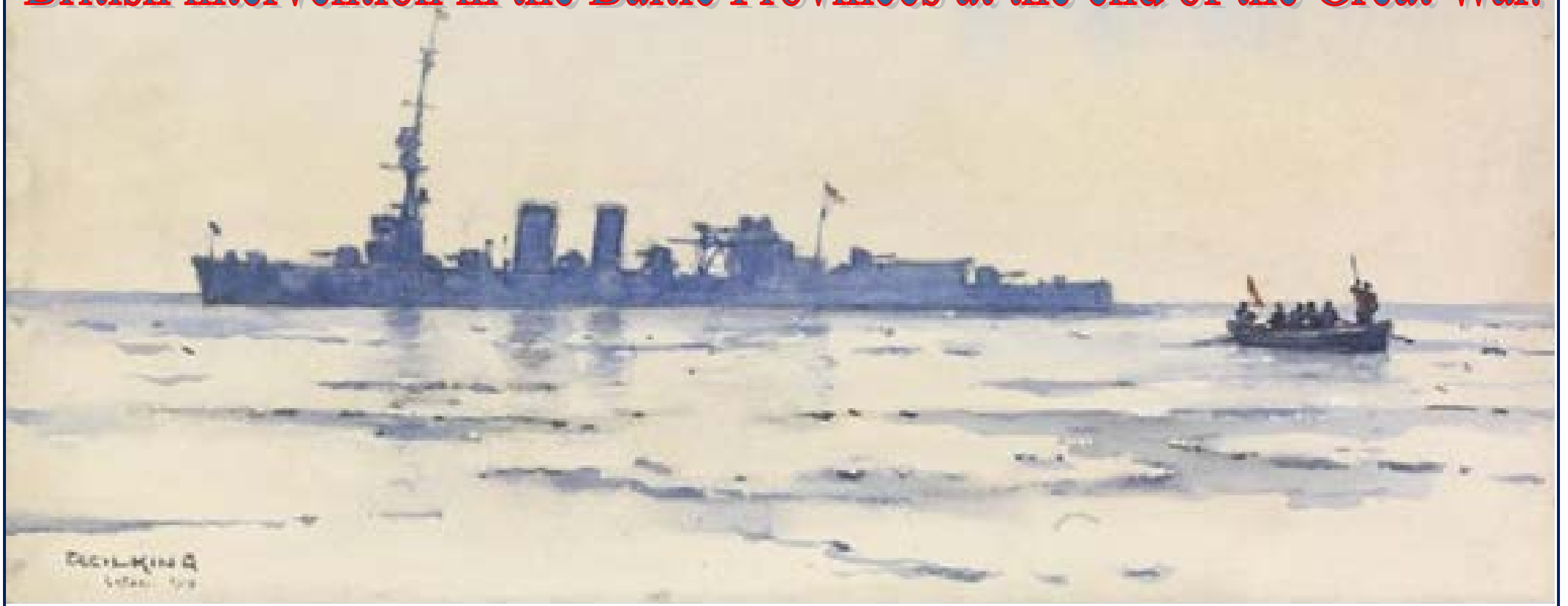


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TO BE OR NOT TO BE THERE:  
British intervention in the Baltic Provinces at the end of the Great War.





## Prologue:

### *The British 1918 path towards some help to Balts.*

#### **Initial remarks**

In the conference paper “*The 1918-20 International Intervention in the Baltic Region. Revisited through the Prism of Recent Experience*” published in *Baltic Security and Defence Review* 2:2011, I outlined a research and book project. The Entente intervention in the Baltic Provinces and Lithuania from late 1918 to early 1920 would be seen through the prism of the Post-Cold War Western experience with limited interventions, from Croatia and Bosnia to Libya, motivated by the wish to build peace, reduce suffering and promote just and effective government.

This first part about the background, discourse and experience of the first four months of Britain’s effort has been prepared to be read as an independent contribution. However, it is also an early version of the first chapters of the book.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note – especially for Baltic readers – that the book is not meant to give a balanced description of what we now know happened. *The subject is the subjective British perceptions, motives, analysis and discourse at the time* that led

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<sup>1</sup> These chapters were used in an earlier form as a paper for the 4th Annual Baltic Military History Conference in Tartu early September 2012, thereafter expanded after a final research visit to The National Archives of United Kingdom in Kew.



Tallinn (Reval) with Toompea in 1918

### ***The British framework***

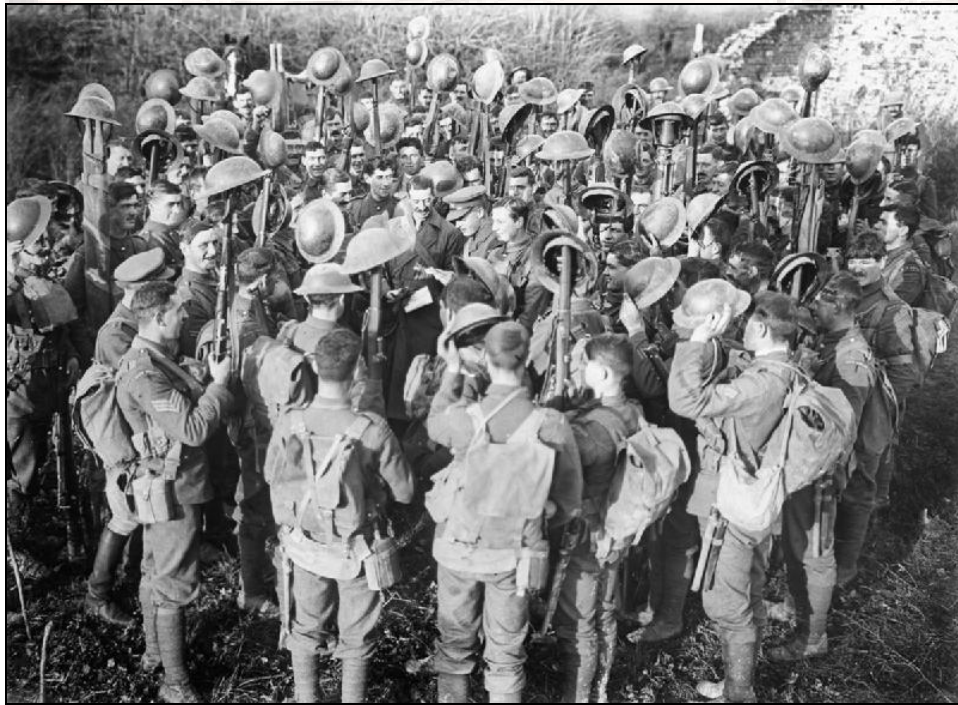
Early November 1918 it was evident that the Great War was nearly over and that it would be victorious, but pride, satisfaction and optimism was nearly totally absent from the discussions of the Cabinet meetings. Great Britain was desperately tired. She was nearly as exhausted as the defeated Germany, and where France had been forced into the war by invasion, Britain could quietly doubt that the continental character and results of its voluntary participation justified the massive human losses and the immense damage to its wealth and future options. The country was pressed by the supply problems even in key areas like coal. There was widespread industrial action, rumours about revolution led by

extreme elements of the Labour Movement. The Cabinet had intelligence that part of the police supported strikes and would remain passive in case of trouble. All parts of the economy lacked skilled labour. Therefore the army – the strongest British Army ever – had to release such groups of trained men, something that added to the pressure to start a general demobilisation as soon as the fighting ended, no matter if the framework still wasn't peace, but only an armistice. It would be difficult to satisfy the French wish to have a large British Army on the Rhine next to its own to keep-up the pressure on the Germans until their eventual signing of a peace treaty. It was clear to all that no sizable British land forces would be available to assist in the stabilization of the chaos wrought by total war.

In Russia the turmoil was spreading with the Bolshevik government fighting White - Entente supported – opposition armies in the east, south and far northwest, in the latter place based on the British bridgehead force in Archangelsk, initially established to recreate an eastern front after the hoped-for toppling the revolutionary government. On these fronts of the Russian civil war, the Entente was already committed to support their Russian allies, and the British leaders had been further energized in their disgust for the Bolsheviks by the Cheka raid on the British Embassy in Petrograd on 31 August 1918 and the killing of the senior diplomat left in town, the Naval Attaché, Captain Francis Cromie, when he attempted to resist the entry.

The raid led to the arrest of Soviet envoys to London that had been exchanged early October for the British diplomat and intelligence agent Robert Bruce Lockhart, who had acted as the British Prime Minister's envoy to Lenin in Moscow until he was arrested earlier in the year after a failed British supported coup attempt against the Bolsheviks.





When it was supposed to be over: Details of the Armistice read to British troops at noon on 11 November 1918.

There were no such established British or Entente commitments in the west and no obvious British strategic interests. Along the Baltic Sea and in the Ukraine only the German forces deterred Bolshevik forces from taking over. In Lithuania and southern Latvia the Germans had been in occupation since spring 1915 and they had taken most of the rest of Latvia and the Estonian Islands in autumn 1917. The

rest of the Baltic area with Estonia had been occupied in late February 1918 to put maximum pressure on the Bolshevik negotiators and force them to sign a peace treaty so that the Germans could concentrate fully on the coming planned decisive offensive in the West – the one that did become decisive, but by failing, which broke the German national will and ability to continue the war. After an end to the fighting the cohesion of most of that conscript based German Army was likely to break, infected by the revolution locally and at home.

### ***14 July 1917 – 30 September 1918: the seeds planted***

The Russian revolution of March 1917 gave Home rule to the Estonians, and as decided by the Provisional Government elections had taken place in May for the Estonian regional council, the Diet (Maapäev). The elected members met in Tallinn (the contemporary name, Reval, will be used hereafter) on 14 July to form a local government. During summer and autumn that year the ineffectiveness of the Russian Provisional Government and the shadow of German offensives the council discussed how to get foreign support against Germany to ensure Estonian self-determination. Jaan Tõnisson's idea to seek full independence and then join Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania with the Nordic States in a block was rejected as impractical, and the effort was initially concentrated on seeking support among supporters of an all-Russian Federation in Petrograd. The late summer local elections, however, undermined the ability to act, as the left-socialist forces - swelled by Latvian refugees and Russian soldiers and sailors - gained a clear majority in the two larger cities, Reval and Narva, and after the 7. November Bolshevik coup in Petrograd, the local Estonian Bolsheviks took power in the mainland part of the country. The Germans had occupied the islands since late October. In the elections to the Russian Constituent Assembly on 12-14 November, the Bolsheviks got more than 40 per cent of the votes, and together

with other leftist groups, they gained a small majority. Again, however, the results were different elsewhere, with the centre-right groups winning outside North Estonia, including in Tartu. The Maapäev met again on 28 November as a response to the development in Russia and the declaration of the leader of the Estonian revolutionary committees, Jaan Anvelt, that the assembly would be disbanded immediately and replaced by an Estonian Constituent Assembly elected early February 1918. The Maapäev reacted by using the occasion to declare Estonia an independent republic and proclaimed it the legitimate representatives of the Estonian people until such time where the constituent assembly had been elected.



Jaan Tõnisson and Ants Piip

The support for independence grew after New Year. In the second week of the January 1918 the Second Congress of Estonian Soldiers – with representatives from the Estonian troops that had been part of the Imperial Russian Army – voted 2/3 in support of independence. Their support for a reformed, but free, Estonia, rather than for total social changes inside an autonomous part of a revolutionary Russian federation was the crucial difference between the situation in Estonia and Latvia. This nationalist rather than revolutionary orientation of the majority of Estonian officers and soldiers became one of the decisive factors that made Baltic independence possible.

On 10-11 January the authorised representatives (Council of Elders) of the dissolved Maapäev met under the protection of Estonian soldiers. The Council decided that the country ought to declare independence immediately as an independent, neutral, state and seek great power guarantees of the status. The new state would safeguard the rights and cultural autonomy to the Russian and German minorities. The coming peace treaty should forbid great power fortifications on Estonian soil. Estonian representatives should be present at the peace conference. A peace treaty paragraph should create the framework for an internationally (e.g. neutral Swedish) monitored referendum among all who had lived in Estonia one year before the war. In this way the people would make the final decision of Estonia should be independent or be united with another power.

All political parties in the country opposed German occupation and would see such an occupation as a violation of the rights of the nation, and the whole population wanted all foreign troops removed from Estonian territory. The Elders decided to send envoys abroad to argue its case for independence along the lines outlined. Ants Piip went to London, Kaarel Robert Pusta to Paris and others led by Jaan Tõnisson to Stockholm to cover Scandinavia.



On 14 January the Council decided to declare independence in the near future. The threat to such independence became acute after the German Baltic nobility made an appeal on 28 January asking Germany to occupy Estonia. The Estonian representatives in Stockholm protested on 4 February in vain to the German envoy to Sweden that the nobility did not represent more than a maximum of 5 per cent of the population and that the Maapäev was the legitimate representatives of the nation. German troops crossed from Ösel (Saaremaa) via Moon (Muhu) to the mainland.



Crossing to the Estonian mainland on the ice and the small island Kessu.

During their couple of months in power the arrogance and administrative ineffectiveness of the Estonian Bolshevik government combined with the general development in Russia to alienate the voters, and the elections to the Estonian Constituent Assembly that started on 3 February exposed a clear reduction in the support to the Bolsheviks, with voters especially shifting to the democratic centre Labour Party. In total the non-socialist vote increased to 56 per cent and the support for Estonian independence even more. Facing a certain defeat if the elections to the Estonian Constituent Assembly would be completed on 10-11 February, these were cancelled by the Bolsheviks. On 19 February the Council of Elders authorized a "Liberation Committee" of three persons to act on its behalf, and when the German troops started their fast offensive into Estonia later in February to force the Soviet government to sign a peace treaty, this troika hurriedly moved to issue a Declaration of Independence and create a provisional government under one of the three, Konstantin Päts. Kaarel Robert Pusta was appointed Foreign Minister. It happened in Tallinn on the night 24-25 February, short time after German forces had entered Tartu. The last representatives of the Bolshevik government had left Reval (Tallinn) on 24 February. On 25 February German forces reached Tallinn, reducing the declaration to a symbolic act that could legitimize later efforts.



On 24 February the German troops reached Tartu (Dorpat)

The German authorities and the local German elite recognized neither the provisional government, nor its claim for Estonia's independence. By the 3 March peace treaty Soviet Russia gave-up control of the Courland, Riga and the Estonian Islands. The future of these areas would be decided by the German authorities considering the wishes of the population. German control of Estonia and Livonia would continue until order had been restored, however this was changed on 27 August, when the Soviet government accepted giving up control of both provinces.

The German plan for its future was to create either one or two German elite ruled states; if two, one in the Duchy of Courland and another a "Baltic State" with its

capital in Riga covering Livonia, Latgalia and the Estonian mainland and islands. The situation of the area between Courland and East Prussia had been settled, when Wilhelm II signed a document on 23 March authorizing the establishment of an independent Lithuania, and on 9 July 1918 the governing Lithuanian council (Taryba) confirmed Duke Wilhelm of Urach as King Mindaugas II of Lithuania. However, before Germany could confirm the Taryba decision, the military situation undermined the attractiveness of a German king, and on 2 November Lithuania became a presidential republic, with the new president was sworn-in on 11 November.

On 22 and 26 March the German nobility of Estonia and Livonia formally invited Germany to take over their provinces, and on 12 April the German nobility controlled leaders of Courland and the Baltic State passed a resolution asking Wilhelm II to recognize the whole area as German protectorate, either in personal union with Prussia or as a united Baltic Duchy under a German prince. On 13 March the Estonian delegation to Scandinavia – the lobbying in Christiania – protested to the German government, but the next day the Kaiser reacted by telegram that he personally was positive to the idea of a union.

To consolidate their control of Estonia, the Germans offered one-third of the arable land to German colonisers, disbanded the Estonian military units, banned Estonian political activity, established a strict censorship and restored the Baltic Germans to control of the municipal councils. On 22 September Kaiser Wilhelm II recognized the independent status of a state in the region in spite of opposition of the Centre-Left part of the Reichstag, and on 5 November 1918, a temporary Regency Council (Regentschaftsrat) was formed for the new state lead by Adolf Pilar von Pilchau, a Baltic German baron from the Pärnu district in Estonia. The



Council consisting of four Baltic Germans, three Estonians and three Latvians was only recognized by Germany. It only functioned until 28 November.<sup>2</sup>

Nationalist leaders who had stayed back in Estonia were interned by the Germans. This forced the group of envoys to work without directives from Reval. This made it easier to tailor the lobbying in Entente and Scandinavian capitals to what would be attractive and effective by the “target” officials and politicians. However, it also brought the risks of problems if and when the internees returned to power. Konstantin Päts returned to his position and power on 20 November 1918.<sup>3</sup>

It is not clear when the envoy to London, Ants Piip, arrived following the Elders decision in mid-January. However, on 14 February, even before the Germans occupied Estonia, new obstacles to his work were created. The situation in the Baltic region was brought to the attention of the British War Cabinet by the special intelligence memorandum “*on the peoples of the Baltic Provinces and Lithuania*”. The memo outlined the history of the two parts of the region – Estonia, Livonia, Courland and “historic” Lithuania – and the size and ethnic-national composition of the populations. The total number of Estonians in Russia

<sup>2</sup> The main source of this short outline of events is the contemporary “Résumé of Political Events since the Russian Revolution” supplied by members of the Estonian Delegation to Great Britain” which is the first and key part of TNA. CAB 24/52. Political Intelligence Department. Foreign Office. Confidential. Russia/007 of 17-5-1918 “Memorandum on the Baltic Provinces”. Combined with Georg von Rauch: *The Baltic States. The Years of Independence. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania 1917-1940.* (London 1974), pp. 31-49. Supplemented by the often inaccurate Toivo U. Raun: *Estonia and the Estonians* (Second Edition). (Stanford (California) 1991), pp. 100-107.

