Winston Churchill had good personal reasons for ignoring the effect of the First Balkan War in his influential narrative: "The World Crisis, 1911-1918". The crisis came before he gained decisive influence over the Admiralty, and he felt humiliated by the independent minded, effective strategy-making of his staff during the crisis.

Richard Hall called the Balkan Wars a "prelude" to the Great War in his book title. However, new research into preparations for war in Germany and Britain and neutrality defence preparations in Sweden and Denmark 1910-1913 makes clear that the First Balkan War was not only a prelude, it had an important and direct catalytic influence on what happened 21 months later.

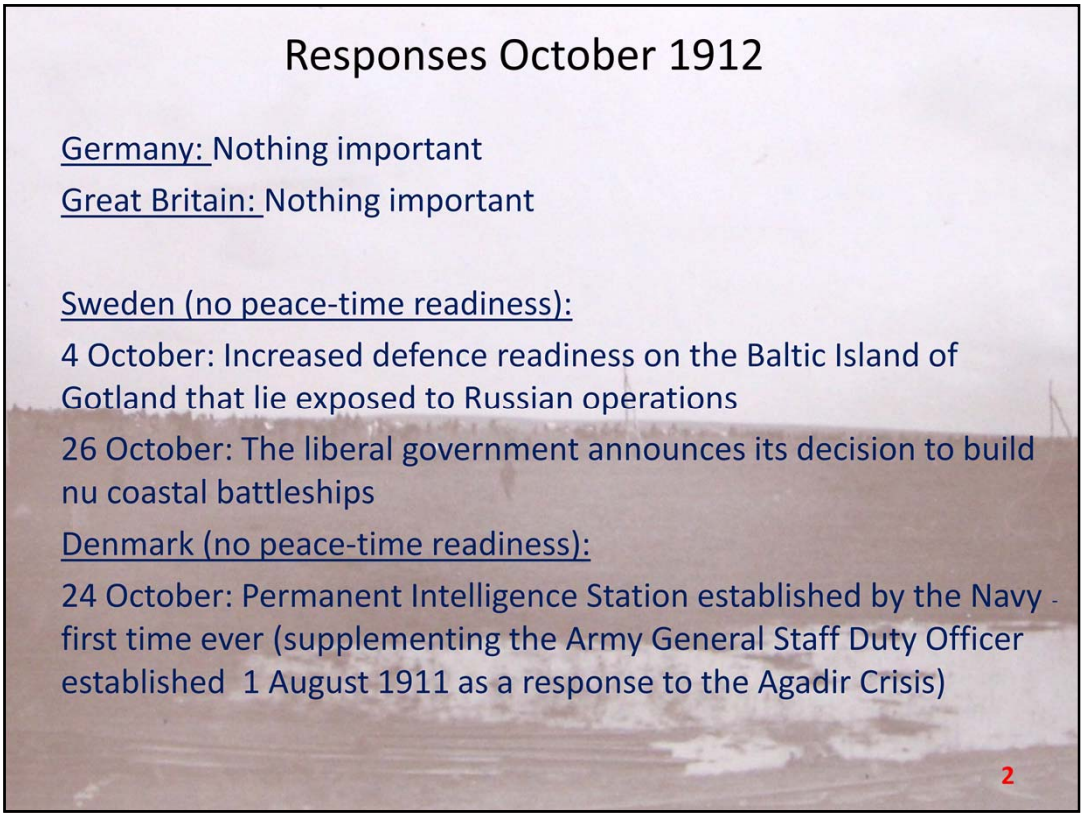
In all four countries the First Balkans War directly triggered war/defence preparations of a fundamentally new character, both directly by increasing combat readiness as a response to the crisis, but more importantly by focusing and accelerating the post-crisis national professional military and naval planning as well as the international preparations for war. After the crisis a great power war was no longer just a possibility; the then policy-making professionals of the armed forces considered it inevitable and fast approaching – and they acted accordingly. The war also confirmed them in their conviction that even modern wars could be won in short, decisive campaigns.

These reactions were not a response to the *start* of the general Balkan conflict in mid-October. The war was only expected to bring a humanitarian crisis as Turkey pacified the region after the victory. The actual trigger was Turkey's unexpected total operational

defeat that brought the risks in early November of a Bulgarian capture of Constantinople. The destruction of expectations as well as the balance of power immediately led to crisis reactions in all four observed states far more comprehensive than the previous year's Agadir Crisis did.

