ottawa [1909].

44 SARTY, p. 483.

45 Cf. H. H. ASQUITH, *The Genesis of the War*, London 1923, pp. 133-134; A. D. DeCELLES, *Laurier et son temps*, Montréal 1920, p. 77; C. GRIMSHAW, *Australian Nationalism and the Imperial Connection*, in: *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1958, p. 176.

46 See Cd. 5746-2, *Dominions No. 9: Imperial Conference, 1911: Papers Laid before the Imperial Conference: Naval and Military Defence*, London 1911.

47 Asquith greatly appreciated consultations with the dominions regarding the imperial defence policy, and therefore he did not exclude their possible future participation in the Committee of Imperial Defence after it possessed greater executive powers. Cf. DEWEY, p. 283; *PD, HC, 5th Series*, Vol. 8, 29th July, 1909, cc. 1395-1396.

48 JOHNSON, p. 107.

49 See H. BOURASSA, *Le projet de loi navale: Sa nature, ses conséquences: Discours prononcé au Monument National le 20 janvier 1910*, [Montreal] 1910.

50 Cf. W. L. COURTNEY — J. E. COURTNEY, *Pillars of the Empire: Studies & Impressions*, London [1918], pp. 79-85; I. R. HANCOCK, *The 1911 Imperial Conference*, in: *Historical Studies: Aus-*

Competence disputes, as a matter of fact, likewise occurred during the Imperial Defence Conference in 1909. While the former Head of the Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence Rear-Admiral Sir Charles Langdale Ottley and his deputy Sir Maurice Hankey Pascal Alers, future Baron Hankey, expressed the view that the Committee should be in charge of the Imperial Conference in private and confidential talks, with regard to the expected position on the part of the Secretary of State for Colonies, they never drafted a proposal on the matter in this sense. Both men gave a clear signal that the Committee of Imperial Defence had to take over the coordination and management of imperial forces and resolving crucial issues in imperial defence at the expense of the Imperial Conference. They argued that the Committee, in contrast to the Imperial Conference, was in frequent contact with the Dominions and the mother country.⁵¹ Compared to the period before the last Colonial Conference the activities of the Committee intensified. From 1908, therefore, the Committee regularly held a meeting every two months whereas the Colonial Conference regularly took place once every four years.⁵² The influence of the Secretariat also grew and its members no longer wanted to “only” prepare the agenda. As a powerful administrative body, they wanted to oversee various planning subcommittees that intensively cooperated with government officials. The number of staff of the Secretariat increased so much since 1908 that Esher’s vision of “a small Permanent Secretariat” became irretrievably the past.⁵³ In like manner, the number of members of the Committee itself likewise increased;⁵⁴ this diverged from the original idea of Balfour and was reflected in the establishment of either permanent or *ad hoc* subcommittees.⁵⁵

In mid-November 1909 Hankey submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Asquith entitled *The War Organisation of the British Empire*. In it, he thoroughly explained his views regarding imperial defence policies and the importance of the Committee of Imperial Defence.⁵⁶ At that time, the growing influence of the Committee caught the eye of an influential member of the Round Table Movement Lionel Curtis who, together with the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Sir Joseph Ward, was preparing a resolution for the forthcoming Imperial Conference that took place in 1911.⁵⁷ According to the resolution in question, Dominion High Commissioners were to have the right to attend meetings of the Committee. New Zealand’s proposal forced Hankey and Ottley to prepare a new memorandum in which they aimed at familiarising members of the Committee with their view on the matter. They noted that the request of New Zealand for the establishment of an Imperial Council was meaningless since its proposed role

tralia and New Zealand, Vol. 12, Is. 47, 1966, pp. 367–368; P. McARTHUR, *Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, London 1919, pp. 81–82.

51 HANKEY, *The Supreme...*, pp. 125–127.

52 MacKINTOSH, p. 496.

53 JOHNSON, p. 92.

54 *PD, HC*, 5th Series, Vol. 19, 25th July, 1910, c. 1895.

55 The most important were Oversea Defence Committee and Home Ports Defence Committee. *PD, HC*, 5th Series, Vol. 41, 25th July, 1912, cc. 1388–1390.

56 HANKEY, *The Supreme...*, p. 85.

57 J. E. KENDLE, *The Colonial and Imperial Conferences 1887–1911: A Study in Imperial Organizations*, London 1967, p. 192.

was generally performed by the Committee. They went on to argue that the Committee, if minor adjustments were adopted, could serve as a certain discussion forum where members of the Empire could discuss questions connected to mutual defence. As for the issue of participation of High Commissioners at meetings of the Committee, they held the view that permanent representation of the Dominions would contribute to effective coordination only partially; therefore, they proposed that Dominions established their own defence committees that would fully cooperate with the Committee.⁵⁸