<sup>3</sup> Kaarel R. Pusta: *Estonia and her Right to Freedom.* *Journal of Central European Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 3, October, 1943 (Manhasset, New York), pp.274-275.

was estimated to be around 1 million and to total population in the three parts of Latvia (Lettland) around 2,6 million 75,8 per cent Letts). The total number of Lithuanians in Russia was estimated to be around 1,6 million, but the memorandum emphasized the difficulty of defining the borders in relation to White Russians as well as Poles and the general very mixed population in the different parts of greater – historic – Lithuania.



The Baltic Provinces of Russia with administrative borders.



All four major national population groups (Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians and White Russians) were mainly peasants. The only larger towns were Riga of 500.000, Libau (Liepaja) of 100.000 and Vilna (Vilnius) of 200.000. The memorandum went on to underline, that: *"The history of the Lets and Letts has been an endless struggle against the German "Baltic Barons". Nowhere in Europa has serfdom "been as ruthless as that imposed "by the German conquerors in the Baltic Provinces, a fact admitted even by German historians"*. The noble estates still controlled very large parts of the provinces, something which together with the uniquely high literacy rate among the peasants gave the Bolsheviks a large and intelligent – anti-German motivated - following among the Estonians and Latvians. In Lithuania both the Lithuanians and White Russians were unhappy because the German occupation made it impossible to settle the scores with their – Polish – landlords.

German withdrawal would be followed immediately by an agrarian revolution. The memorandum concluded that: *"The peasant in revolt, who desires to seize the land, provides at present the one great anti-German force throughout the Baltic Provinces and historic Lithuania, and the potential ally of any one who fights Germany."*<sup>4</sup>

Ants Piip had no influence on the analysis of the memorandum. It did not reflect any desire for independence or confrontation with Russian rule. Land, not nationality, was the objective of the local populations.

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<sup>4</sup> The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey (TNA). CAB 24/42 Intelligence Bureau, Department of Information. B. 11. 14.2.1918. Special Memorandum on THE PEOPLES OF THE BALTIC PROVINCES AND LITHUANIA. (with map).

The memo must have added to Piip's challenge, however, in spite of its message, he succeeded quickly in his lobbying. Attempts to influence London had started on 23 January, when an Estonian deputation in Petrograd had asked the local British representative, Mr Lindley, if the British government would support the Estonian wish for independence at the peace conference. Lindley had answered that his country would resist German annexation attempts at the conference. Thereafter Britain had consulted its allies. Japan had given full support. Italy had agreed to counter annexation ambitions. The U.S. government was reluctant to agree *"on the ground that the number of States that might come into existence as the result of the war might prove embarrassing"*. On 21 February Jaan Tõnisson had had a meeting with the British envoy to Stockholm, Sir Esme Howard. The Estonian had told Howard that:

*"in view of the approaching German invasion, it would greatly encourage the Esthonians in their determination not be annexed by Germany, if the Western Powers would at least provisionally recognise the National Council as the de facto independent body until the Peace Conference took place, and state that the final settlement could only be made by the Conference."*

Tõnisson's suggestion showed a perceptive use of the 10-11 January Elders' decisions. On 25 February the Estonian, Howard and the British representatives in the Allied capitals were instructed by the Foreign Office:

*"that His Majesty's Government were prepared provisionally to recognise the Esthonian Constituent Assembly as the de facto independent body until*

*the Peace Conference took place, when the future status of Estonia ought to be settled on the principle of self-determination”.*

Apparently the Foreign Office did not yet know that the Constituent Assembly had never been elected.

On 23 April Ants Piip together with the acting Estonian Foreign Minister, Kaarel Robert Pusta, and the writer Eduard Reinhold Virgo were given the chance to convince the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Arthur Balfour, of the merits of the Estonian and Baltic case. They gave a version of the development of the previous year that understated the three months under de facto rule of the Estonian Bolsheviks. A massive majority of Estonians wanted nothing to do with Germany. *“Their present desire is for the recognition of their country’s independence, leaving the question of its eventual return into a Federation of Russian States open for the present”.* 20 per cent of Estonians lived in Russia, but it had to be noted that the *“return of Russia to a condition of stable order will be a long process.”* The uncompleted elections for the Constituent Assembly had in reality been a referendum about independence, and here 70 per cent had voted for the absolute independence and the rest for autonomy within a Russian federation. The delegation rejected the idea of a separation of the Estonian Islands that was part of the German-Soviet peace treaty from the rest of the country. It also argued against union between the northern (Estonian populated) and southern (Latvian populated) parts of Livonia *“as they fear that Germany intends to retaining Courland and divide the Lettish people.”* The delegation felt certain that it would receive support from France and Italy, but would *“apparently sincerely, value that of Great Britain most.”* The Estonian wishes had also met sympathy in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

3 May Arthur Balfour notified the delegation that:

*“His Majesty’s Government greet with sympathy the aspirations of the Estonian people, and are glad to reaffirm their readiness to grant provisional recognition to the Estonian National Council as a de facto independent body until the Peace Conference takes place, when the future status of Estonia ought to be settled as far as possible in accordance with the wishes of the population.”*

Balfour also made clear that the British government would do its utmost to secure that the final outcome would mirror the principle of self-determination, and that Britain was glad to receive Professor Antonius Piip as the informal diplomatic representative of the Estonian Provisional Government. The Foreign Secretary thought that Britain had clear geopolitical reasons to support the Estonians. The Germans were already giving military support to Finland, Lithuania was on the way to become a German puppet state, Courland and the Estonian Islands had been won by the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty, and the rest of Latvia was strongly infected by support for the Bolsheviks. The recognition of the Estonians would send a strong message to Finland that Great Britain, not Germany, was the real supporter of small states.

The Estonians had been convincing, and their presentation had persuaded the philosophically and idealistically minded gentleman-statesman Balfour that they had a just case, and the analysts of his ministry were asked to revise the 14 February memorandum that had been based on *“various historical and statistical data”.*



On 17 May the three months old paper was de facto replaced by a new memorandum completed three days earlier *“based principally upon mere recent information”*. The Estonian part was based on the information supplied by the Piip-Pusta-Virgo delegation. The Latvian part was based on available recent written sources supplemented by letters from the Latvian Provisional Council in Petrograd from Jānis Zālītis, who would become the first defence minister of his country in December, and the short Lithuanian part was a letter dated 16 March about *“Latvia and Lithuania”* from John Szlupas (Jonas Sliupas), the American-Lithuanian leader of the Lithuanian representatives in Stockholm.

The memorandum part about Latvia underlined the German plans to annex Courland and the Latvian determination to resist any such partition of their country. The resolution from a session on 15-19 January of the Latvian Provisional National Council in Petrograd stated that a democratic and independent republic Latvia should be formed of Courland, Livonia and Latgale and underlined that no peace treaty should restrict the peoples’ right of self-determination. Because the situation in Russia seemed hopeless, their ideas for the future could be expressed by the formula *“An independent Latvia under the protectorate of the Western European Powers.”* Other possibilities were a Lithuanian-Latvian monarchy or maybe even a larger union of *“the Baltic peoples”*; Scandinavians, Finns, Estonians and Latvians. The memorandum noted that if the Latvians asked for recognition similar to that given to the Estonians, *“a corresponding treatment of the Lettish request will be not less fruitful.”* Dr. Sliupas underlined that the Lithuanian was under extreme German pressure, and it would give way if it did not get Entente support that outlined what future the Allies saw for Latvia and Lithuania. Lithuania needed to be convinced that they did not plan to include the country

into a Greater Poland. *“Russia is gone forever”*. Britain should support the idea of joining the Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonian and Finns into a confederation with the Scandinavian nations. *“If Britain would support the project the Swedes would be won, and the smaller peoples ... would be delighted.”*<sup>5</sup>

The fact that representatives from all three Baltic nations entertained ideas to get involved with the Scandinavians must have been what inspired Balfour to seek their practical assistance in the autumn.

Balfour’s motives for supporting the Baltic nations were probably a combination of idealism and reasons parallel to what he outlined in May as the logic behind his Middle East policy:

*“Through the establishment of an Arab Kingdom in the Hejaz, of an autonomous Arab protected state in Mesopotamia and of an internalised Jewish ‘home’ in Palestine will not increase the territories under British flag, they will certainly give increased protection to British interests, ... ‘buffer*

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<sup>5</sup> TNA. CAB 24/52. Political Intelligence Department. Foreign Office. Confidential. Russia/007 of 17-5-1918 “Memorandum on the Baltic Provinces”. CAB 24/144 Secret. Eastern Report. No. LVII of 28-2-1918. CAB 24/144 Secret. Eastern Report. No. LXXXVII of 21-3-1918. Vahur Vade: The Baltic States and Europe, 1918-1940, in: John Hiden, Vahur Made and David J. Smith: The Baltic Question during the Cold War. (Abingdon & New York 2008), p.9. Georg von Rauch: The Baltic States, pp. 48-49. Mart Nutt: The establishment and restoration of Estonian independence and the development of Estonian foreign relations, in Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Yearbook 2007.

*states', of all the greater value to us because they have been created not for our security but for the advantage of their inhabitants".<sup>6</sup>*

The meetings between Balfour and the Estonian delegation took place during the final crisis of the Great War, when the Germans came close to defeating the British Expeditionary Force and France. The crisis passed in July and in August the Allies had started the series of large offensives that gradually destroyed the German Army and convinced its leader that it was time to seek peace in earnest. From mid-August onwards, the Allied leaders had to define and agree on the terms that the Germans would have to accept. After presentations about the military situation in France and at sea, Balfour gave his review of the "War Aims" agreed with France and Italy and made clear that the initiative to suggest compromises would have to come from her Allies rather than Great Britain. Thereafter he listed important issues from "the whole field from the Arctic Ocean to the Aegean". Austria-Hungary would be broken-up on national lines. The Poles had been promised access to the sea, and both that commitment and the question of the Polish borders had to be left open. The position of the western border depended on "what extent we had beaten Germany". The next observation was influenced by what he had concluded after his work with the German challenge in the Baltic region:

*"Continuing to describe the principles of mutual conflict and common dependence upon herself on which Germany was building up the ring of border States which she had carved out of Russia, he insisted that the*

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in: Jeremy Black: *The Great War and the Making of the Modern World*. (London 2011), p.239.

*breaking down of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty must be an essential object of our policy."*

This part of Balfour's briefing was accepted by the War Cabinet without comments.<sup>7</sup>

### ***October 1918 and the positive sceptic Robert Cecil***

In early October when the Allied leaders met in Versailles, it was clear that the end of the war was very close, and on 8 October Marshal Ferdinand Foch, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Armies presented his proposal for "Conditions of an Armistice with Germany". However, his note focused on the requirements in the west, and the discussion led to the inclusion of the demands for the other fronts in a draft that set the conditions for both Germany and Austria-Hungary. That expanded proposal stated that "Immediate steps to be taken for the evacuation of all territory belonging to Russia and Roumania before the war": The Germans should evacuate Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.<sup>8</sup>

On 10 October the British envoy to Norway cabled London informing the Foreign Office that he had send open letters from the local Russian Legation to the ambassadors in London, Paris and Rome. It was decoded the following day. In a

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<sup>7</sup> TNA. CAB 23/7 Minutes 13.8.1918 Balfour "War Aims. Review by the Secretary for Foreign Affairs".

<sup>8</sup> TNA. CAB 23/8 Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet and Imperial War Cabinet. 11-10-1918 at 4 p.m.: Annex II "Conditions of an Armistice with Germany. Translation of a Note by Marshal Foch. (Discussed at the Conference, but no decision taken) of 8-10-1918. Annex III to "Joint Resolution Regarding Conditions of an Armistice with Germany and Austria-Hungary. (Discussed at the Conference, but no decision taken.)"



French language summary of the letters the envoy made clear that they underlined the grave danger that “*Bolshevik excesses*” would follow if the German troops were suddenly withdrawn from the present occupied parts of Russia: “*Allied forces should, as soon as possible after an armistice, be landed in Baltic and Black Sea ports in sufficient strength to maintain order*”. On 14 October the telegram was passed-on to the General Staff, and three days later the Director of Military Intelligence, Major General Sir William Thwaites, reinforced the message from Christiania in a message to the Under Secretary of States for Foreign Affairs, Lord Robert Cecil. The concern was especially noticeable in the Ukraine and Estonia. Wireless interceptions seem “*to justify this anxiety*”. Thwaites judged that Allied occupation “*would be welcomed by the great mass of the population, even perhaps in the very large towns, provided that it was carried out in sufficient strength to remove fear of premature withdrawal and consequent reprisals by the Bolsheviks*”.

The warning from Norway followed a letter to The Times on 2 October from the highly respected Anglo-Russian Oxford professor, Paul Gavrilovich Vinogradoff. In “*The Fate of Russia. Establishment of Public Order*”, Vinogradoff noted that the Bolsheviks had thrown their mask, “*their rule may be defined in one word: it is a program, the like of which has not been witnessed since ... (the) Armenian massacres.*” There was no All-Russian government that could balance the Bolsheviks; however the Allies should remember what Russia had contributed during the war and assist her, even “*when she lies prostrate and bleeding from self-inflicted wounds*”. The peace settlement had to ensure that the Germans “*decamp from Baku and Kars, from Kiev and Pskov, from Riga and Reval. But who is to take their place during the interregnum? Hardly Lenin’s Chinese executioners.*”

Vinogradoff concluded:

*“As the occupied provinces of Russia have to be cleared of Germans and cannot be consigned immediately to a central Russian authority, there is nothing for it but to put them under the temporary control of an international police force recruited from the ranks of the Western Allies. It is not an easy task to provide for such an occupation, but the urgency of measures of this kind is obvious...”*

Somebody in the War Office added “*and Neutrals*” after “*Western Allies*” in the margin of the cutting of Vinogradoff’s letter attached to the file.<sup>9</sup>

During the days in mid-October when the Imperial General Staff considered the telegram from Norway, London received new inspiration. The Estonian envoy to Stockholm, Jaan Tõnisson, had already underlined the risk of a Bolshevik take-over as the German troops departed. The issue had - according to a message on 11 October sent by the Chargé d’Affaires in Stockholm, Robert Henry Clive Mr Clive - been discussed with the Swedish Government “*who has returned a non-committal answer*”. However, the Swedish Social-Democrat leader, Hjalmar Branting, “*is stated to be in favour of such action by Swedish troops*”. The British staff officer also had information that the Germans were in favour of being replaced by Swedish troops in Estonia.<sup>10</sup> The rumour of

<sup>9</sup> TNA. WO 32/5670. Sir M. Findlay (Christiania) No. 3616 of 10-10-1918. War Office 0149/5749 (M.I.R.) of 17-10-1918. Extract from “The Times” 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1918.

<sup>10</sup> TNA. WO 32/5670. The M.I.R. (M.I.2.e.) typed note dated 16-10-1918.

Branting's positive and Tōnisson's ardent hope that it was correct formed an important element in British policy-making the next four weeks.

How much the Estonians and Arthur Balfour's reading of the arguments of Latvians and Lithuanians and the emerging picture of the situation in Russia had influenced him became clear in the memorandum Balfour presented to the War Cabinet on 18 October. He underlined that the three nations presented a special problem, because they were too weak to stand alone and unsupported between Germany and Russia, in race and religion they were:

*"utterly different from both their great neighbours as well as from each other ... in culture they are far superior to the Russians, but very hostile to the Germans. They have successfully retained their individuality through generations of bureaucratic oppression, and as soon as Russia collapsed, each one of them put in a claim to be treated as an independent self-sufficing nation."*

There seemed only to be four ways of dealing with this situation at the Peace Conference or separately: Britain might sanction the Brest-Litovsk Treaty *"a solution not worth discussing"*. A second possibility would be to reject any change of the pre-war relations between these nations and Russia. Balfour rejected that possibility completely. A third option would be to assure that got autonomy under either Russia or Germany. Finally: *"We may give them complete independence"*.