A couple of weeks later, when Serbian control of part of the Albanian coast became reality, the development came very close to great power war, and the after effect undermined traditional, bureacratic and political barriers to effective war or defence preparations.

Based on my new monography "Det lille land før den store krig" (*The small country before the Great War*) the paper cronologically outlines the reactions in all four countries from November 1912 to May 1913.



For the Great Powers, the initially likely and then open regional war brought intensive diplomatic activity, but no significant rise in military or naval readiness. No steps were necessary, because they had operational naval forces, and some of these were in the Mediterranean.

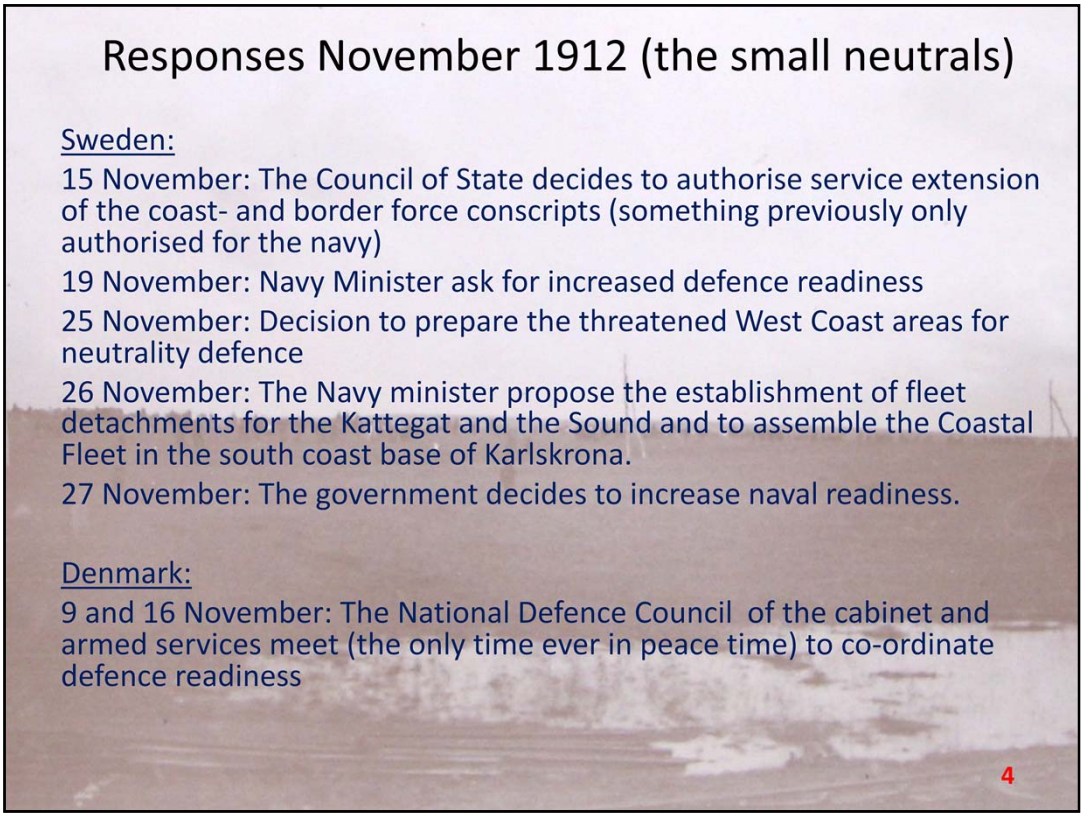
For the small Nordic neutrals the situation was fundamentally different. Their armed forces were pure training-mobilization structures, and in order to develop even a basic defence capability, they had to take extraordinary steps to show determination, to enhance the warning capability and to create operational military formations and most of their naval units. Therefore it is natural that the first reactions to the Balkan War took place in the small countries. These preparations decided what happened in July-August 1914.

The Germans had been deeply angered and frustrated by the British support to France during the Agadir Crisis one year earlier. Their leaders considered the result a serious loss of face. Therefore the British denial in early November that the manning of some extra vessels meant naval mobilization had little credibility in Berlin. Nervousness and growing hostility interacted and quickly led to naval war preparations. The German Navy knew that as long as it had parts of its main fleet in the Baltic, it risked a defeat in detail if the Royal Navy started hostilities without warning.

Three weeks into November, both the Albanian coast and Constantinople problems were clear. The former required direct German support to Austria and brought risk of war with the Entente, and the German leadership dispatched the fleet from Kiel to reduce vulnerability.