Based on the precedent of 1909, on 23 May 1911, Prime Minister Asquith proposed that defence and foreign policy issues should not be discussed within the Imperial Conference but at a joint meeting of Dominion Prime Ministers and members of the Committee of Imperial Defence.⁵⁹ Even though many versions of why the British government agreed on taking such a step appeared,⁶⁰ the most likely one was that it wished to discuss sensitive matters of defence and foreign policy in secret and this was something conference negotiations did not allow.⁶¹ During three joint meetings (taking place between 26 and 30 May) a certain degree of mistrust towards the Dominions on the part of British Foreign Office became obvious.⁶²

The then Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Edward Grey, future 1st Viscount Grey of Fallodon, who disagreed with some of the positions of the Dominions, even decided to give the overseas statesmen a lesson: "It is possible to have separate Fleets in a united Empire, but it is not possible to have separate Fleets in a united Empire without having a common Foreign Policy which shall determine the action of the different Forces maintained in different part of the Empire."⁶³ Grey's note had even a deeper meaning. It represented a forceful argument for maintaining the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The mere alliance, concluded in 1902, in no small way influenced the traditional interests of Australia, Canada and New Zealand in the Pacific. When Japan became a great power, which was confirmed by the Japanese victory over Russia in the war of 1905, opposition on the part of the Dominions further intensified. The Dominions argued that such an alliance between Britain and Japan only signalled economic, political and naval weakness of the Empire. In 1911, mostly Australians vehemently opposed against renewing the alliance and pointed to, in particular, undesirable and large-in-numbers Japanese immigration to the Australian continent and nearby islands and to a great-power way of spreading influence of the Japanese in the Pacific weakening the British, or Australian respectively, position.⁶⁴ On the other

58 HANKEY, *The Supreme...*, p. 130; KENDLE, pp. 192–193.

59 Cd. 5745, *Dominions No. 7: Imperial Conference, 1911: Minutes of Proceedings of the Imperial Conference, 1911*, London 1911, p. 23.

60 R. JEBB, *The Britannic Question: A Survey of Alternatives*, London 1913, pp. 41–50.

61 I. H. NISH, *Australia and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1901–1911*, in: *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1963, p. 209.

62 HANCOCK, pp. 365–366.

63 G. P. GOOCH — H. TEMPERLEY (Eds.), *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914: Anglo-German Tension: Armaments and Negotiation, 1907–12*, Vol. 6, London 1930, Appendix V, p. 781.

64 Cf. R. J. GOWEN, *British Legerdemain at the 1911 Imperial Conference: The Dominions, Defence Planning, and the Renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance*, in: *The Journal of Modern Histo-*

hand, the alliance with Japan under scrutiny provided the Dominions with a certain degree of safety. Terminating the alliance would lead to a deterioration of the strategic position in the British Empire in the Far East.⁶⁵

On the first two joint sessions of the London representatives, Dominion Prime Ministers and members of the Committee of Imperial Defence, questions connected to British imperial foreign policy, navy and land forces were discussed. The British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Edward Grey brilliantly summed up the essential aspects of European policy⁶⁶ and extensively dealt with the Anglo-Japanese Alliance advocating its restoration.⁶⁷ At the same time, he expressed the wish that he would like to see more intensive consultations and information exchange in the field of foreign and defence policy between the mother country and the Dominions before a final decision was actually made. Such an appeal did not automatically mean an offer to participate in the implementation of imperial foreign policy.⁶⁸ Participants of the meeting subsequently disapproved the commencement of negotiations with the Japanese government on an extension of the alliance for another ten years.⁶⁹ Indeed, it was the first ever officially recorded joint decision on a significant issue of foreign policy which had been discussed together.⁷⁰

The First Lord of the Admiralty, Reginald McKenna, subsequently presented a maritime strategy for civilian and naval vessels in case of war. He likewise put forward a request that the dominion fleet was built under one command. According to his opinion, lack of organisation could lead to chaos. The Dominions complied with McKenna only partially. They agreed that their fleet would fall under the authority of the Admiralty in international waters and that they would be at disposal to the Empire in case of war.⁷¹ By doing so, they responded primarily to Asquith's argument

ry, Vol. 52, No. 3, 1980, pp. 385–413; HALL, p. 77; P. LOWE, *The British Empire and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1911–1915*, in: *History*, Vol. 54, Is. 181, 1969, pp. 213–214; N. K. MEANEY, 'A Proposition of the Highest International Importance': Alfred Deakin's Pacific Agreement Proposal and Its Significance for Australian-Imperial Relations, in: *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, Vol. 5, Is. 3, 1967, p. 201; NISH, pp. 207–208.

65 TNA, CAB 1/4, No. 78–C, Australia and New Zealand: Strategic Situation in the Event of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance Being Determined: Memorandum by the Committee of Imperial Defence, Whitehall Gardens, 3rd May, 1911, ff. 14–16 [242–243].