Balfour was inclined to aim at the creation of three small national states with borders following *"ethnological lines"* as closely as possible. Estonia would then have a population of around 1 million, Latvia of 2 and Lithuania of about 5

millions. He saw a Baltic federation as desirable, and if possible they should combine with Finland and one or more Scandinavian states. This, however, should only be encouraged, no pressure should be used:

*"Our experience of forced marriages in these regions is not reassuring; and if it has proved impossible to keep Norway and Sweden united, and if Denmark and Iceland seem drifting apart, the prospect of inducing their neighbours to join who differ profoundly in race and language and do not always agree in religion, seems somewhat remote."*<sup>11</sup>

As Lloyd George was absent, the War Cabinet meeting on 18 October where Balfour's paper was discussed as part of the general debate about the situation in Russia, was chaired by Earl Curzon.

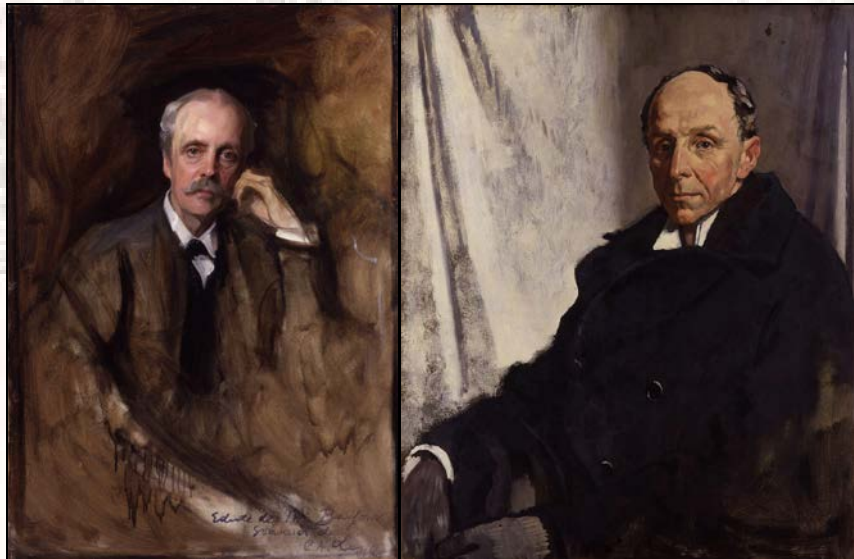
At the end of the discussion Balfour's deputy, Lord Robert Cecil, underlined that questions demanded immediate consideration, firstly *"The question of the small Baltic States which had been created by Germany as the result of the Peace of Brest-Litovsk"* and secondly the question of intervention in Russia. Cecil *"hated the idea of abandoning to Bolshevik fury all those who had helped us, but he quite saw that it might end badly if we tried to destroy Bolshevism by means of military interference"*. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Andrew Bonar Law, thought that it would help the Cabinet to come to a conclusion if a joint memorandum by the Foreign Office, the War Office, and the Admiralty could be drawn up regarding the present position and our future policy in Russia. Austen Chamberlain, then Minister without Portfolio, hoped that such a memorandum would contain

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<sup>11</sup> TNA. CAB 24/70 Confidential G.T. "Baltic Provinces", signed A.J.B. 18-10-1918.



definite propositions for the Cabinet to accept or reject. The War Cabinet decided that the Foreign Office should prepare a Paper about the actual and future military policy in Russia in consultation with the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the First Sea Lord.<sup>12</sup>



Arthur Balfour, more of an idealist, and his deputy, Robert Cecil, the focused geo-political realist.

Apparently Cecil realised that he had to state his analysis in writing, because on 20 October he circulated his own “*Memorandum on Russian Policy*” to the King and War Cabinet. He started by underlining that the purpose of the British

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<sup>12</sup> TNA. CAB 23/8 Minutes 18.10.1918, item “Russia”.

military presence was to deprive the enemy of supplies and assistance from Russia and – if possible – to recreate a Russian front. Both would become irrelevant with an Armistice.

Other justification such as assisting the Czechs and non-Bolshevik Russian groups had come later. The British might continue to continue this support, because of the probably true constant flow of information making clear that the withdrawal of the German troops would be followed “*by an outbreak of Bolshevism with the consequent chaos and destruction*”. The risks were constantly underlined by the Germans because they wanted to justify dominating the occupied districts politically and commercially after the war. If they were allowed to keep that influence “*they will not only command the Baltic but may very likely become commercially if not politically paramount in the whole of European and ultimately Asiatic Russia with all its incalculable resources*”.

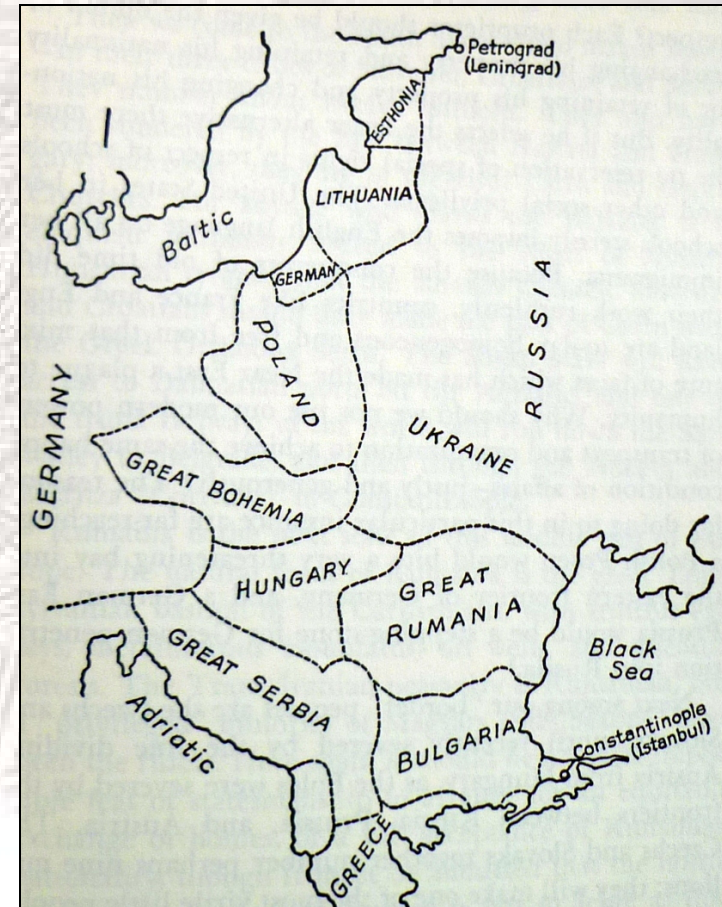
This means that Cecil saw the Geo-Political risk of Germany gaining control of the Euro-Asiatic continent, Halford Mackinder’s “*Heartland*”, and Mackinder’s views of the necessary policies in Eastern Europe.<sup>13</sup>

The main purpose of British policy in Russia should be to counter such a development by maintaining influence in the rich districts of Russia: middle and western Siberia, Caucasus and the Ukraine by supporting “*a friendly population (and) as good and stable a Government as possible*”. Here the British should invest its money and arms.

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<sup>13</sup> See Halford J. Mackinder: *Democratic Ideals and Reality*. London 1919, 1942, pp. 158-1966. For a short outline of Mackinder’s views of the German aspirations and the possible counter-move see Brian W. Blouet: *Halford Mackinder. A Biography*. College Station 1987.

Cecil was “entirely opposed to anything like a crusade against Bolshevism whether by sending forces if we had them into Russia or even by erecting as is contemplated by some people a ring fence round European Russia. It is probably true that the policy I have sketched above might have that effect at any rate to some extent but I do not advocate it on that ground.”



Mackinder’s sketch of the “Middle tier of states between Germany and Russia” from his “Democratic Ideal and Reality” finished January 1919.



Cecil looked “*with grave apprehension*” about what might happen to the fate of the small Baltic States “*brought into existence by the Germans*”. Because of their youth and inexperience they would remain weak for many years into the future. He considered it unlikely that they could be given “a Polish orientation”. As Finland, they were likely “*to lean upon Germany*”. “The only remedy appears to be to foster as far as we can the creation of a Scandinavian block to which the new states would turn for assistance”. Therefore he welcomed a suggestion that Sweden sent troops to Estonia, even if “*it is very doubtful if she will do it*”.

A senior War Office staff officer supported Cecil’s general priorities, but the recommended policy depended on safeguards that an Armistice was enforced. He also wondered why the politician did not give his motives for being against Bolshevism. After all, it was not a domestic movement, it had ambitions beyond Russia’s borders, and there “*is far less liberty in Bolshevik Russia than in Berlin*”. He also noted that Cecil had overlooked that Finland was moving away from the German orientation. It was now looking towards the Allies for protection against Bolshevism. The Allies should now use their military successes and insist that the armistice terms ensured German evacuation of the Baltic States and the opening of the Baltic Sea. “*The situation which developed in Finland during the last 6 months will then be reproduced in the Baltic States*”. If the Allies were prepared to act, the governments would be stable and pro-Entente. A barrier should be erected against Bolshevism. “*The ground is ripe in Finland, Esthonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Galicia and Roumania*”. In Russia itself intervention would be in

the “*interests of civilization and humanity*”. A first step should be an occupation of Petrograd from Finland.<sup>14</sup>

The first version of the War Office “*Memorandum on our present and future military policy in Russia*” was ready on 27 October. It started by giving a short outline of the British intervention during 1918. It had been justified by results, “*even if these have not been so favourable as had been hoped for*”.

Now with the possibility of a forced German evacuation, the Allies were faced with the option of the region being handed-over to “the tender mercies of Bolshevism”. The danger was exploited by the Germans seeking to stay in the Baltic States. If the Allies were to reap the full benefits of their victory, they should be ready with a policy that would “*enable them to include in the armistice terms the evacuation of the Baltic States and the complete opening of the Baltic Sea to Allied Merchantmen and ships of war*”. The Allies should aim at creating a stable belt of states from the Baltic to the Black Sea, from the three Baltic States to Romania. The memorandum thereafter proposed anchoring this barrier in Northern Europa:

*“The present situation presents a great opportunity for the Scandinavian Powers to form a Scandinavian block, extending its influence to the Baltic States, and it is suggested that the humiliation of Germany will probably result in Sweden departing from her former pro-German orientation (c.f.*

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<sup>14</sup> TNA. WO 32/5670, Circulated to the King and Cabinet. MEMORANDUM BY LORD ROBERT CECIL. Memorandum on Russian Policy. 20-10-1918. War Office 21-10-1918 ( Lt. Coloneæ, General Staff ???, 21-10-1918) SECRET. NOTE ON LORD ROBERT CECIL’S MEMORANDUM ON RUSSIAN POLICY dated October 20<sup>th</sup> 1918.

(compare with) Finland). It is not, therefore, unreasonable to hope that given Allied support and a guarantee against reprisals from Germany, Norway, Sweden and Denmark might combine to extend their protection and support to the young States of Esthonia, Latvia and Lithuania.”

Thereafter the memorandum dealt with the different parts of the barrier from north to south. The Germans were estimated to have between 30.000 and 40.000 men in the Baltic States, and the Allies should aim at creating a “police force” of this strength “say 3 Division, to occupy the Baltic States during the inter-regnum between Armistice and Peace”. It the Allies did not raise this force themselves; it should come from the Scandinavians. However, the United States may be willing to find the force by herself. The Royal Navy should police the Baltic Sea and its Royal Marines the ports of Reval, Riga and Libau “with valuable results to our future prestige and trade”. The final version of the memorandum from two days later had only minor changes. During the staffing it had been noted that Swedish forces might not be the best solution for Lithuania, and “Local forces” were added to the proposed Baltic States’ garrison between Armistice and Peace.

On 31 October the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Henry Wilson, gave his comments. He accepted the substance and recommendations, but suggested that the Germans might continue to encourage Bolshevism in Russia. This policy would continue for some time. There was no doubt that Germany hoped “eventually herself to step into Russia and crush Bolshevism, thereby

permanently establishing her power in that country and compensating herself for her losses elsewhere”.<sup>15</sup>

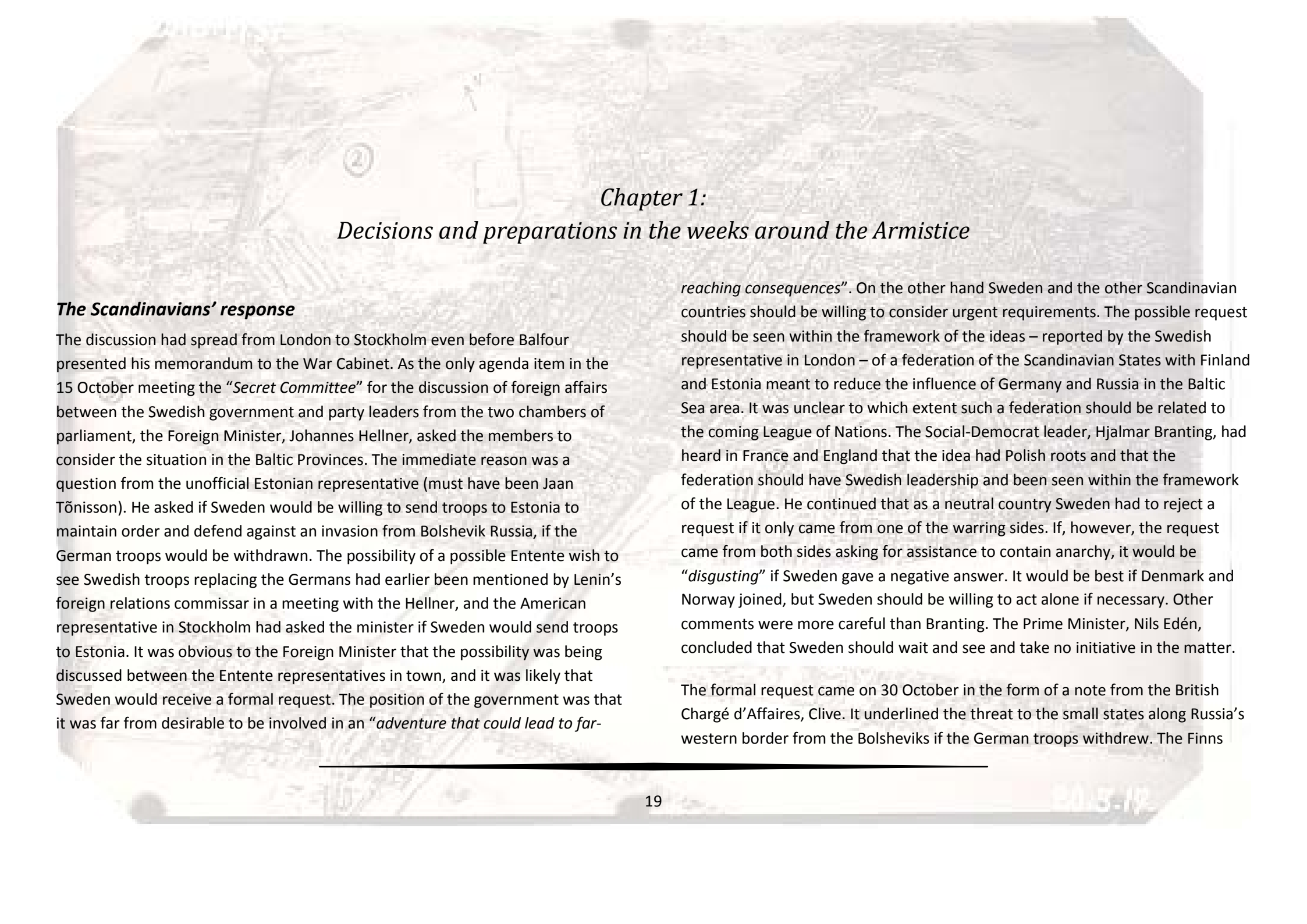


The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Henry Wilson, who supported the creation of an anti-Bolshevik buffer zone from the Baltic to the Black Sea

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<sup>15</sup> TNA. WO 32/5670. General Staff, War Office, 27<sup>th</sup> October, 1918. Memorandum on our present and future military policy in Russia. A second version of 29<sup>th</sup> October.





## Chapter 1: *Decisions and preparations in the weeks around the Armistice*

### ***The Scandinavians' response***

The discussion had spread from London to Stockholm even before Balfour presented his memorandum to the War Cabinet. As the only agenda item in the 15 October meeting the “*Secret Committee*” for the discussion of foreign affairs between the Swedish government and party leaders from the two chambers of parliament, the Foreign Minister, Johannes Hellner, asked the members to consider the situation in the Baltic Provinces. The immediate reason was a question from the unofficial Estonian representative (must have been Jaan Tõnisson). He asked if Sweden would be willing to send troops to Estonia to maintain order and defend against an invasion from Bolshevik Russia, if the German troops would be withdrawn. The possibility of a possible Entente wish to see Swedish troops replacing the Germans had earlier been mentioned by Lenin’s foreign relations commissar in a meeting with the Hellner, and the American representative in Stockholm had asked the minister if Sweden would send troops to Estonia. It was obvious to the Foreign Minister that the possibility was being discussed between the Entente representatives in town, and it was likely that Sweden would receive a formal request. The position of the government was that it was far from desirable to be involved in an “*adventure that could lead to far-*

*reaching consequences*”. On the other hand Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries should be willing to consider urgent requirements. The possible request should be seen within the framework of the ideas – reported by the Swedish representative in London – of a federation of the Scandinavian States with Finland and Estonia meant to reduce the influence of Germany and Russia in the Baltic Sea area. It was unclear to which extent such a federation should be related to the coming League of Nations. The Social-Democrat leader, Hjalmar Branting, had heard in France and England that the idea had Polish roots and that the federation should have Swedish leadership and been seen within the framework of the League. He continued that as a neutral country Sweden had to reject a request if it only came from one of the warring sides. If, however, the request came from both sides asking for assistance to contain anarchy, it would be “*disgusting*” if Sweden gave a negative answer. It would be best if Denmark and Norway joined, but Sweden should be willing to act alone if necessary. Other comments were more careful than Branting. The Prime Minister, Nils Edén, concluded that Sweden should wait and see and take no initiative in the matter.