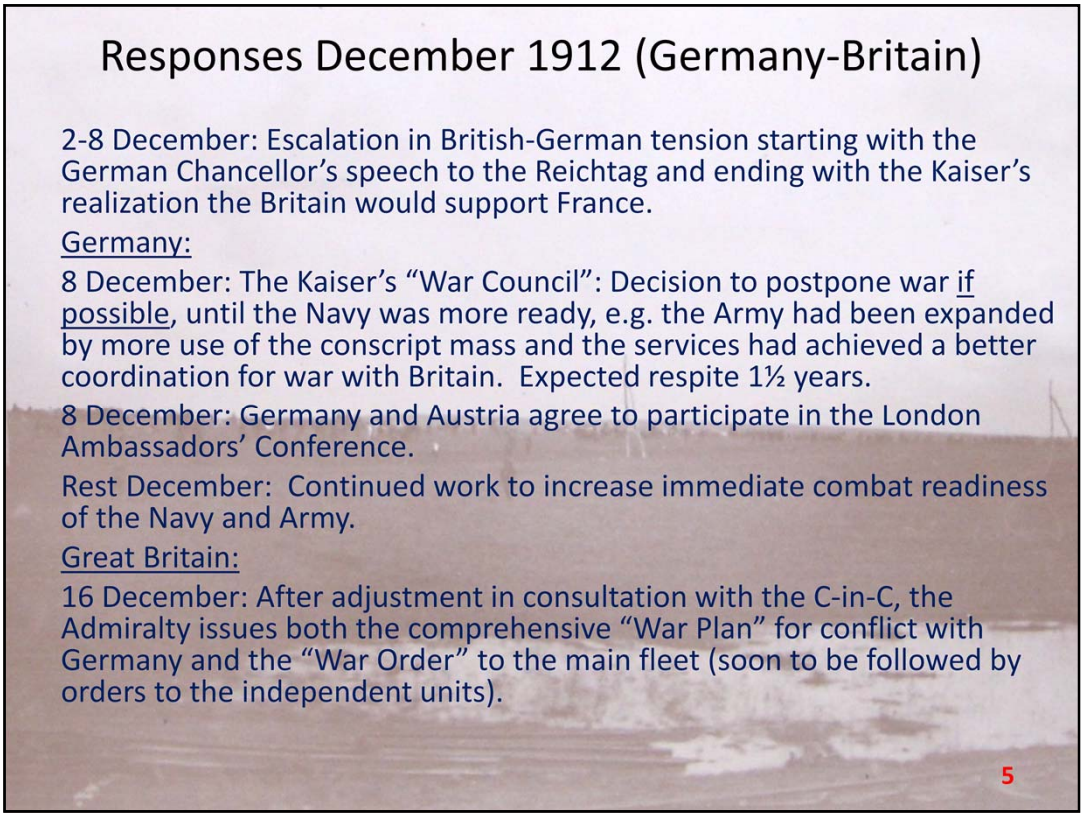
The British focus at the beginning of the month had been in the Eastern Mediterranean, but by mid-month the intensity of the crisis and the risk of war apparently inspired the fast completion of the first ever modern Royal Navy War Plan. This operational idea in the plan was new, reflecting the failure of an alternative concept during the annual naval manoeuvres in the late summer.

The idea that guided the 25 November plan remained valid during the First World War.



