


- My work to describe Denmark's strategy position from 1911 to 1919 made it necessary to understand the RN strategy discourse.
- In the investigation I was inspired by the contributions and discourse of Jon Sumida, Nicholas Lambert, Matthew Seligmann, James Goldrick, Andrew Lambert, Steve Cobb and Shawn Grimes. They helped focus my source reading.
- In the critical reading I benefited from my background as a senior joint strategic level planner and lecturer. My Clausewitzian and thus critical observation of the "Netcentric" buzz in the 1990s was most also helpful.



The elements of the North Sea planning and discourse

- 1) The promise of the wireless technology for intelligent centralised control from the Admiralty
- 2) The role and limitations of a distant control of Germany's sea lines of communications
- 3) The close observation blockade for operational intelligence
- 4) Offensive action to force the High Seas Fleet to risk battle
- 5) The two fleet trapping manoeuvre from north-west/southwest and later from the north on parallel tracks



- The foundation was Henry Jackson's work with radio telegraphy – and the demonstration of its practical use by the Japanese in May 1905.
- The accelerator was the First Moroccan Crisis March 1905 – May 1906.
- The first step was the creation of the Admiralty joint Trade and Intelligence "War Room" in spring 1905.
- Individual written contributions were:
 - Related to the Assistant Intelligence Division Director, Captain George Ballard's, failed bridgebuilding to the army via Colonel Charles Cardwell from August to October 1905.
 - Thereafter the various 1906 documents about strategy in a war with Germany from George Ballard, Julian Corbett, and Edmond Slade.
 - And the reports from the Berlin Naval Attaché, Philip

Dumas.

- All were followed and directly or indirectly included in the discussions and drafting of plans studies linked to the Ballard Committee in the 1907 winter months.



- The key step was Fisher's alliance with the just retired Henry Wilson that became mirrored in the latter's memorandum from May 1907.
- Here Wilson extracted what he considered correct and sound from the Ballard Committee Report. He considered that:
 - A trade blockade would remain ineffective as it would most be likely bypassed via North-European Neutrals.
 - Therefore the only possibility to get quick results was to force the Germans out to give battle by aggressive tactical action against his coast or bases.
 - The enemy should be closely observed to ensure timely intelligence of High Seas Fleet departure.
 - When this happened, two fleets would manoeuvre as directed by radio to ensure that the enemy fleet would be cut-off from its bases.
- The emphasis on centralisation was catalysed and energised

by the Beresford challenge from summer 1907 until 1 July 1908. On the latter day Beresford's task was reduced to commanding the forces he had been given, but do so as directed by the Admiralty.

- The "War Plan issued" on that day directed Beresford what forces should be used in which secondary mission, but did not inform him how the main mission – the destruction of the enemy main fleet – was to be achieved.
- The autumn 1908 exercises concentrated on Commodore (T) (Lewis Bayly) 's destroyer operations in the observation blockade.

- Parallel to the identification of the control, intelligence and manoeuvre elements of a general Admiralty war plan, studies continued. They took the form of Richmond's follow-up study work in the ad hoc "Strategy Committee" under Fisher in 1908 together with Slade's short time replacement at the College, Lowry, and Osmond Brock. The different operational problems and combinations were tested in College war gaming.

- The decisive control part of the emerging war planning was outlined in the DNI's (Slade's) Secret "Wireless Telegraphy in War"-memorandum from summer 1908.
- The only part of a War Plan that needed to be put on paper was the directive for the deployment of destroyers backed by cruisers with wireless in the close observation blockade that would give warning of a German fleet departure. It happened first time in the Admiralty War Plan for 1909 and mirrored the observation blockading part of the 1 July 1908 "War Plan" outline.

- Similar plans would be issued the next two years until the Fisher-Wilson period ended with the retirement of the latter in late 1911.



- Late 1908 or early 1909 Fisher summed-up the four years' of war studies and planning by referring to Wilson's 1907 memorandum. He supported its analysis and underlined the key elements for a war plan against Germany.
- The radio controlled trap plan was tested by Fisher in the summer 1909 fleet manoeuvres off north-west Scotland, which as designed to get one fleet between the enemy and his bases. Wilson acted as Chief Umpire.
- The summer 1909 reconnaissance for an off-shore blockading force base at Horn's Reef was a logical element in searching for a way to support the destroyers to increase their time in the observation line.
- Late 1909 Fisher emphasised that only he and Wilson knew the secret war plan for certain victory. Then he had just successfully blocked the creation of a naval staff which he

considered could bureaucratise and delay the First Sea Lord's direct control of the fleets.