The formal request came on 30 October in the form of a note from the British Chargé d’Affaires, Clive. It underlined the threat to the small states along Russia’s western border from the Bolsheviks if the German troops withdrew. The Finns

might be able to defend themselves, but the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians needed assistance before they could organize themselves for defence. Such assistance would be in the interests of civilization. A good solution would be if Sweden alone or the Scandinavians together gave the three nations military protection. The British had information that the Estonian requirement was limited to 40 000 rifles with 1 000 rounds per weapon.



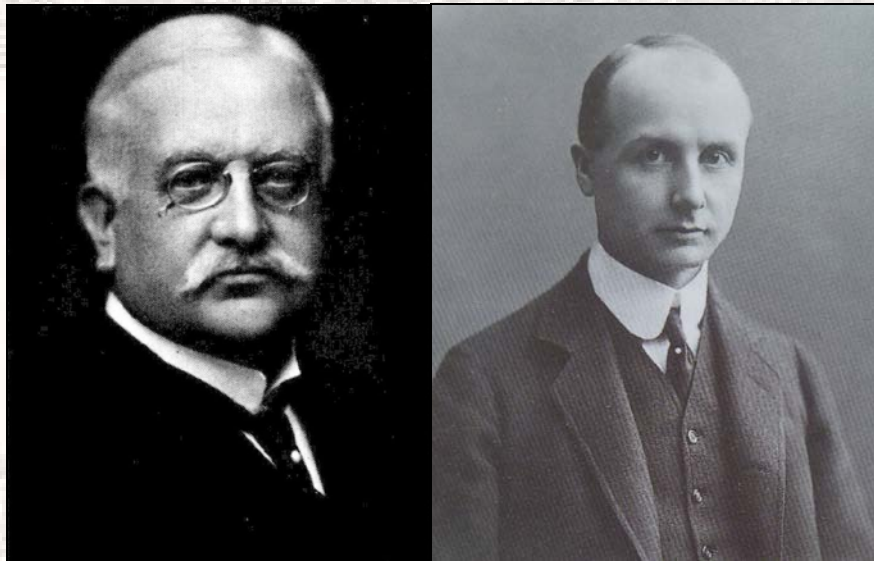
Two eager British diplomats, the Chargé d’Affaires Robert Henry Clive in Stockholm and Lord Kilmarnock in Copenhagen.

Thereafter they would be able to defend the border themselves. The Latvians, however, would not be able to establish a defence themselves. The British lacked detailed information from the country, but considered that it needed assistance in the form of a small foreign force of 2 000 men – plus food supplies. After some months, the Latvians might become able to create a border defence force of some 10 000 soldiers. The British were aware that the Lithuanians had contacted Sweden directly. As a minimum the British hoped that the Scandinavians would find the necessary weapons and ammunition of the authorities of the three Baltic nations. Weapons and ammunition would be replaced from British stocks as soon as possible.

The “*Secret Committee*” considered the British request in its 4 November meeting. Johannes Hellner started by noting that similar notes had been sent to Denmark and Norway, and that the three countries were in consultation about how to react. The British legation had been informed that the Parliament had to be heard, and that it was fairly unlikely that a majority would be support sending troops. Sending the required amount of weapons would mean a significant reduction of the mobilization stocks, and there was a risk that such weapons would be used in internal fighting. Hellner had asked Clive if the Entente had demanded the withdrawal of the German troops. The British diplomat did not know if that was the case, but considered it likely it would be a condition for armistice. Clive had continued that the Entente probably wanted German co-operation against the Bolsheviks, but as they had arranged the Bolshevik revolution in the first place and later supported them with funds and weapons, he considers such German participation unlikely. Thereafter the Foreign Minister had asked the German envoy. He had said that his country was interested in working with the Entente against the Bolsheviks in Baltic Provinces. Germany was against



help from Sweden as such assistance would be used by the Entente as a pretext for demanding the withdrawal of German troops from the area. Johannes Hellner concluded that the British request to the Scandinavians was politically motivated rather than driven by humanitarian needs. The British wanted to use them as a tool to reduce German influence in the region. The Prime Minister, Nils Edén, underlined that the King and government agreed with the Foreign Minister's analysis, therefore he intended to answer – without directly rejecting the request – by underlining the need for additional information and a request from both the belligerents. He received the support of the Committee.



The two Foreign Ministers that said no: Johannes Hellner and Erik Scavenius

The members underlined the danger of withdrawing the German troops as well as the need for Sweden to focus on the situation in Finland. Hellner made clear that he had – indirectly – underlined the risk of an early German troop withdraw to the Entente envoys in town. The Committee agreed that Sweden should send somebody to investigate the situation on the other side of the Baltic Sea and report back. The next agenda item was the relations to the Bolshevik government and its propaganda in Sweden.<sup>16</sup>

The Danish response was given verbally to the British Chargé d'Affaires in Copenhagen on 5 November. It underlined that giving the requested assistance would be connected with foreign policy, domestic politics and practical obstacles. Sending troops was impossible because of *"the character of the Danish Army and the views about that organisation in Denmark"* (the ruling Social-Liberal government was against *any* military instrumental role for Danish armed forces). There was only one private weapon factory, *"The Rifle Syndicate"*, all other weapons belonged to the state, and the large Danish Social-Democratic Party – that formed the parliamentary support for the minority government – was against such weapons *"being used in combat between part of Russia or in civil war there"*. The Danish envoy to London was instructed by his Foreign Minister that the answer should not be understood as a rejection in principle. The question was still *"being considered"* – as in Sweden. Indirectly the British were advised to buy

<sup>16</sup> Riksarkivet (The Swedish State Archive) (RiKA). Hemliga Utskottet. Protokoll 1917-1918. Protokoll 15-10-1918. Protokoll 4-11-1918 with the translation into Swedish of the British note dated 30-10-1918.

weapons from the private company, which was producing one of the best light machine guns on the market: the “*Madsen Rekylgevær*”.<sup>17</sup>

It is noteworthy how both London and the Balts used the Scandinavians and the British diplomatic expertise from the Nordic capitals during this period. The British envoys were apparently expected to play a role lobbying for support for Baltic States independence, and the brilliant and effective envoy to Stockholm throughout the war, Esme William Howard, was given a senior staff position responsible for the region in the British Peace Conference delegation. The British – Scandinavian – Baltic bridge was re-established 70-75 years later when another period of Russian weakness opened the window for Baltic States’ independence, now, however, with Denmark and Sweden in a far more active role and Finland a good deal more discreet in its focused support to the Estonian neighbour.<sup>18</sup>

### **Robert Bruce Lockhart**

The information from the Scandinavians was discouraging. It more or less totally undermined the War Office’s model for the northern end of the buffer zone from the Baltic to the Black Sea. However, other news was positive for those who supported some sort of intervention. On 4 November the Russian Embassy in London informed the Foreign Office that had trustworthy information from their envoy in Stockholm that “*the appearance of an Allied Fleet before Petrograd, in conjunction with other measures which the Allies may undertake, would result in the downfall of Bolshevism*”. The Armistice just needed to open the Baltic Sea and

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<sup>17</sup> Rigsarkivet (The Danish State Archive) (RA). London, diplomatisk repræsentation. 1913-1929. Politiske rapporter. Pk. 468. Tel. fra UM af 5’ Nov. 1918, modt. 6’ Nov.

<sup>18</sup> The narrative is inspired by the author’s direct involvement from 1990 to 2004 and with Britain from 1994.

Finnish Gulf to the Allies to dishearten the Bolsheviks and raise the spirits of the loyal elements. The next day London received information from Washington that the Russian Ambassador to the U.S. suggested that allied troops were sent through the Dardanelles to replace the German troops in Ukrainian towns like Odessa. On the same day, it got a cable from Lord Kilmarnock in Copenhagen passing-on a message from the local authorities of Minsk, Mohilev and Vilna. They warned of the atrocities the Bolsheviks were to commit in White Russia and Lithuania, when they replaced the retreating German troops, presently estimated as about 7.000 in Minsk and 6.000 in Vilna.<sup>19</sup>

The British Prime Minister did chair the War Cabinet meeting held on 5 November. He noted that Balfour had been eager to ensure that the terms of the armistice should compel the Germans to leave a certain quantity of arms in Poland, the Ukraine, and other Eastern areas, for the defence of those localities against the Bolsheviks. However, this proposal had been rejected the previous afternoon by the Allied Supreme War Council.<sup>20</sup> Another solution to protect the three Baltic provinces and other German occupied areas against a quick Bolshevik coup immediately after Berlin admitted defeat had to be found.

On 7 November the War Cabinet got important new information when Robert Bruce Lockhart reported about the internal situation in the Russia he had left

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<sup>19</sup> TNA. WO 32/5670. Russian Embassy (C. Nabokoff) No. 2950 of 4-11-1918 to Sir Ronald Graham, Foreign Office. Decypher telegram from Mr Barclay (Washington) No. 4983 of 4-11-1918. Telegram (en clair) Lord Kilmarnock (Copenhagen) Nos. 3258 and 3259 of 4-11-1918.

<sup>20</sup> TNA. CAB 23/8: Minutes 5-11-1918, item “Arms for use against Bolsheviks”.

after having been exchanged with the Soviet diplomats imprisoned after the killing of Francis Cromie. He described the internal political and economic situation, foreign policy and military power of Soviet Russia and estimated that the total Soviet army strength was 213 000, thinly spread along the fronts in the west, north, east and south, with only 16 000 as a screen in the west facing the Germans. Of the total 23 000 were Latvians, excellent troops that formed the backbone of the Bolshevik strength. The Commander-in-Chief was also Latvian. Lockhart noted that the Bolsheviks were *“still”* the strongest political party in Russia. The party was a serious danger for the rest of Europe, but that if Bolshevism could be confined to its present area it would fail, sooner or later, because of the weakness of its economic policy. He found it difficult to evaluate the strength of Bolshevism. He had a feeling that its actual position was the result of the weakness of all other parties in Russia. The main weakness of the different counter-revolutionary forces was their inability to co-operate.

Lockhart ended his report by listing the different Allied options when Germany was defeated. That defeat would not only remove the original pretext for intervention against the Soviets, it would also strengthen the position of the Bolsheviks; firstly *“by raising their hopes for a revolution in Austria and Germany”* and secondly *“by increasing their power in the Ukraine, Poland and the other Russian districts at present occupied by Germany”*.



Robert Bruce Lockhart: With news – and advice – from Soviet Russia

In Lockhart’s opinion the first Allied option was to abandon the intervention completely and come to a working arrangement with the Bolsheviks. This is what they desired. Supporters of the option argued:

*(1) that such a policy frees us from the charge of suppressing an anti-capitalistic revolution ; (2) that Bolshevism cannot lie killed by bayonets, but should be allowed to die a natural death;*



*(3) that we do not expose ourselves to the risk of labour and socialist troubles at home by sending troops to Russia against the Bolsheviks after the conclusion of an armistice or peace, and finally*

*(4) that once freed from the constant menace of outside interference the Bolshevik regime will become more moderate because, by not intervening, we shall be able to hold threats of intervention over its head.*

I quote Lockhart fully, because the reader will recognize similar arguments from the foreign political intervention debate today. He continued by rejecting that the Bolsheviks would be moderate and less of a threat to its neighbours if left alone. They would see withdrawal as a sign of weakness and get new revolutionary energy from the option.

The second Allied option would be to abandon the intervention, but replace it with support with arms and money to the anti-Bolshevik organisations in Russia and *“support in the same way a chain of national States on Russia's western frontier, such as the Baltic Provinces, Poland, the Ukraine and Roumania, with a view to creating- a strong economic barrier against the spread of Bolshevism.”*

Lockhart considered this option – the one actually chosen - as the weakest.

*“Without the active support of foreign troops the counter-revolutionary forces in Russia are not strong enough to overcome the Bolsheviks. By financing these organisations, and yet not supporting them actively, we lay ourselves open to the same charges as if we were intervening in force, and at the same time we are only prolonging civil war and unnecessary bloodshed in Russia. The results of our present intervention would seem*

*to show the danger of half-measures against the Bolsheviks. Finally, nothing seems to me more difficult of attainment than the plan of erecting a ring of border-States round Bolshevism, unless these States are supported by Allied forces. Both Poland and the Ukraine, not to mention the Baltic Provinces, will have more than enough to do to combat Bolshevism in their own territories. All of these States are far more likely to become Bolshevik themselves, than to be able to exert any healthy influence on Bolshevism from outside.”*

Lockhart's third – preferred – option was *“in spite of obvious difficulties”* to:

*“intervene immediately on a proper scale, to strengthen our forces in Siberia and in the north, and at the same time by securing the elimination of Turkey from the war to send an expeditionary force through the Black Sea ... and march immediately on Moscow in order to strike a blow at the very heart of Bolshevism.”*

At the end of his report he underlined that America had to contribute most of the troops so that the French and British contributions could be limited to volunteers. He also made clear any intervention should be justified on humanitarian grounds. No intervention in Russia could be really successful unless it was accompanied by massive food aid and other supplies for the starving population and no such economic relief could be given without an effective military presence.<sup>21</sup> Again arguments echoed in the current debate.

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<sup>21</sup> TNA. CAB 24/73: Robert Hamilton Bruce Lockhart's report of 1.11.1918 sent to Balfour 7.11.1918 about the internal situation in Russia until 30 September.

### ***A Royal Navy operation against Kiel?***

On 7 November 1918, the same day Lockart's memorandum reached Balfour, a suggestion from Copenhagen may have been the factor that catalysed the form of the actual British assistance to the Estonians would be given two weeks later. Ever since 1905 the Royal Navy had faced that the strength of an undefeated German Navy made Baltic Sea operations unrealistic. The most ambitious operation considered was a massive raid through the Danish Strait planned by the Admiralty War Staff in late October 1917 on a request from Alexander Kerensky, the Russian Provisional Government leader, who feared a German offensive against Petrograd after their invasion of the Estonian Islands. The intended large scale cruiser-destroyer operation had been cancelled and replaced by a more limited operation in the Kattegat, partly because of doubt if the effort would be enough to stabilize Kerensky's faltering regime, partly because it was more opportune for Lloyd George to address the new acute crises in North Italy.<sup>22</sup>

Now, on the evening of 7 November, Captain Charles Dix, the British Naval Attaché to Denmark, suggested to the Admiralty that it was time to attack Kiel. In a meeting with his French and U.S. colleagues, they had agreed that the mutiny in the German navy bases meant that the time had come to demand of the Danes that they cleared the Great Belt mine-fields. The mayhem had already made the Danish Navy increase patrolling to hinder the arrival of armed rebellious bands, and the next two days the British Military Attaché reported about a general strengthening of the guarding of the land and sea border. The Danes should be

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<sup>22</sup> See the reconstruction in Michael H. Clemmesen: *Den lange vej mod 9. April. Historien om de fyrre år før den tyske operation mod Norge og Danmark i 1940.* (Odense 2010), pp. 235-252.

protected by the deployment of a squadron deployed to their waters. Captain Dix' report only reached the Admiralty on 9 November, and on 11 November he had supplemented the proposal with information from the Ministry of the Marine that the Danish Navy would start clearing its own mine-fields in the Sound, Great Belt and Little Belt and restore lights and marks. The Danes also reported that the German Navy left the vicinity of Danish waters. On 14 November the Admiralty reacted by requesting any information the Danes had about the German mine-fields that had been established in the Great Belt and Sound – and information about what they would do to clear these.<sup>23</sup> Nothing indicates, though, that the Royal Navy had started formal planning for an entry yet.

When the Scandinavians decided to procrastinate, the Germans had to be allowed to keep some troops in the Baltic Provinces in the next period, and that necessity influenced the final armistice demands. In the Armistice coming into effect on 11 November, the first clause dealing with the eastern frontiers of Germany did demand them to withdraw to the pre-war borders, but the evacuation should only start *“as soon as the Allies shall think the moment suitable, having regard to the internal situation of these territories”*. Other clauses annulled the Brest-Litovsk and supplementary treaties, underlined that the troops should end requisitions, seizures and any other coercive measures and made clear that the Allies should have free access to the German evacuated territories *“in order to convey supplies to the populations of these territories or for the purpose of maintaining order”*, the latter task a euphemism for resisting Bolshevism.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> TNA. FO 371/3361, pp.270, 272, 274, 278-279.