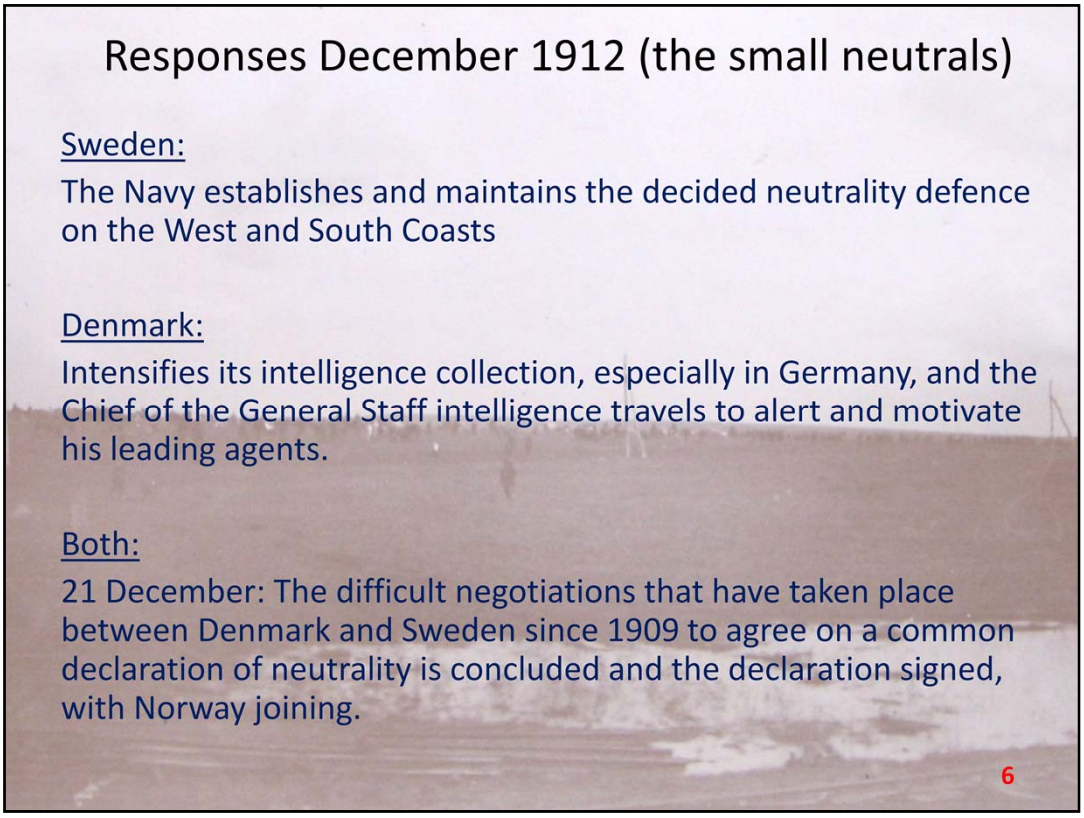
In Sweden the Liberal government had the need to prove determination to the highly critical royal family and Conservative opposition. However, the government wanted to do so in a way that underlined its will to guard and defend the neutrality in all directions, not only against the main threat that inspired the opposition: A Russian invasion over the land border in the north. The appearance of the German Navy off the western coast on 25 November highlighted the risk that either the British or the German Navy would use the deep fiords of the Kattegat coast as bases against the opponent, and this brought a quick decision by the government.

The Danish government read the situation in the same way as the Swedish. However with the country lying exposed to German power and with the popular hatred of the Germans generated by the treatment of the Danish minority in North Schleswig, the Danish government considered it essential that the country stayed "*invisible*". Rising defence readiness by mobilization might be seen as directed against Germany and thereby provoke an attack or an ultimatum that would destroy neutrality. Thus the Danish reaction was limited to political-military consultation and co-ordination – and unhappiness that the Swedish steps created popular pressure to do something similar.



The days up to the Kaiser's so-called "Council of War" on 8 December were the climax of the crisis, and only the consensus at the meeting that the services needed more time to finish and focus their war preparations moved Europe back from the brink of a general war.