- During the summer 1910 manoeuvres Wilson personally exercised close Admiralty control of the different parts of the fleet.
- January 1911 became the last time when the War Plan for the close observation blockading forces was issued.



- Immediately after taking over as C-in-C, Callaghan underlined that the available destroyer flotillas could not sustain the required close observational blockade outlined by the War Plan for an extended period.
- Another problem generally realised was the torpedo vessels threat at the start of the war to the main battle fleet.
- A third issue was the too low manning - and thus readiness level - in too large part of the fleet.
- This third issue was addressed immediately by the new war staff. The highest quality reserve vessel would be fully manned with personnel from shore installations. It was something that could take place without a visible formal mobilisation.
- Callaghans observation blockade concern was addressed in

early April, when the close blockade was given-up, and a few days later Ballard outlined an alternative in his "Explanatory Memorandum": A mid-North Sea cruiser observation line from Norway to Holland was to give warning of enemy fleet approaching.

- To reduce the main battle fleet vulnerability in a period of tension, it was decided to move it north to operate from Scottish bases.

- During the 1912 naval manoeuvres, the extended mid-North Sea observation line proved a failure. At the same time the Chief Umpire, Sir William May, underlined the problems with centralised operational control.
- In September 1912 Ballard concluded that changes had to be made in the planning.
- Due to the perceived risk of international war in November 1912 during the Balkan Crisis, a new type of War Plan and War Orders were quickly developed in cooperation between Ballard and Callaghan. The new plan and orders emphasised distant trade blockade and other trade warfare steps. The observation line in the North Sea had been replaced with cruiser sweeps. Warning of an enemy fleet sally had to be given by signals intelligence and later by a growing number of patrol submarines.
- In spring 1913 followed a War Plan option with France as ally.
- The 1913 manoeuvres (again with Sir William May as Chief Umpire) highlighted the limits of centralised command.
- During late 1913 Ballard started a War Plan revision process aimed at simplifying the plans by increasing delegation of

authority from the Admiralty to the C-in-C.



The key elements and steps:

- In December 1912 Churchill replaced his First Sea Lord, Francis Bridgeman, with the more flexible Prince Louis of Battenberg. It was the first step to increase the First Lord's direct control of the navy.
- Churchill thereafter asked his private naval secretary, Rear-Admiral David Beatty, to criticize the new War Plan. Beatty concluded as expected that the plan was too passive and thus not up to RN traditional Nelsonian standards.
- When Beatty replaced Lewis Bayly as the battle-cruiser squadron commander in winter 1913, the older admiral accepted a request to develop offensive alternatives to the Ballard-Callaghan War Plan. With two assistants Bayly completed the planning during the spring and summer of 1913. His proposed alternatives were quickly and effectively

blocked by Ballard with the support of the Chief of War Staff, Henry Jackson.

- However in spring 1914 Churchill outmanoeuvred Ballard bureaucratically and made him resign from the DOD position. Jackson soon followed Ballard, and the new team with Bayly's assistant Leveson as DOD and Sturdee as COS were launched into a rewriting of the plans and orders to bring them into line with the First Lord's views.
- However, the war came unexpectedly early, and Churchill's intent was blocked by his new C-in-C appointee, Jellicoe.



The logical effects of central control culture would be:

- Firstly that flag officers waited for orders instead of showing initiative and moral courage by independent action.
- Secondly there would be a lack of urgency to develop and clear and effective staff and communication procedures on flagships, as directions would come from the War Room.
- Thirdly there would be no pressure to ensure immediate delegation of intelligence to all tactical-operational commanders (to use 1990 concepts: to create *Network Enabled* rather than *Netcentric* action).
- Fourthly there would be no urgency to develop low power radio systems for flag officer tactical coordination of fleets and squadrons operating beyond visual distance of each other similar to the German. This probably also because of visual in-fleet communications was essential for the stealth of the

"trap".

- Finally there would be increased risk of tactical misunderstanding, friction and "*blue-on-blue*".

Logical effects of the two-force "trap" operation:

- A two-speed Dreadnought battle fleet from distant bases meant that the "trap" was adjusted to work with the battle fleet and the HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH-class reinforced battle-cruiser fleet.
- The idea can hardly be considered "secret" as it clearly guided all major surface actions from the Heligoland to Jutland. It came very close to bringing success in several of these - but did not, partly due to chance, partly to weaknesses resulting from the centralisation drive.