<sup>24</sup> Convention d'armistice du 11 novembre 1918.

### **German – Bolshevik complicity?**

The Allies thought that the Germans deliberately handed over terrain and weapons to the Bolsheviks, after the Russian Government also annulled the Brest-Litovsk Treaty two days after the Armistice came into effect. This was not the case in reality. The main reason why the temporary protection by Germans failed was that the cohesion and discipline of the troops and sailors had collapsed into mutiny and insubordination under the combine weight of war fatigue, demoralization by defeat and revolutionary infection inspired both locally and by information from home.<sup>25</sup>

On 13 November, the Director of Military Intelligence sent Robert Cecil a copy of the report that général de division Henri Albert Niessel had sent to the French Government. Niessel had now returned after having been his country's liaison officer in Russia. His report was dated 3 November. The French general assumed that the Allies would decide to replace the departing German and Austrian troops with their own immediately. Otherwise "*the Red Guards will pour in...*". The general recommended that the responsibility to replace the Germans was divided among the Allied powers. The final part of his report suggested how the outstanding economic issues between Russia and Germany should be solved.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Outlined e.g. in: Vello Helk: *Estlands Historie – kort fortalt*. (Odense 1993), p. 81. Geoffrey Bennett: *Freeing the Baltic*. (Edinburgh 2002), p.27. See also TNA. ADM 137/1663, Appendix 3 (contd) (to Rear-Admiral Sinclear's orders). Mr. Clive (Stockholm) cable of 15-11-1918 at 5.35 p.m. about departing German soldiers and plundering marines.

<sup>26</sup> TNA. WO 32/5670. War Office 0149/5749 (M.I.R.) of 13-11-1918. With: Paris 3-11-1918 .5162. Analysis of a Report made by General Niessel (now in hospital in France) – on the – Problems which will arise in Russia when Russian Territory is evacuated by the Central Powers.

### **Policy with limitations defined**

The conference at the Foreign Office in the afternoon of 13 November must be considered the final stage in the co-ordination of intervention in Russia-policy decided by the 18 October War Cabinet meeting. Balfour chaired the meeting. Other representatives from the Foreign Office were his very independent minded deputy, Lord Robert Cecil, the Permanent Under-Secretary Lord Hardinge of Penshurst and the intellectual liberal, Sir George Clerk. The other participants were Lord Milner, the Secretary for War, the General Staff Directors of Military Intelligence (Major-General Sir William Thwaites) and Military Operations (Major-General Sir Percy Pollexfen de Blaquiere Radcliffe), and with the Director of Naval Intelligence, the highly respected Rear-Admiral Sir Reginald 'Blinker' Hall, as the only Admiralty representative. The meeting started by Robert Cecil reading a General Staff memorandum that concluded that British troops should have left Russia no later than the signing of the peace treaty. Cecil considered such a strict policy framework as unrealistic. Thereafter Balfour gave two principles as "*as basis for discussion*".

The first principle was that Great Britain could "*not embark on an anti-Bolshevik crusade in Russia*". He saw it as natural that the local British observers (like Lockhart) would disagree, as "*they were obsessed with the external and visible violence of Bolshevism*", but the British people would not be willing to support such a crusade. The second principle was that it was "*necessary that support should be afforded to the Border States of Western Russia from the Baltic to the Black Sea*". They should be recognized and thereafter supported.

The General Staff paper had argued "*that the existence of these small States on the western border of Russia would inevitably prove the object of military*



ambition on the part of the latter country when Russia should again become a Power." Actually the army memorandum had argued, assuming that the Royal Navy would control the coast of the Baltic Provinces:

*"Lithuania, - Latvia and Esthonia remain. The ultimate political settlement as regards these provinces is a matter for the Peace Conference, if it can be decided at all until Russia has recovered her stability in some form or other. Meanwhile all that the Allies can do is to supply arms to such National Governments as are capable of exercising de facto authority on evacuation by Germany, and to afford them such moral support from the Baltic coast as naval conditions may render possible (my emphasis)."*

Balfour thought that the coming League of Nations should be able to protect them. Some had argued that Bolshevism was already strong in the Baltic region. Balfour did not consider an agrarian rebellion against the existing landlords Bolshevism. Milner *"mentioned that the clause in the armistice providing for the policing of these States by German troops might prove a danger in view of the break-up of moral in the German army"*. Here Balfour did not seem to have any comments. Thereafter Balfour proposed that the British should support the Omsk government, assist in getting the Czech troops home from Siberia, help Denikin in South-East Russia and assist the small nationalities of the Caucasus.

Lord Milner agreed with Balfour in his general observations; no crusade against Bolshevism was possible:

*"Anything which could be done to protect the Baltic States should be done, but British troops could not be despatched to these regions. On the other*

*hand, considerations both of honour and of interest demanded that we should keep Bolshevism from the regions East of the Black Sea, i.e., the Caucasus, the Don country, and Turkestan. It was necessary that our military objectives should be limited."*

Milner also noted the agreement with the French from 23 December 1917 about their *"spheres of activity in Russia"*. It was covered by a separate short note from the Director of Military Operations. In the Black Sea area France focused on Romania and the Ukraine, Britain on North and South Caucasus and the Don region. North Russia was primarily a British interest area. The note did not divide the Baltic littoral into spheres of activity. It would come later.

Lord Robert Cecil *"was not prepared to go quite so far as to say that we should protect Border States against Bolshevik attack. Our object should be to help the Russians to stand by themselves, and we should therefore do everything possible to support and strengthen existing organisations."* He was still in favour of creating a *"Baltic Block"*. If that failed, Britain should supply the local authorities with weapons, where after they might be able themselves to control their area. Admiral Hall noted the importance of food supply. Captain Cromie had underlined in the last letter before he was killed (2½ months earlier) that *"the hand that feeds this country will rule it."*

After a short general discussion, the Conference concluded that one of the decisions that should be recorded that Britain should *"... supply the Baltic States*

*with military material, if, and when, they have Governments ready to receive and utilise such material”.*<sup>27</sup>

The Prime Minister chaired the War Cabinet meeting on 14 November, where both the First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir Eric Geddes and the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss were present. The problem related to the challenges from Bolshevism was discussed as the final agenda item.

The discussion started with Balfour drawing attention to the minutes of the proceedings of the Foreign Office conference the previous afternoon. He underlined that the military and naval authorities had been present, and had considered the War Office memorandum on future British policy in Russia and neighbouring countries. The Foreign Secretary underlined that it had been apparent that all British representatives on the spot had been inclined to undertake an anti-Bolshevik crusade. In view of the atrocious character of the Bolshevik Government, this was not surprising, but it had been agreed that such a military crusade was impossible as it would involve Britain in military operations of unknown magnitude.

However, it was also clear to Balfour that the Germans were using Bolsheviks in Holland and elsewhere for their own purposes. The Swiss Government, which had been by tradition open to the reception of political refugees of all kinds, had now

been compelled to turn out Bolshevik agents. He thought it was useless to attempt anything against the Bolsheviks in Great Russia, and the plan recommended was that Britain should give whatever assistance that lay in its power to the elements in Siberia and South-East Russia, who had remained supporters of the Allies during the war, such as the Omsk Government. However, it was difficult to give recognition to governments that might only remain in power a short time and where the boundaries of the areas under their control were unclear. Balfour added that he had written several short Papers about the western border states of Russia of relevance to a peace settlement. They would be circulated to the War Cabinet. Britain could not allow them to be overwhelmed by Central Russia and incorporated into Central Russia as they contained populations of different race, language, and religion, and were, on the whole, more civilised and cultivated than the Great Russians. The danger lay in the combination of invasion and revolution. The Bolsheviks stated that they would be content to leave the Border States to remain outside Great Russia, provided the governments were in the hands of Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils. All the Border States were weakened by the existing land system. In the northern Baltic States there existed a number of wealthy German barons, while further south large properties were held by Polish counts. The existence of this aristocracy, which was opposed to the peasants and the great mass of the people, constituted a class division which was a source of great weakness.

*“Mr. Balfour said that he had made great efforts to get the Scandinavian countries to assist in providing arms and in policing these Border States. They had, however, all refused, and, if anything was to be done, it would have to be done by the Allies.”*

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<sup>27</sup> TNA. CAB 24/70 W.O. Secret 0. 1/180/517. “Memorandum on our Present and Future Military Policy in Russia of 13-11-1918. CAB 24/69 Secret 0149/5869 “To the Secretary, War Cabinet, signed P. P. de B. Radcliffe, D.M.O.”. CAB 23/8 Minutes of the Proceedings of a Conference held at the Foreign Office on November 13, 1918, AT 3-30 P.M.

The Secretary for War, Lord Milner, ruled out that Britain could we send troops. Lord Robert Cecil supported Balfour's view that it would be fatal to let it be thought that we were committed to an anti-Bolshevik crusade. Thereafter Cecil distanced himself from Balfour's views about the Baltic Provinces, other missions had higher priority. He:

*"doubted very much whether it was part of our duty to protect Esthonia and the Baltic States against Russian Bolshevism, but we ought to do what we could to prevent the rich countries of Southern and South-Eastern Russia from drifting into anarchy, and we ought to protect the people we have from time to time incited to help us in the war."*

Lloyd George agreed with Balfour's proposed general policy, but as a radical political reformer he considered social change more important than independence:

*"With regard to Esthonia, he took the view that the sooner the peasants got on to the land there the better, as peasants in possession of the land would constitute a strong anti-Bolshevik nucleus. The German landowners had been a curse to the country, and had been used by the German Government as an alien garrison."*

Milner's criticized Balfour's ideas in a different way. He thought that it would be better to support:

*"the countries where there were already in existence Governments opposed to the Bolsheviks—that is to say, east of the Don and the Volga—were*

*those which most closely affected the interests of the British Empire and were most easily got at. These countries were threatened by a Bolshevik invasion from the west. We should help the existing Governments to resist such an invasion, more especially as in those countries there were no complications due to the existence of an alien landed aristocracy."*

Thereafter the discussion moved on to how the British people could be protected against Bolshevik infection. Lloyd George understood that Britain *"had a great, inflammable, industrial population, and it was very desirable that our industrial population should know how industrial workers had suffered equally with the rest of the population of Russia at the hands of the Bolsheviks"*. Austen Chamberlain thought *"that the time had come when full publication should be given to the evidence which had been collected by Mr. Lockhart in regard to the behaviour of the Bolsheviks"*. Balfour stated that the Bolshevik Government in Russia *"had used their control of food supplies to starve to death their political opponents. The people they had treated worst were people whom we should regard in this country as blood-red Socialists"*. Andrew Bonar Law, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, thought that *"it was most important that we should get the press of the country to take up the question of Bolshevik excesses more fully"*. Cecil and Chamberlain underlined that the information about the subject in the Foreign Office and War Aims Committee would be made available. The War Cabinet did not reach any decision about if and how to support the Baltic nations.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Estonian lobbying for decision***

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<sup>28</sup> TNA. CAB 23/8 Minutes 14.11.1918 "Bolshevism - Russia, Siberia, Turkestan, Caucasia, The Baltic States, Poland, Holland."



Further Estonian lobbying was needed to trigger a decision, and it had in reality started even before the start of the War Cabinet meeting on 14 November. Jaan Tõnisson had made clear to the British Chargé d’Affaires in Stockholm that the situation in Estonia was extremely serious. He had asked Clive to have Ants Piip in London informed. The Germans had requisitioned all stocks of grain. *“Towns are starving. Bread riots have occurred. 10,000 tons of cereals needed at once. Despatch at once steamers with cereals in exchange for flax, flax seed and wood. Ask immediately for despatch of some ships of war to Reval for demonstration, carrying arms for Esthonian troops...”*

The next afternoon – on 15 November – Clive forwarded information from the British consul in Helsingfors (Helsinki), who had had a meeting with a refugee from Estonia. The man had reached Helsinki early morning that day and claimed to be representing the *“Bourgeoisie of Reval”* that asked for assistance against the Bolsheviks. The German troops were about to leave, where after the Bolsheviks would have *“mastery”*, as the Estonian government that was established the day before was too weak to control them. *“If immediate Allied forces not forthcoming inhabitants fear terrible massacre and German marines have already started to plunder official stores in harbour”*.

The official request for assistance came in the evening of 19 November, both via Clive in Stockholm and directly from Ants Piip. Piip’s note to Balfour started with informing the British that the Estonian government had protested against the *“German Military Terror”* on 5 November and asked for an immediate evacuation of the German troops, release of all political prisoners and freedom to organize Estonian armed forces. However, even when Piip was writing, the German government in Estonia still sought close union with Prussia with the support of the German military presence, and the *“Pan-Germanic Baltic Barons”* still

supported the united German Landesrat in Riga. The German occupation forces had deprived the Estonians of all their arms and their policy had effectively blocked the build-up of sufficient national forces to maintain order:

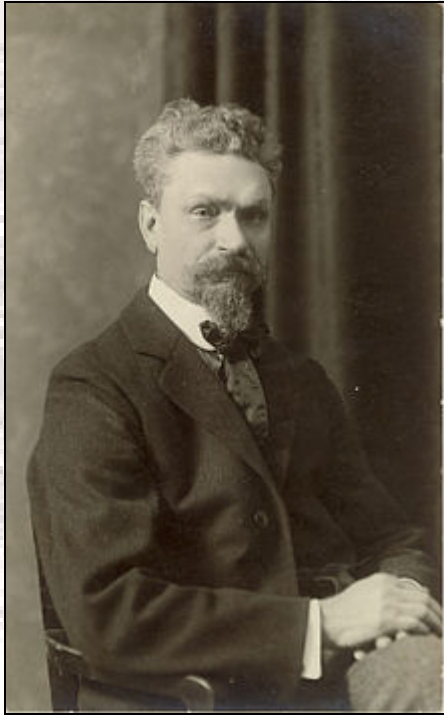
*“... I have the honour to approach H.M.B.G. asking them to be so kind as to arrange with the Allies on behalf of the Esthonian Provisional Government as an intermediary for the purpose of sending Military and Naval support to Esthonia with the least possible delay...”*

According to the Estonian Ministry of War plans for mobilization and defence it was estimated that 20 000 men – or if necessary 50 000 men – could be mobilized in 2 or 3 weeks, if the Allies provided the weapons. Estonian political representatives would be seconded as advisors to any Allied forces sent to the country. Beyond weapons, the country needed financial and economic support after German military confiscation of grain and manufactured articles had left the country devastated and starving.

*“The Estonian people hope that the Allies who have supported Estonia politically heretofore will provide them with the necessary supplies. They regard the cause of the Allies as their common cause specially as they have suffered during three years much fighting together against the common enemy; particularly taking an important part in the East Prussian invasion in August 1914 wherein the Estonian suffered very heavy losses...”<sup>29</sup>*

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<sup>29</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1663. Copy of cable sent by Mr. Clive (Stockholm) on 14-11-1918 at 9.50 p.m. Copy of cable sent by Mr. Clive (Stockholm) on 15-11-1918 at 5.35 p.m. Copy of cable sent by Mr. Clive (Stockholm) on 19-11-1918 at 7.45 p.m. Esthonian Provisional Legation to The Right Honourable A. J. Balfour.



Mihkel Martna, who participated in the final meeting.

Piip's written English may not have been perfect, but together with Tõnisson's work via Clive in Stockholm, it was what was necessary to make the British launch types of support not explicitly ruled-out by War Cabinet decisions.

Ants Piip's note led to a meeting with the British the next day, on 20 November. As in the April meeting, Piip had brought Eduard Virgo, but this time the third Estonian participant was the journalist and nationalist politician Mihkel Martna, a

smart move as Martna came from the left wing of the Social-Democratic Party, thereby made clear by his presence that not all socialists were Bolsheviks.

The British side was led by the sceptic realist Lord Robert Cecil. Vice-Admiral Sir Sydney Robert Fremantle, the Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff represented the Admiralty. The War Office was only represented by a colonel, which was logical as the army could only to give technical and instructor support within the framework of the War Cabinet decisions. Considering Balfour's role in supporting both Jewish and Baltic ambitions to have home lands, it is intriguing to note that the army officer in this decisive meeting was Colonel Frederick Kisch, the British Zionist leader. The Estonians noted that Cecil made it a precondition for support that *"our government (is) ... stable and reliable and has a democratic base in its fight against bolshevism and disorder"*.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Decision and planning***

Just after noon on the same day, 20 November, the decision to send the navy to the Baltic Sea was taken by the Imperial War Cabinet, where the Dominions were

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<sup>30</sup> Vabadussõja Ajaloo Komitee: Eesti Vabadussõda 1918-1920. I. (Tallinn 1937), p. 312.

represented and were Balfour was a formal member.<sup>31</sup> Robert Cecil did not attend. Balfour argued that:

*“it would be clear to anyone who had read the recent Foreign Office telegrams that a show of force in the Baltic would be most useful. It would help to strengthen the populations of that part of the world against Bolshevism, and might assist British interests there. He was very anxious, therefore, that the British fleet should be sent, in view of the excellent moral effect that would be obtained along the south-east coast of the Baltic.”*



Vice-Admiral Sir Sydney Fremantle, who managed the intervention from the Admiralty as Deputy Chief of Naval Staff. Here in 1917 as Cruiser Squadron Commander.