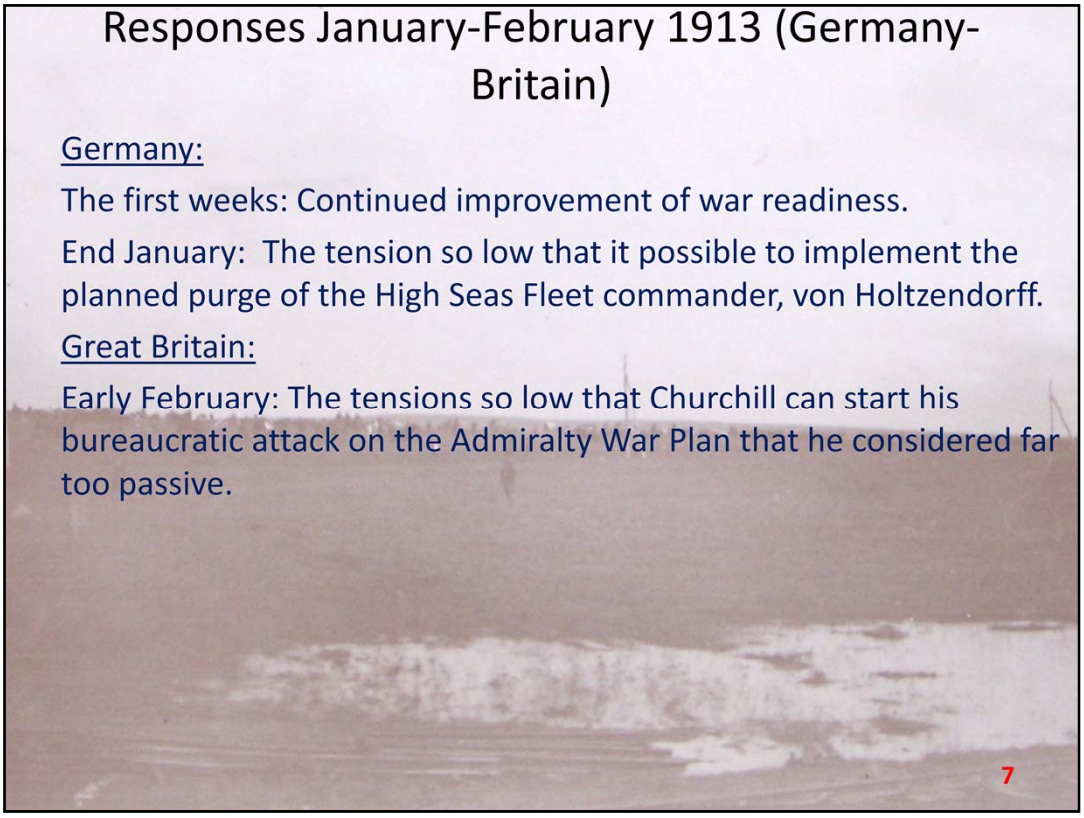
However, nobody could know at the time that the crisis would not slide out of control by irresponsible Serbian or Bulgarian action – followed by Austrian and Russian response - and the improvements of combat readiness continued (and were monitored by diplomats and intelligence officers).



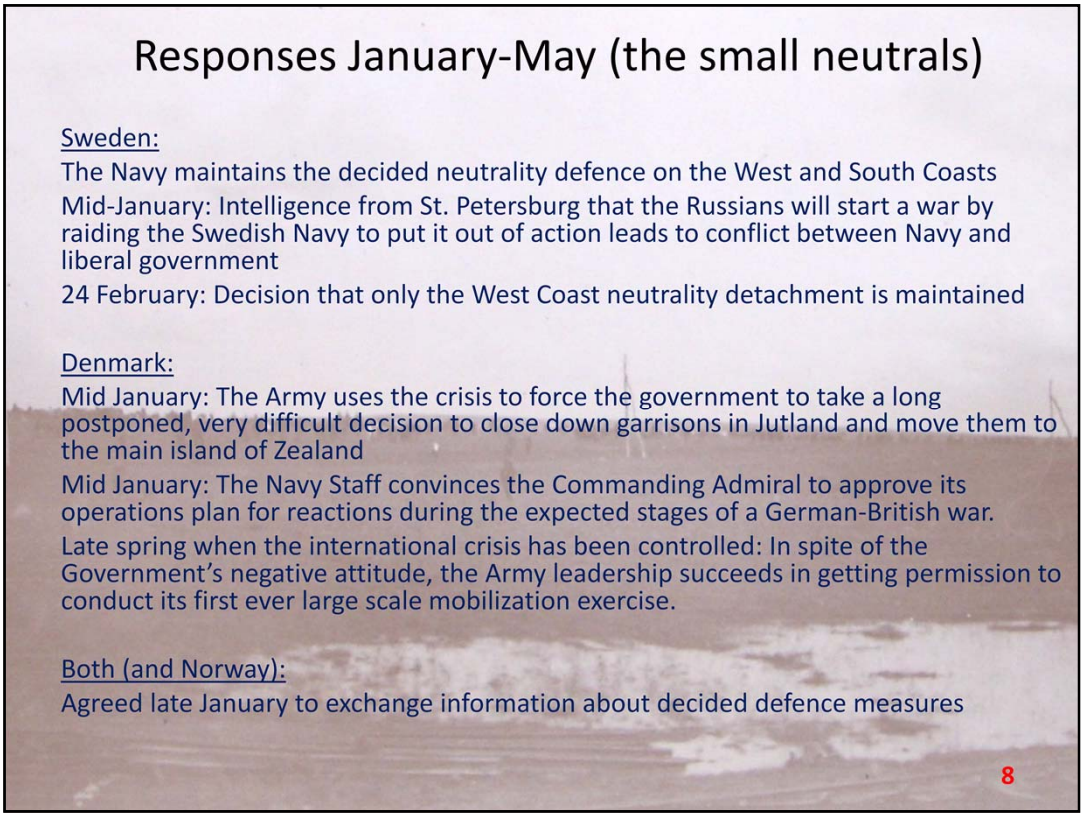
In Sweden the decided fleet deployment took place early December.