66 D. LLOYD GEORGE, *War Memoirs*, Vol. 2, London 1938, p. 28; TNA, CAB 2/2, Committee of Imperial Defence: Minutes of the 111th Meeting, 26th May, 1911, ff. 10–15.

67 TNA, CAB 2/2, Committee of Imperial Defence: Minutes of the 111th Meeting, 26th May, 1911, ff. 16–18.

68 Cf. ASQUITH, pp. 122–127; L. CURTIS, *The Problem of the Commonwealth*, London 1916, pp. 108–114; G. W. EGERTON, *The Dominions and the Peace Settlement*, in: *United Empire: The Royal Colonial Institute Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 6, 1915, pp. 426–427.

69 TNA, CAB 2/2, Committee of Imperial Defence: Minutes of the 111th Meeting, 26th May, 1911, f. 36.

70 HALL, p. 82.

71 Cf. ASQUITH, pp. 128–131; CAC, Hankey Papers [further only HP], HNKY 7/6–7/7, Copy of Memo Sent to McKenna 11th May, 1911, ff. [1]–15; CAC, HP, HNKY 7/6–7/7, Memorandum on the Officering of the Navies of the Dominions, ff. [1]–3; HANCOCK, p. 369; TNA, CAB 2/2, Committee of Imperial Defence: Minutes of the 112th Meeting, 29th May, 1911, ff. 1–9; W. C. B. TUNSTALL, *Imperial Defence, 1897–1914*, in: *The Cambridge History of the British Em-*

that if Britain was at war, the whole Empire was at war, i.e. all its possessions and commercial interests would suddenly find themselves in danger.⁷² The Secretary of State for War, Richard Haldane, then summarised the readiness of the British land forces in comparison with the German Army.⁷³

The meeting of 30 May 1911 was probably the most important. Not only British concessions to the dominions in imperial naval policy were discussed,⁷⁴ but first and foremost the role and importance of the Committee of Imperial Defence was touched on. Both Hankey and Ottley hoped that this would change the status of the Committee at the expense of the Imperial Conference; however, this did not prove to be the case. During the negotiations, Asquith decided to invite representatives of the dominions to the Committee stressing they would continue to have a purely advisory role. As for the issue of participations of High Commissioners at the meeting, the participants agreed that their presence would make coordination more effective only partially. For this reason, they accepted the proposal of Hankey and Ottley, which allowed each dominion, if desired, to set up its own defence committee that would cooperate with the Committee.⁷⁵ Although the Committee became the highest advisory body in naval, military and foreign affairs for all Cabinets and Parliaments of the Empire, it still lacked adequate anchorage in the imperial structure.⁷⁶

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE AND THE BRITISH-DOMINION RELATIONS, 1904-1911

ABSTRACT

This contribution is focused on the analysis of the establishment of the Committee of Imperial Defence and the British-Dominion relations from 1904 to 1911. The formation of the first dominions by linking the until-then Self-governing Colonies together raised the question of what the position of the new Dominions to their mother country and the other parts of the Empire was. Before the outbreak of the First World War, matters related to the Dominion status were discussed at several Colonial, from 1907 Imperial Conferences; however, neither British nor Dominion politicians managed to reach an agreement or a complex solution. In fact, only partial solutions were adopted. At the turn of the 19th and 20th century, the British Government began to pursue defence matters intensively. A lot of foreign-policy issues, and in particular fear of German naval armaments, had a profound influence on the debate; indeed, this was the case to the extent that the significance of the second influential imperial institution, i.e. the Imperial Defence Committee, rose. Even though the system of imperial conferences, that served as a forum where crucial questions dealing with imperial, foreign, defence and economic policies were decided, was institutionalised and firmly “anchored” in the imperial structure, it had to compete with the powerful Imperial Defence Committee.

pire: The Empire-Commonwealth 1870-1919, Vol. 3, Cambridge 1967, pp. 595-596.

72 HALL, p. 86.

73 ASQUITH, pp. 131-134.

74 TNA, CAB 2/2, Committee of Imperial Defence: Minutes of the 113th Meeting, 30th May, 1911, ff. 1-15.

75 Cf. JOHNSON, pp. 111-113; TNA, CAB 2/2, Committee of Imperial Defence: Minutes of the 113th Meeting, 30th May, 1911, ff. 16-17; TNA, CAB 5/3, [D.] 94-C, Proceedings of the Committee of Imperial Defence at the 113th Meeting, 30th May, 1911, ff. 2-3.

76 R. L. BORDEN, *Splendid Record of the Borden Government Naval Policy Clearly Defined*, Ottawa 1913, p. 22.

KEYWORDS

British Empire; Great Britain; Dominions; Imperial foreign policy; Imperial Conference of 1911; Committee of Imperial Defence; Imperial Defence Conference of 1909; Constitutional Relations; Self-governing Colonies

Jaroslav Valkoun | Institute of World History, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, Nám. Jana Palacha 2, 116 38, Praha 1, Czech Republic, jaroslavvalkoun@ff.cuni.cz