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<sup>31</sup> Balfour was not a formal member of Lloyd George’s normal War Cabinet, even if he often participated in the meetings.

The Admiralty was reluctant for “*technical reasons*”, so it became a decision for the Cabinet to take. This made the First Sea Lord, Admiral Rosslyn Wemyss, made clear that the navy just needed time to become ready and get a possibility to clear



the mines. His minister, The First Lord, Eric Geddes, agreed with the proposal to send a fleet to the Baltic “*provided that the proposals did not include going to Petrograd and Finland. If the fleet were to go to Petrograd, it would be contrary to the policy of the Cabinet not to fight Bolshevism*”.

The Imperial War Cabinet then decided that the Admiralty should despatch a fleet to the Baltic when the mine situation made it possible. The operation should take place in consultation with the Foreign Office “*as may be possible and required*”. Its destination was not to involve Finland or Petrograd.<sup>32</sup>

On 21 November both the Foreign Office and the Admiralty started work to prepare the operation, and the next day the War Cabinet Secretary, Lieutenant Colonel Maurice, noted that Balfour and Cecil agreed that the issues raised by “*Lord Robert Cecil's Note on the subject of Esthonia*” (must be his notes after the meeting with the Piip delegation) had been “*disposed of*” by “*the decision of the Imperial War Cabinet, that the Admiralty, subject to arrangements for clearing mines and to actual destination, should make arrangement a for the despatch of the Fleet to the Baltic*”.<sup>33</sup>

The exchange of information between London and Copenhagen about the sweeping of the German minefields in the Sound and Great Belt that started immediately after the Armistice had continued the following days. On 15 November London asked what information the Danes had about the minefields in

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<sup>32</sup> TNA. CAB 23/32. Imperial War Cabinet, 37, 20-11-1918, at 12 noon, Item: Despatch of British Fleet to the Baltic.

<sup>33</sup> TNA. CAB 24/70 Secret G.T.-6346 WAR CABINET. ESTONIA. Note by the Secretary. Hankey 22.11.1918. There are no notes about the in CAB 23/8 Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet ... November 21, 1918, at 12 noon.

the southern part of the Great Belt, and two days later, the British Chargé d’Affaires, Lord Kilmarnock (Victor Alexander Sereld Hay, 21st Earl of Erroll and 4th Baron Kilmarnock), informed London that the Danes would lift their own mines and German mines in Danish territorial waters, but “*no steps will be taken to sweep other German minefields until a request has been received preferably (my emphasis) from German Government*”. On 21 November Kilmarnock informed London that the Germans had asked the Danes to take-over watching their minefields, not to remove them. The Danes lacked accurate information about the positions of German Great Belt fields.<sup>34</sup>

The Royal Navy was not only dependent on having the minefields cleared, it needed Copenhagen harbour as the staging base for operations into the Baltic Sea. Giving that permission was not only awkward for the Danes because Denmark was neutral, but because the whole neutrality defence concept was aimed at blocking western maritime powers the access to use Danish harbours and territorial waters for operations against the Baltic Sea littoral powers Germany and Russia. This must be the reason why the massive Allied naval presence in Copenhagen the next 1½ years was ignored by Danish official and loyal historians.

### ***Danes told that Copenhagen was the base***

The note to the Danes was prepared on 21 November in the Foreign Office. It simply asked Kilmarnock to make clear to the Danes that

*“We are anxious to send British Naval forces to the Baltic. The terms of the Armistice with Germany gives us full right and liberty to do so. The*

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<sup>34</sup> TNA. FO 371/3361, pp.280-285.

*Admiralty would like these forces to visit and be based on Copenhagen. Will you enquire whether this would be agreeable to the Danish Government which we trust may prove the case.”*

The last words had the character of a diplomatically soft, but clear, ultimatum from a friendly, but victorious, power that had had its request for active support rejected less than three weeks earlier. For the envoy the cable included the confidential information that *“You will no doubt realize that the object of sending these ships is to show the flag and to help the partisans of order in the newly created states in (changed by Balfour before sending to: communities lying along) the Eastern (should have been western ... but everybody was in a hurry) borders of Russia.”*

Kilmarnock was authorized to explain the confidential motive to *“Mr. Andersen”* (H.N. Andersen, the owner of the Danish East Asian Company), *“who I feel sure will realize the importance of the action which we propose to take”*.

The Danish Defence Minister, Peter Munch, wrote in his notes on 22 November that the Foreign Minister, Erik Scavenius, had informed the other members of the government of the British note, when they had been on the way to the State Council Dinner with the king. The British wanted to use Copenhagen as its base.

*“We realized that arguing against such use would be futile, but we also understood that it would be difficult in relation to the neutrality rules, because the presence of the navy could influence public opinion in a reactionary-chauvinistic direction. The King was happy, as he saw the force as a protection against Bolshevism”*.

After a formal discussion on 23 November, the Danish Government gave the required permission. As Ove Rode, the Minister for Interior Affairs noted in his diary:

*“The English Government has asked if the Royal Navy could visit Copenhagen and use it as a basis for visits in the Baltic Sea (my emphasis: not for operations). They want to show the flag in the Baltic countries and Finland. Scavenius (the Foreign Minister 1913-1920, Erik Scavenius) had answered that they were welcome, but had underlined that our difficult supply situation made it necessary that the force brought everything it needed.”*

The positive answer was sent to London late afternoon 23 November. H. N. Andersen had underlined that the visit would *“exite feelings of deepest sympathy of King and whole Danish people”*, and a couple of hours later Kilmarnock recommended that the force brought wine, etc. so that it became possible to celebrate the arrival by entertaining. It would have a good and useful propaganda effect.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Plans for dealing with the Germans***

22 November the British War Office had become aware that when the Germans did evacuate the Baltic Provinces, the Bolsheviks moved in. General Henry Wilson decided to consult with the Allied Supreme Commander, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, about what could be done. The contact took place using the British senior liaison officer, General Sir John Philip Du Cane. Wilson suggested that the Germans

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<sup>35</sup> TNA. FO 371/3361, pp.408-413. ADM 137/1663 Cypher telegram to Lord Kilmarnock (Copenhagen). Foreign Office; November 21st, 1918, 11 p.m. Tage Kaarsted (ed.): Ove Rodes dagbøger 1914-1918. (Aarhus 1972). P.Munch: 'Erindringer 1918-1924. Freden, Genforeningen og de første efterkrigsår.' Kbh. 1963, pp.7-10

should be ordered, *“under the threat of reprisals, to remain for the time being in occupation of alle territory west of the Brest Litovsk line, excepting Poland”*. Foch replied on 24 November that this would only be feasible in places where it would be possible to intervene quickly with sufficient Allied troops to establish control. Based on that logic, *“Marshal Foch considered that the only action possible in the Baltic Provinces consisted in affording material support to the local forces, such support to include Cadres, Staffs, arms and ammunition”*. Due to British government policy, she could not send instructors and staff, so she had to limited herself to the other support suggested.

Wilson agreed with Foch, but he continued to suggest *“reprisals elsewhere”* in a letter to the Marshal on 27 November.

The British general considered *“that the execution of this clause of the Armistice should be pressed on the German authorities under threat of such reprisals as could be carried out without delay by the forces under your command, e.g., the occupation of a bridgehead opposite Duisburg (Duisburg) or Strassburg (Strasbourg)”*.

A staff officer's noted one month later that such support to the Baltic States would be popular as it *“would not be exposed to the charge of aggression against the Bolsheviks and would be entirely in accordance with the principle of protection of small nationalities”*.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> TNA. WO 32/5670. Note with regard to the enforcement of Article 12 of the Armistice in so far as concerns the Baltic Provinces. Dated 24-12-1918. Secret From:-G.I.G.S. To General du Cane. 191 H.W.Personal. 22-11-1918. Secret From:-G.I.G.S. To General du Cane. 194 H.W.Personal. 27-11-1918. Le Maréchal Commandement en Chef les Armees

If Foch was not willing to do as recommended to keep German troops in the Baltic States to defend against the Bolsheviks, he proved willing one year later to use the same *“reprisal”* to get German troops out.

### ***The Mission***

Preparations in the Admiralty to send a squadron had been completed on 24 November. The Grand Fleet war ordered to detach the different parts of the Baltic Sea task force, and the task force commander should have the directive for his complex and probably delicate mission. The Grand Fleet Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Beatty, was ordered to detach the 6<sup>th</sup> Light Cruiser Squadron with its five cruisers, a destroyer flotilla with its flotilla leader vessel and eight destroyers and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Fleet Sweeping Flotilla (of seven large fleet mine-sweepers). The mine-sweepers should be ready to sail with 24 hours', the rest with 48 hours', notice. The task force commander should be the cruiser squadron commander, Rear-Admiral Edwyn Sinclair Alexander-Sinclair, who had just had the honour of leading the surrendered German High Seas Fleet battlecruisers to Rosyth. HMS PRINCESS MARGARET, built as passenger ship, used as mine-layer by the Royal Navy during the war, now employed as transport of the weapons and supplies for the Estonians. It would join the force when she had received her cargo, *“on receipt of special orders”* to Sinclair. The force would be supported by two tankers (oilers) that should sail independently ahead of the force large. One would remain at Copenhagen, the other oiler and a collier with 3 000 tons for the fleet mine-sweepers had to be be small enough to follow the force through the shallow southern end of the Sound.

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Alliess. No 689910 Au G.Q.G.A., 24-11-1918 à Monsieur le Général, Chef de l'Etat-Major Impérial Britannique. Analysis of Marshal Foch's views with regard to the execution of Articles 12 & 13 of the Armistice. General Du Cane's Telegram C.P.206 24-11-1918.



Sinclair had two missions: *“The primary object of your visit to the Baltic is to show the British Flag, and to support British policy as circumstances may dictate. A subsidiary object will probably be to supply the Esthonian or other National governments on the Baltic Coasts.”* In the original draft the subsidiary object had only been to supply *“the Esthonian National government”*.

Initially he was only to proceed to the Sound *“which the Danish Government has granted permission for you to use as your base”*. There he should refuel and be ready to *“proceed to any port in the Baltic to which you may be ordered”*. During the stay in Copenhagen he should use time and opportunity to collect information about mine-free routes, pilots and mercantile traffic.

Arms and ammunition for Estonia (with *“or other Baltic States”* added) would be on HMS PRINCESS MARGARET. *“This supply will be at your discretion, and should be granted only should you be reasonably convinced that the Esthonian (added: “or other”) Government is of a stable nature and can control the Army, and that the Army will not be used in a manner opposed to British interests.”* According to information in England, the German troops were rapidly withdrawing and a well-organized Estonian army was being mobilized, but without the necessary arms and ammunition. It was under a government that sought independence from Germany and wanted to maintain that independence against Bolshevik aggression.

*“The British Government have definitely decided against any military commitment in Esthonia”* (changed from: *“Not to assist Esthonia with a military force”*) *“, and any assistance you may think to give should be limited”* (added: *“unless in some exceptional circumstances,”*) *“to the supply of arms, and the moral support given by the presence of the British Flag.”*

Thereafter it was made clear to Sinclair that his mission was also to control maritime trade in the Baltic Sea so that the blockade of Germany could continue to add pressure until she signed a Peace Treaty, and he was given new guidelines that relaxed the blockade controls of neutral shipping. Against Bolshevik Russian war ships. *“... you should not take hostile action, unless it is clear that they have hostile intentions, against which you should be on your guard.”*

Sinclair should inform both the Admiralty and the Grand Fleet about his intentions, and if he moved to the Gulf of Finland, he should initially leave a cruiser in Copenhagen as a radio relay vessel to ensure *“thoroughly reliable”* connection home. He would have interpreters speaking the Nordic languages, Russian and German, and Mr. Bosanquet, the former British Consul-General to Riga, would act as his Political Advisor onboard the flagship. Vivian Henry Courthope Bosanquet, Esq, had covered Latvia, Lithuania and White Russia from Riga 1911.<sup>37</sup>

London received new information from Estonia when Lord Kilmarnock could report from Copenhagen that the local Estonian representative, Karl Menning, had just returned from his country. The German soldiers had formed Soldiers' Councils and refused to carry out orders to repress the population. On 16 November the new Estonian government had issued a proclamation calling-up 25 000 men for the army, and they were receiving some weapons from the German soldiers whose one desire now was to go home. Everything was quiet, and reports that fighting had started in Riga were untrue. The members of the Estonian Government expected to be able to maintain order, *“but earnestly beg*

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<sup>37</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1663, the first 33 pages with draft and final version of the directives to the CinC and Rear-Admiral Sinclair.

*British men of war may visit Reval as soon as possible. This would overawe any unruly elements which may exist and help to avert danger of attack from outside by Bolsheviks as German requisitions have seriously denuded country of supplies.”<sup>38</sup>*

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<sup>38</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1664, From Lord Kilmarnock (Copenhagen) No. 3472 sent Nov. 23<sup>rd</sup> 1918 at 1.10 a.m.

## Chapter 2: *The limited and conditional launch*

### **To Copenhagen**

Now the practical preparations started, with new information underlining the dangers. On 25 November Kilmarnock warned about floating mines in the Skagerrak and Kattegat. That part of the route to Copenhagen should be done in daylight to minimize the risk. Even if no assistance was to be given to operations on land, Sinclair asked for “*military maps of Esthonian district*” on 26 November. They were sent immediately.

On 26 November the Imperial War Cabinet authorised that the fleet sent could supply the Estonians with the rifles and machine guns now ready. It was pointed out that whether transfer could actually take place depended on the existence of a proper government. The open motive for sending the weapons was to guard against Bolshevism, “*but it would be a disastrous policy, in the present state of confusion in the Baltic States, for His Majesty's Government to interfere between German landowners and the Esthonian population.*” After the discussion the Imperial War Cabinet decided that the arms should be sent at once, “*but not delivered to the Esthonians until the receipt of specific orders from the War Cabinet.*” Sinclair could sail.



The politically illiterate Rear-Admiral Edwyn Sinclair Alexander-Sinclair.



In the 28 November Imperial War Cabinet meeting, Admiral Fremantle asked for War Cabinet instructions for Sinclair's force, now under-way to Copenhagen. The transport ship with the weapons was soon ready to sail. *"The Admiralty wished to be informed of the Government's policy, particularly in relation to the Bolsheviks, as to whether or not naval support was to be given to the Estonians in resisting the Bolsheviks."* And should the fleet support Germans if they assisted the Estonians in their defence? The Imperial War Cabinet postponed the discussion until Balfour could be present, and it did not become involved in drafting the supplementary instruction that were sent on 4 December.

In that afternoon Sinclair's force arrived in Copenhagen, and on the next morning he and Mr Bosanquet had a meeting in the legation with the local Estonian representative, Karl Menning. According to the political advisor's report Menning had asked that the squadron proceeded immediately to the border at Narva, where a force of 9-10 000 Estonian and other Bolsheviks was being concentrated, but its attack might be contained if sea landing was made impossible. So far the actual enemy operations had only involved a few hundreds. It was a critical transition period, and the sympathy always felt towards England could influence attitudes. Bosanquet's report also covered the complex situation in Latvia. Latvians were more Bolshevik than Estonians and the two nations had little in common.



The W-Class Destroyers of Sinclair's force arriving in Copenhagen off the city's harbour promenade "Langelinie" late afternoon 28 November 1918. That part of the harbour became the Royal Navy's staging base for the intervention the next 1½ years.

Lord Kilmarnock informed the admiral that it would be possible to get 300 Madsen Light Machine Guns from the private company, the Rifle Syndicate, the firm that the Danish Foreign Minister had indicated in his reply on 5 November as the only possible place in Denmark where to get weapons for the Baltic States. The Rear-Admiral was instructed by the Admiralty that he was to load the Madsens on his transports in Copenhagen and not leave before they were on-board. Around midnight Kilmarnock answered on Sinclair's behalf that the force could have at least 200 of the Danish machine guns on his ships if he sailed on 30

November, without waiting for the arrival of PRINCESS MARGARET. At that time the squadron had received orders to remain in Copenhagen “until further orders”, however, the Admiralty changed its mind, and on the morning of 30 November Sinclair was ordered to depart for Libau with his force minus the cruiser left in Copenhagen as a radio relay vessel, and without the commander of his minesweeper flotilla. The mine specialist flotilla commander had been asked to investigate with the Danish naval authorities what could be done to clear wide mine-swept channels in the southern parts of the Sound and in the Kattegat.

After Sinclair had left, Kilmarnock cabled London that Karl Menning had informed him that the Germans in Estonia had destroyed 30 000 rifles, but that the Estonian Army had been able to get 5 000 rifles and 20 field pieces from Finland. The Germans in the country were no longer under military discipline and could no longer be seen as a fighting force.