In Denmark the only permitted action became the intensification of intelligence activities, including pressing the diplomatic service to co-operate with army intelligence.

The Scandinavian agreement of a common declaration of neutrality only came after very difficult negotiations that had started in 1909. It remained valid until the end of First World War.

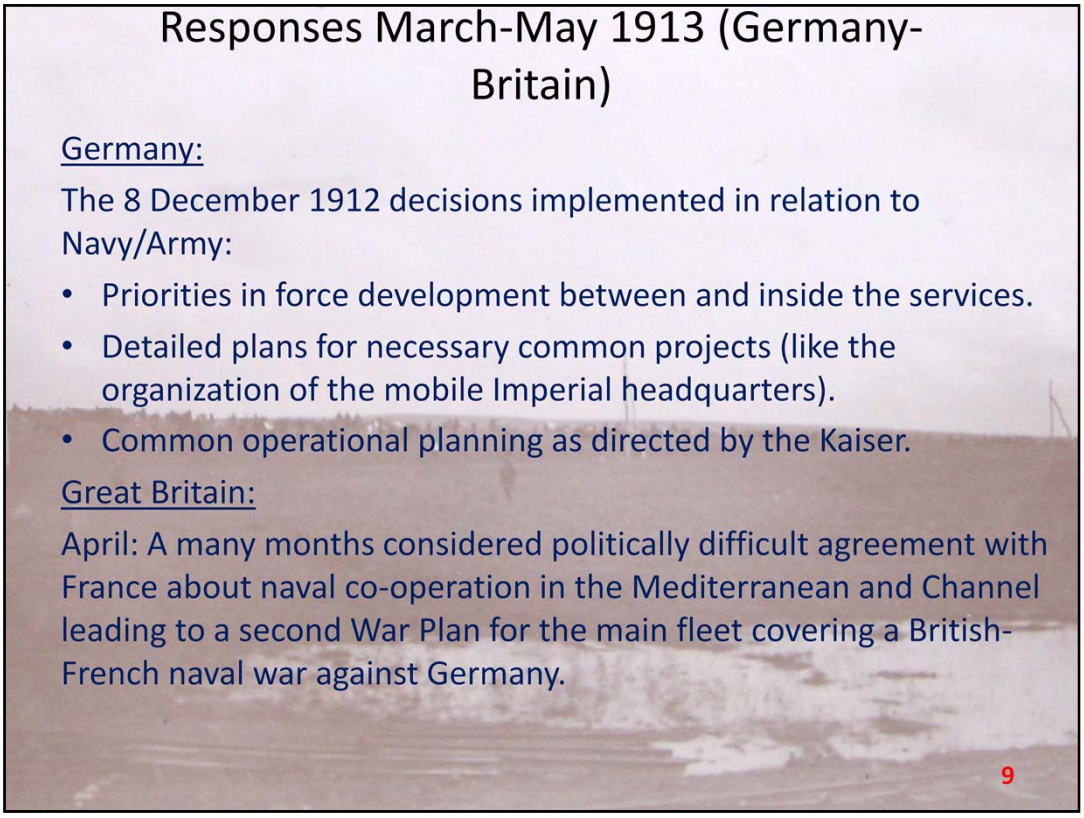


Most of January the tension remained high, but at the end of the month both the German and British naval ministers – Tirpitz and Churchill – felt free to move to remove obstacles to their full control of their service.



In the Scandinavian countries the continuing crisis was used by the military/naval professionals to advance what they considered essential defence steps, in Sweden unsuccessfully, as the government rejected to prioritize the Russian threat, in Denmark successfully, getting garrisons moved, achieving agreement on a naval operations plan and having a massive – post-crisis – mobilization exercise carried out.

Denmark and Norway succeeded in getting Sweden to accept giving advance warning of future increase of defence readiness. During the war the practical and political Scandinavian co-operation would become routine.



During the last months of the crisis, “bridges” were built to traditional opponents in both Germany and Britain.

In Germany between the Army and Navy – in one end of the planning spectrum agreeing on how to invade England if so decided – at the other end to allow naval access to the General Staff library in the mobile imperial HQs.

Britain accepted dependence of the French Navy in the Western Mediterranean.