### ***Onwards to Libau***

Sinclair’s force arrived in Libau on the afternoon of 1 December. Here Sinclair was ordered to send Bosanquet over-land to Reval for fact-finding. After meeting the local Latvian leaders, the Rear-Admiral underlined that:

*“Delay involved may have most serious consequences as Bolsheviks are reported to be landing Esthonian Coast. I do not know if there is danger of our Squadron being attacked by superior sea force but for political reasons I think it is of utmost importance that ships should proceed immediately to Reval ... (Menning stated that Tõnisson had arrived on-board the M Class destroyer, HMS MEDWAY, just returned from a reconnaissance to Reval,*

*he) describes situation critical. Very few arms have been received from Germans & people are very depressed. Non-arrival causing lack of confidence among Estonians. He appealed to British Government to permit Fleet to proceed immediately to Reval to protect defenceless population. If Bolsheviks entered country they would murder inhabitants... (The fleet’s presence) would frighten enemy & change situation...”*

On 2 December Sinclair and London were informed by Lord Kilmarnock that the Estonian representative in Stockholm had information that “10 Russian Warships are lying off Reval”. On 3 December it became clear that Bosanquet could not travel over-land from Libau to Reval, as all railways were in German hands. There were reports that the situation was also critical in Riga. All those interviewed in Libau underlined the essential role the British ships had in the preservation of order and prevention of massacre. The local authorities asked the squadron to leave a cruiser – even a destroyer – to show the flag, when it departed. The last German naval units would leave the harbour on 5 December.

On the same day - 2 December - the Russian Revolutionary Military Council decided that the navy should support the operations between Narva and Reval, and on 4 December the Red Army commander, Vācietis, instructed the fleet should blockade Reval and take control of the islands controlling access to the harbour.



Karl Menning, another key lobbyist and liaison to the Scandinavians and British. To Sinclair's disgust he was ignored by his government.

Sinclair and his political advisor now asked for more forces, including battleships: *"If prestige of British Flag is to be maintained and effective action taken, more light forces with a heavy squadron are necessary."* The additional light forces should make it possible to be present in all major ports. The insecure situation meant that the local representations wanted to deposit their money on-board the

British ships. Mine problems remained. The channels to Reval and Riga had still not been reported clear. On 3 December Tönisson assured Sinclair that Estonians manned the heavy coastal batteries that controlled the access to Reval harbour.

### ***To Reval – finally – mines and battleships***

On 4 December London reacted to the worsening situation, Sinclair's wish for additional forces and the request from Admiral Fremantle to the 28 November Imperial War Cabinet meeting for instructions with a new *"General policy"* directive to the force commander. Sinclair's missions were:

*"Firstly. To land arms at Reval should you consider this will assist policy of H. M. Government as already explained to you.*

*Secondly. Having landed the arms to inform Esthonian Govt. they must now be responsible for defence of their country and that it is not intended to keep ships at Reval."*

One of the destroyers being sent for reconnaissance to Reval should bring and land Bosanquet. He would decide if the landing of guns was justified. *"One or more destroyers may remain at Reval at your discretion your squadron following should you consider it desirable not to wait for PRINCESS MARGARET and ANGORA."* The two minelayer-transports with the weapons would arrive at Copenhagen on 5 December followed later by collier with ammunition. The Germans would be allowed to use Libau for the evacuation of their troops and equipment in the area.

*"Policy of maintaining a ship at each of the principal ports if (is) not generally approved. It is not proposed to issue a proclamation that British*



*ships are in Baltic to maintain order on shore and support authority as it would not be possible to make this good.*

*A Battle Squadron will be sent to Copenhagen in readiness to support your force (when it) is landing arms. Whether squadron proceed to Eastern Baltic will depend on result of reconnaissance to Reval.”*

Even if Sinclair was constrained somewhat by his new directive, much room was still left for his initiative until the arms had been safely landed in Reval and possibly elsewhere. On 5 December the British squadron had its first casualties. In spite of the risk of meeting a superior Russian force, he had decided to leave Libau for Reval. Staying was bad for moral. When underway the cruiser HMS CASSANDRA struck a mine. 11 crew members were killed and the ship lost. The mine threat en route made the squadron return to the Sound off Copenhagen that it reached on 6 December. On the same day Sinclair was informed that the Admiralty considered it unnecessary to send a battleship force to Copenhagen when it had decided not to keep Sinclair's force in the Eastern Baltic after the weapons had been handed over.

On 7 December Bosanquet sent a situation report including his advice about how to give assistance. In Libau a local militia was set up to defend against the Bolsheviks when the Germans left. It should be given British weapons. The situation in Riga was critical because of the strong Bolshevik elements in the city. A Bolshevik volunteer force had taken Pskov and was advancing in the direction of Riga, Walk (Valga/Valka) and Werro (Võru), with the last town already controlled by local Estonian Bolsheviks.

On 8 December the squadron lost two destroyers damaged in a collision in fog, but the next day, 9 December, the remaining part of the Sinclair's force in Copenhagen – now escorting the two minelayer-transport – returned to Libau to start the mission of support to the local authorities so that they could help themselves after the British fleet had left.<sup>39</sup>

The discarded option of sending a force of battleships to Copenhagen and if needed into the Baltic to support Sinclair's force against Russian heavy units had been made possible at the end of November, because a channel had been swept through the German barriers in the southern parts of the Great Belt. The Danish

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<sup>39</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1663. Telegram from Kilmarnock Copenhagen to Admiralty at 25-11-1918 at 6.30 a.m. C.in C. Grand Fleet No 447 of 26-11-1918 to Admiralty. Admiralty Secret 025603 of 26-11-1918 to Commander in Chief. From Aberdeen to Ipswich at 29-11-1918 recorded 8.45 p.m. Kilmarnock Copenhagen No. 414 on 29-11-1918 to Admiralty. C. in C. Grand Fleet No. 510.to Admiralty. Kilmarnock Copenhagen of 30-11-1918 to Admiralty. Kilmarnock (Copenhagen) No. 3575 of 30-11-1918 at 7.35 p.m. Cypher V. C.in C. 545 of 1-12-1918 to Admiralty. C. in C. 555 of 2-12-1918 to Admiralty. C. in C. 567 of 3-12-1918 to Admiralty. Coastguard Wireless Aberdeen of 3-12-1918 to Admiralty. Admiralty of 4-12-1918 sent 1630 to C in C G F 32. Coast Guard W/T Aberdeen of 5-12-1918 to Admiralty. 6<sup>th</sup> LCS No. 30/267 Secret. Proceedings, CARDIFF on 4-12-1918 to C.in C. GF. CG Wireless Aberdeen of 6-12-1918 at 4.52 p.m. to Admiralty . From Admiralty No. 194 of 6-12-1918 to Rear Admiral Commanding Sixth Light Cruiser Squadron. R.A. 6<sup>th</sup> Light Cruiser Squadron Copenhagen 103 of 7-12-1918 to Admiralty. Coastguard Wireless Aberdeen 108 of 8-12-1918 to Admiralty. Coast Guard W/T Aberdeen of 9-12-1918 to Admiralty. 6<sup>th</sup> LCS No. 30/267 Secret. Proceedings, CARDIFF on 17-12-1918 to C.in C. GF. CAB 23/42. Imperial War Cabinet 38, on 26-11-1918, at 12 noon, Item: Esthonia. Imperial War Cabinet 39, on 28-11-1918, at 11.45 a.m., Item: The Situation in the Baltic. Mati Õun, Hannes Walter and Peedu Sammalsoo: Struggles in the Baltic. The Estonian and the British Royal Navies' Operations in the Baltic during the Estonian War of Independence. (Tranlation by Earl of Carlisle) (Tallinn, 2012), pp. 32-33.

Navy did not have the necessary vessels and expertise, but on 26 November a modern German Navy minesweeper flotilla had stated the work on a British demand.

Before returning to Libau, Sinclair had a meeting with the Danish Rear-Admiral Wilhelm Garde, the commander of the naval defences of the Danish capital. The British admiral wanted to discuss the clearing of the German mines in the southern part of the Sound. Sinclair's fleet minesweepers were unsuited for work in the shallow part of the area. He wanted, and got, co-operation.

The Swedes had already inquired on 2 December if the British force would clear the mines, if not, they would have to do the work themselves. On 13 December they were informed that the British effort would only be what was related to its own needs. It would not conduct regular mine clearing operations.<sup>40</sup>

Even after the support operation had been launched, Balfour continued to argue in support of the Baltic nations. One occasion was during the Allied discussions on 3 December about how Russia should be represented at the coming peace conference. Asked by the Prime Minister to express his views, Balfour

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<sup>40</sup> RA. Flaadens Overkommando. Sagsakter, Pk. 0.5, 1918, 3201-3620. Chefen for 2' Eskadre Nr. 1391 af 27-11-1918 til Flaadens Overkommando. Sagsakter, Pk. 0.5, 1918, 3201-3620. Chefen for Den Flydende Defension på Københavns Red Løbe-Nr. 1043 af 09-12-1918 til Flaadens Overkommando. The actual co-operation is implied by the lack of follow-up correspondence. TNA. FO 371/3361 pp.303-304, 316-318.

Started the Britain should not recognize any treaties entered by Russian since the Revolution, such as the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. However, it

*“was necessary to come to some conclusion as to the representation of Russia and of the fractions of previously Russian territory which had formed themselves, or wished to form, themselves, into separate States... He thought it could safely be said that all desired to see Russia re-constituted in some manner; in other words, that there should be a stable and coherent Russia in some manner comparable to the Russia that existed before the war. But he thought that no one could wish that her boundaries should be the same as before; for instance, Finland could not be included within them. Finland had been much ill-used by Russia in the past, and, though the Allies had little reason to be satisfied with the conduct of Finland in the last year, it could not be our policy to deliver Finland to her former yoke. Much the same applied to the smaller nationalities in the North-West. The populations there were, by education, far in advance of the populations of Central Russia, from whom they differed in race, in religion, and in language. They had not hitherto been able to develop their nationality in consequence of the pressure of Russia on the one side, and of Germany on the other. The French Government had already acknowledged the Finnish Government... Mr. Balfour felt that the time must come when Great Britain would have to follow suit. The other Governments of Esthonia, Livonia, etc., had not been recognised, but sympathy and good wishes had been expressed, and they had been led to suppose that their case would be considered at the Peace Conference.”*

On Lloyd George's question whether all these States desired independence, Balfour replied that:

*"at the present time they did. They were afraid of Russia in its present form, and had the bitterest recollections of the former Russian bureaucracy, which had protected the German Barons along the Baltic. These German Barons would doubtless have to be bought out, or driven out. In all these cases he thought that we should have to support the plea for independence, with a proviso that, with the advent of better conditions in Russia, these States could, at their own option, enter into a Federal union with her..."*<sup>41</sup>

### **Opposition**

Two days later, on 5 December, the War Cabinet returned to the discussion of the future military policy in Russia. It took place on the basis of two memoranda, one from the General Staff, and a very different paper from the Director of the Board of Education, the Oxford historian Dr H. A. L. Fisher. The army memorandum referred to the 14 November decisions, but only covered possible operations from the Barents Sea towards the south. The Fisher contribution is described extensively, partly because it is an illustration of the generic liberal view of the employment of the military as an instrument in international politics and of ability of humanity and common sense to bring the best possible results. It was the combination of alternatives and arguments that both Balfour and supporters of

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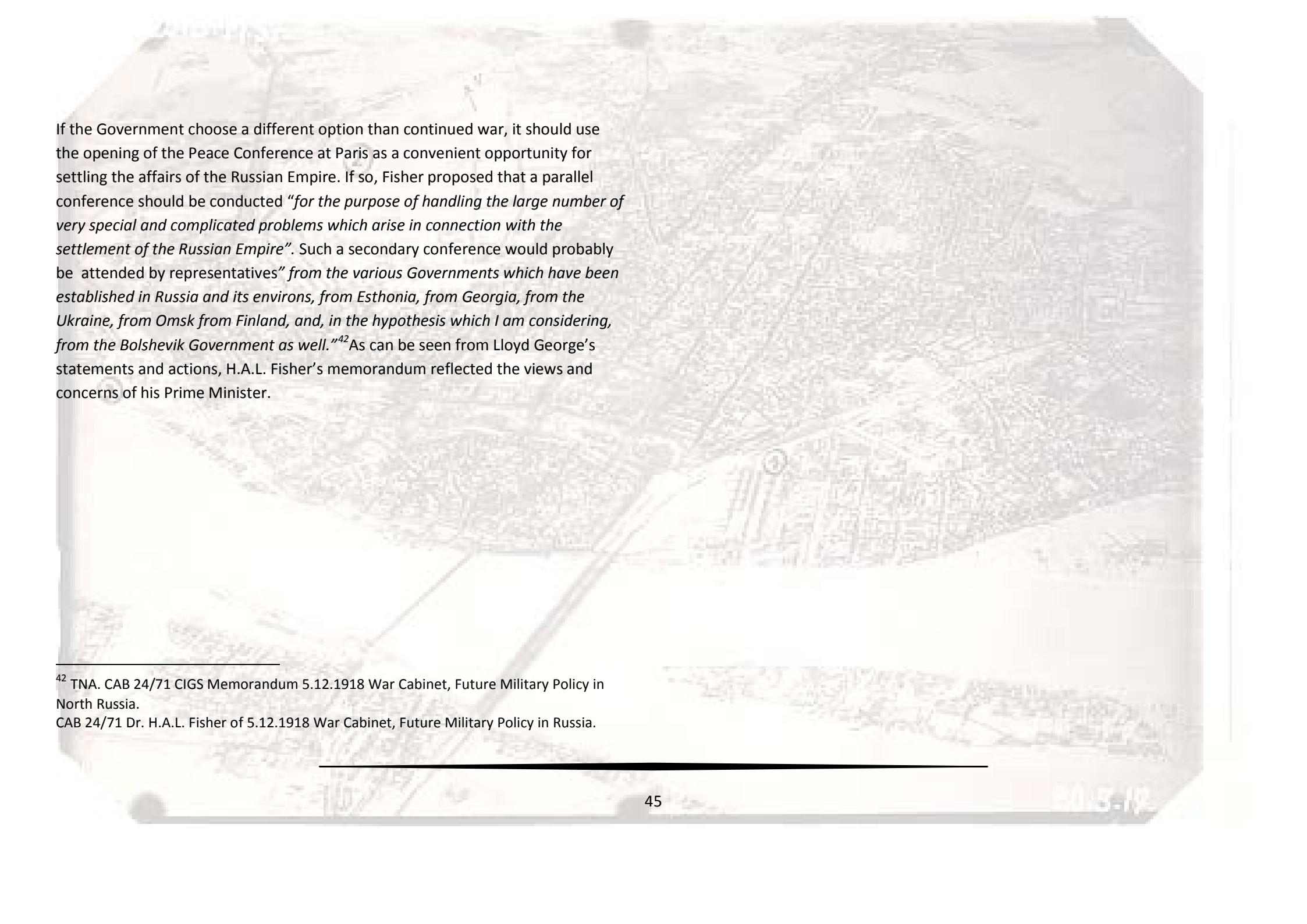
<sup>41</sup> TNA. CAB 23/42 Notes of an Allied Conversation held in the Cabinet Room, 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Tuesday, 3rd December, 1918, at 11.15 A.M. Item: Representation of Russia at the Peace Conference.

offensive counter-revolutionary operations had to question and overcome in the War Cabinet and later at the Peace Conference.

H. A. L. Fisher was "*much impressed*" with what he heard from many sides about a general feeling of uneasiness about the character and purpose of the British military involvement in the Russian Empire. After the Armistice had been signed with the enemy countries this involvement was "*extremely unpopular with the working men and women of this Country, the more so since rumours are circulating to the effect that British soldiers serving in Russia are starving for lack of food*". Working people did not understand why Britain was fighting in Russia at all unless it was – as they were being informed by the Left-wing Independent Labour Party - to assist in the restoration of Autocracy. Probably only a small minority of British workers sympathized with the Bolshevik regime, but a very much larger number considered that the question of how Russia was governed should be decided by the Russians themselves. It "*should be left to stew in her own juice*".

Fisher therefore thought that the British Government should consider or rather reconsider its position "*on the Russian question*". .... He did not himself have the information necessary to judge "*whether the most recent incarnation of the Bolshevik Government is as bad as it is painted or as to whether it has succeeded in securing a large measure of acceptance in Russia and I cannot, therefore, offer an opinion as to whether it would be right to carry on an Allied War for the overthrow of the Bolshevik power.*" All he could say was that the continuance of the war to influence internal developments in Russia would be most unpopular in this Country and it would become more and more unpopular the longer the operations lasted.





If the Government choose a different option than continued war, it should use the opening of the Peace Conference at Paris as a convenient opportunity for settling the affairs of the Russian Empire. If so, Fisher proposed that a parallel conference should be conducted *“for the purpose of handling the large number of very special and complicated problems which arise in connection with the settlement of the Russian Empire”*. Such a secondary conference would probably be attended by representatives *“from the various Governments which have been established in Russia and its environs, from Esthonia, from Georgia, from the Ukraine, from Omsk from Finland, and, in the hypothesis which I am considering, from the Bolshevik Government as well.”*<sup>42</sup>As can be seen from Lloyd George’s statements and actions, H.A.L. Fisher’s memorandum reflected the views and concerns of his Prime Minister.

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<sup>42</sup> TNA. CAB 24/71 CIGS Memorandum 5.12.1918 War Cabinet, Future Military Policy in North Russia.

CAB 24/71 Dr. H.A.L. Fisher of 5.12.1918 War Cabinet, Future Military Policy in Russia.

## Chapter 3: *The first month – on the way to giving-up*

### ***Continued policy discussions***

The British War Cabinet discussions about the country's and Allied action in Russia continued on 10 December, when Sinclair had returned to Libau. Balfour started by presenting a paper *"primarily written so that the people in Russia, who were continually complaining that we were not doing enough, might understand what our policy was. It was written in reply to one class of critics, and by implication answered other critics who inquired why our troops were still in Russia"*.

The Foreign Secretary underlined that for Britain:

*"... no alternative is open at present than to use such troops as we possess to the best advantage ; where we have no troops, to supply arms and money ; and in the case of the Baltic provinces to protect, as far as we can, the nascent nationalities by the help of our fleet. Such a policy must necessarily seem halting and imperfect to those who, on the spot, are resisting the invasion of militant Bolshevism. But it is all that we can accomplish in existing circumstances, or ought to attempt."*

Thereafter Lloyd George made clear that the government remained deeply divided, and he continued believing that the British *"could not undertake the protection of the inhabitants of any part of Russia against Bolshevism, and he pointed out that we had originally intervened in Russia with a view to embarrassing Germany."*<sup>43</sup>

Sinclair's force arrived in Libau in the evening of 9 December, and the following morning he started to receive delegations from the different interest groups that sought to influence British policy in the region. The first was Captain Schurowsky, a staff officer from the White Russian *"Army of the North"*, then with its headquarters in Riga with General Rozianko as second-in-command. Schurowsky his army's difficult situation.

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<sup>43</sup> TNA. CAB 23/8 Minutes 10.12.1918 Direction of Allied Action and Military Policy in Russia. CAB 23/8 Minutes 10.12.1918 Appendix 29.11.1918 Notes on our Policy in Russia by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

### **Meeting the Estonian leaders**

On 11 November a tug arrived from Reval bringing pilots for the squadron. It also brought Colonel Johan Laidoner (Sinclair understood his name as "*Leidner*"). He had been sent to meet Sinclair just after returning from Petrograd via Helsinki on 8 December. He reported that the Estonian Army, numbering about 1 500, were retiring in front of the Bolshevik forces advancing from Narva. The front was then at Jeve (Jõhvi) about 20 miles from the border. Arms were urgently needed. 20 000 rifles were needed immediately, probably 20 000 more later. The actual stock of weapons was 8 000 rifles.



From Libau 1918

The impression of Laidoner and his report triggered Sinclair's decision "*that the situation in Estonia was critical*" and "*that the Estonians were to be trusted with Arms*". He made up his mind to take his force to Reval immediately. It arrived on 12 December and was met by the Estonian Government and the Commander-in-

Chief, general Andres Larka. He had not co-ordinated with Laidoner and gave different information about the situation at the front and requirements. This did little to impress the admiral. Larka asked for 5 000 rifles and 30 machine guns, but shown the Madsen light machine guns, he asked for 200 of those. He also asked for boots, uniforms, pistols and field guns "*and generally did not appear very grateful for the rifles and machine guns promised*".

The admiral and Bosanquet met the Prime and War Minister, Konstantin Päts the following day, 13 December. He first and foremost wanted the squadron or part of it to remain at Reval. He "*appeared much disappointed when I said I was afraid this was not possible, but that I hoped I might be able to return later*". Päts said that the Bolsheviks would rise immediately when the ships left. The minister repeated several times that, "*if they sailed at once it would do more harm than if they had never come*". To make the Päts happier and probably to get away from Reval, Sinclair volunteered that he could shell the coast in the rear of the Bolshevik positions the next morning. Five destroyers were sent, but the shelling was cancelled because of fog. The promise was significant, because it proved that Sinclair was willing to go beyond his directive and contribute actively to the fighting.

During the conversation with the Estonian leader the admiral got the impression that Päts trusted the deterrent and moral effects of the British flag more than he trusted the effects of defence preparations. "*I suggested that I thought this was a mistake*", hereafter the Prime Minister continued to underline that he wanted Estonia to become a British protectorate. Sinclair answered that his government was willing to support Estonia, but that it had ruled-out assisting with land forces. He asked Päts to consult Mihkel Martna, who had arrived with the squadron, but had left England later than Sinclair. The admiral observed that "*They did not appear to attach much importance to M. Martna, saying that it had not been possible to keep him fully informed...*" Martna – one of the effective and trusted lobbyist – was not called.



The British had seen the Estonians they had liaised and negotiated with as Päts' empowered envoys. Now it had become clear that they had operated independently. By their dedication and intelligently adapted lobbying they could be seen to have lured London to intervene.

Sinclair reported to London that General Larka had made clear on 12 December that he had no confidence in the Russian Northern Army. It had originally been established by the Germans, but had now lost moral after having been defeated by the Bolsheviks at Pskov. The admiral had commented that it was a pity that the Estonians "*should not see their way to combine with the Northern Army at such a critical time*". Larka thereafter informed him that an arrangement had indeed been made for taking the Russian force under Estonian command.

### ***Estonian-Russian friction***

In the evening of 13 December Sinclair then met with the Russian Northern Army commander, Colonel Neff. He had "*no great opinion of the Estonians as a fighting force*", one week earlier he had accepted to bring his forces under Estonian command and take responsibility for the defence of the south-eastern part of the country in spite of his lack of trust. He needed money, arms and – especially - boots. He did not think that he would get some of the British funds given to the Estonians and wanted direct access to the British Government. Sinclair told him that "*if he fought loyally under the Estonian command against the Bolsheviks, I would be glad to represent his requirements.*" Neff then wanted to hear what would happen when the Bolsheviks had been pushed back over the Estonian and Latvian borders. Sinclair noted that with the daily Red advances, "*it was scarcely worth considering*", but if he crossed the border he could move to join forces with other White Russian armies.

Sinclair concluded that there "*is evidently a strong mutual feeling of distrust between the Estonians and the Russian Northern Army.*" They might fight each other if there was no common enemy. One reason might be that the Estonians

suspected that the Russians aimed at reinstating the German Barons. That is why they wanted to limit the Northern Army to a maximum of 3 500 troops. The number of Russian officers in Reval outside that army was 200-300, and not to complicate matters more, the admiral had avoided their attempts of contact with anybody from that group. Sinclair experienced a complexity that a different group of British officers would experience 75 years later when trying to stabilize Bosnia.

The arms assistance to the Estonians landed in Reval consisted of two – different – light field cannon, 100 Lewis light machine guns, 50 Madsen light machine guns and 5 000 rifles. In the morning of 14 December Sinclair did use his force to bombard the Bolshevik lines in the east. He brought "*General*" Johan Pitka to direct the fire. Pitka was a former merchant navy officer, who was now commanding the land forces resisting the Bolshevik advance from Narva. Pitka, who had developed an armoured train force that supported the defence would soon organize the Estonian Navy. He impressed Sinclair "*as the most practical man I had met*". When returning to Reval after the bombardment, Pitka has repeated Päts' request that a ship or ships should be left at Reval. Sinclair made clear to the Estonian that he thought that Päts was mistaken in seeing the presence of the flag as more important as that men and arms. Pitka appeared to agree.



Johan Pitka, the only person that really impressed Sinclair among the leaders he met in Reval. Later British arrivals were similarly convinced of his aggressiveness and originality.

Sinclair had intended to leave for Riga right after the bombardment. The two minelayer-transporters with destroyer escorts had already left. However, more fog meant that the squadron postponed its departure until 15 December, and before he departed, he was given a written request for support signed by Pitka. In the conversation with Sinclair Pääts had asked for donation of ships and deployment of instructors and a symbolic military force. Now he asked in writing for the possibility to purchase two destroyers – with British crews until Estonians had been trained. He would also like to have a battalion deployed *“for the purpose of giving an(d) insight in the manner an ideal democratic army is organized”*, it

would not be sent to the front, only employed for instruction and as an example. The third wish was the detachment of a higher army officer to advise the Defence Minister. All involved would be paid by Estonia.

Sinclair had told the Estonians that he felt sure *“that any personnel sent would have to be volunteer and unofficial. A military advisor and some instructors would ... be of greatest assistance, as there appears to be no one capable of organizing and army at present.”* Sinclair saw it as *“well worth consideration to send a British General with a good staff to command the combined Estonian, Latvian and Russian armies”*. Such an arrangement would be welcomed by the Russians and probably accepted by the Estonians. He would consult the Latvians when he got the chance.

### ***Back in Libau with the Latvian-German conflict***

When back in Libau on the way to Riga, General Rozianko came on-board to report that his army's situation had become desperate. It had retreated from Walk to Ermes (Ergeme) west of the town. The army needed to be withdrawn to a quiet place to reorganise with extra money, boots and arms. The local Latvian population was very hostile and Pro-Bolshevik. He considers the country lost when he hear that the Allies would not send land forces. During the meeting news arrived that the Bolsheviks were advancing and that Riga would fall in two weeks. It proved to be an accurate prediction. Rozianko told Sinclair that *“the Germans put every obstacle in his way; that their troops were disorganized and in league with the Bolsheviks”*. They were selling their arms and equipment to the highest bidder. Sinclair noted that the Germans were doing everything possible to hinder the raising and preparation of the local defence forces.

Sinclair also received deputations with petitions from the German Courland nobility, the Libau Mayor and finally from the Latvian Government in Riga. The Latvians saw the situation as hopeless. The Mayor underlined that *“everybody who had had anything to do with resisting the Bolsheviks would be massacred”*.

As other future limited intervention commanders Sinclair had difficulties implementing what must be seen as the half-hearted compromises of the decisions in his capital. Exposed to the reality in the mission area he concluded after his discussions in Libau that:

*“As the Germans are not complying with (the relevant article) of the Armistice, and appear to be either unable or unwilling – or perhaps both – to protect the country, the only thing to save it is, in my opinion, the landing of an Expeditionary Force. I fully appreciate the difficulties, responsibility incurred, and magnitude generally of such an undertaking, but can see no other way to save the country...”*

On the morning of 17 December Sinclair’s force of two cruisers, seven destroyers and PRINCESS MARGARET with weapons for the Latvian Government sailed for Riga. It arrived in Dünamunde (Daugavagriva) in the early evening.<sup>44</sup>

In the afternoon of 18 December Sinclair and Bosanquet met the leaders of the Latvian Provisional Government. After that meeting the admiral considered the Prime Minister, Karlis Ulmanis, “an energetic and capable man”. Ulmanis did not consider Riga in immediate danger. He had 1 500 trained men with German weapons, but urgently needed field artillery. He asked for Allied troops, even a small number, but when told that it was impossible, he asked for a British General in command, as Baltic Germans and Russians refused to serve under a Latvian – and vice versa. A German offer to make a general available had been rejected. Ulmanis then agreed that PRINCESS MARGARET with a cruiser and two destroyers should enter the river and unload weapons directly to the Latvian recruits for training in the morning of 19 December. When ready, the soldiers would receive their weapons and be sent to the front. The crews of the warships would deliver the instructors. Sinclair informed London that he intended to establish a similar

base for weapons training and supply in Libau, using the arms aboard HMS ANGORA and the warship crews there.<sup>45</sup>

On 23 December, after Sinclair had left Riga, Bosanquet and the senior officer present, HMS PRINCESS MARGARET’s captain, Harry Smyth, called the senior German representatives in town, August Winnig, the Chief German Commissioner for the Baltic States, and Lieutenant-Colonel von Birkner, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Chief of Staff, to a conference to discuss the German implementation of the Armistice terms.

Bosanquet spoke for the British side. He underlined that the Bolsheviks were advancing, and the danger to Riga was imminent. He stated that the purpose of the squadron’s visit “was to see that the Terms of the Armistice were carried out by the Germans – particularly as regards Riga and district”. Winnig answered that he did not know the relevant article in the Armistice text, but he had heard “unofficially” during a Berlin visit that the Entente powers considered the terms bound Germany to protect the country. Birkner found that the terms were contradictory; the both asked the Germans to evacuate the Baltic area and to stay. Bosanquet underlined that the British “did NOT consider the time suitable for evacuation yet”. They demanded that German kept enough troops in the area not only to defend Riga, but the Latvian part of Livonia and the railway from Riga to Libau.

After the Germans had been given time to discuss the British demand, the most junior German officer, who had acted as an interpreter, underlined that the Latvian troops in town were unreliable, and the about 40.000 German troops in town “did not want to fight now, but to go home”.

Bosanquet then rejected the notion that German troops staying to fight should be given Latvian citizenship and ignored the offer that the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Commander,

<sup>44</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1663. 6th LCS CARDIFF No. 30/273 of 17-12-1918.

<sup>45</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1663. 6th LCS CARDIFF No. 30/275 of 19-12-1918.



Lieutenant-General Ludwig von Estorff, would command the defence of Latvia and Estonia against the Bolsheviks. The Germans were under Armistice obligations to fight.

The officer replied that Germany would do all she could, *“but the task was impossible because the German soldiers were not in a state of mind to fight for this country”*. Birkner supplemented that he asked Berlin for reinforcement every day without result, but he would contact his capital again, and he underlined that preparation should be made for the evacuation of the inhabitants.

Bosanquet replied that evacuation of German troops and weapons that could be used for defence should stop. Birkner promised to keep back some guns in the hope of getting some volunteers to use them, recruiting efforts had also started in Germany. But those unwilling to fight had to go not to continue undermining the morale of the rest with propaganda. Before the Germans withdrew, Bosanquet concluded the conference by underlining that if *“the Germans are not able to carry out the Terms of the Armistice here, the GENERAL Peace Terms (at home) might be affected”*.<sup>46</sup>

The conference was without real results, as British had nothing positive to offer the Germans for fighting, and they were left with their unstable Latvian allies.

### ***Expected Bolshevik victory in the Estonian and Latvian countryside***

In a general situation report from the same day, 23 December, Sinclair wrote that after his visits to Libau, Riga and Reval, he was convinced that the land outside the three visited towns would fall to the Bolsheviks if Bolshevism does not die *“a natural death”* or the Bolshevik troops have to leave the land taken because of

<sup>46</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1664. “Proceedings at Conference held on board H.M.S. “PRINCESS MARGARET” on 23rd December 1918, between Senior British Naval Officer, Riga, and British Political Representative and German Authorities at Riga”.

losses and the impossibility of staying in the *“devastated country”* during the winter.

Beyond these two possibilities: *“there is nothing to prevent the Bolsheviks from occupying the country. There is no real opposition, partly owing to the Germans not allowing military organisation of local forces behind the lines, and partly to the local Government having no leading men or ability to help themselves.”* The only thing the Royal Navy could do was what it did already, to give moral support by presence and help the governments to raise and drill troops *“to prevent internal disorder and, if recruiting goes on satisfactorily, to attempt gradually to push the Bolsheviks back from the vicinity of the towns.”*

Sinclair had now distributed his ships among all three towns to do so. The Russian Northern Army was *“a puzzling factor”*. It was not trusted by the Estonians or Latvians, but it would be stupid not to use a force of 3 000 organised men, to a large extent composed of fugitive officers, who are fighting to save their lives. It should be supported at once by sending the necessary boots, field guns and overcoats from England.

The force in Reval was being reinforced because intelligence from Petrograd from 8 December – received in Copenhagen on 21 December – indicated that the Russians made arrangements to prepare a landing force of 6 500 men that was to capture the Estonian capital. It was to be escorted by the armoured cruiser OLEG.

### ***A Lithuanian delegation***

A message from the HMS ANGORA in Libau on 23 December added to the complexity of Sinclair’s mission. The mine-layer’s captain had received a visit from a Peter Leonavicius, representative of the Lithuanian Prime Minister. *“This gentleman put forward the usual request for assistance with money and arms”*. The Bolsheviks were only about 100 kilometres from Vilna and advancing. Three

envoys were on the way to London and the Finance Minister would come to Libau to meet Sinclair.

### ***Doubtful political stability***

On 21 December Sinclair forwarded an alarming report from Bosanquet. It was copied for the General Staff the next day. The situation in Latvia was dangerous. *“It is not yet possible to hope for serious Lettish resistance to Bolsheviks though we have promised them arms”*. The defence was deliberately hindered by Germany in a way that opened the front to the Bolsheviks. *“It appears inevitable, in absence of Entente Expedition or occupation, that the Baltic Provinces will be occupied by the Bolsheviks ...”*

Thereafter Bosanquet recommended *“that the organization of defence and high command should be undertaken by sending out at once a British General and Staff and a British Volunteer force ... If nothing further is done British prestige will suffer with all sections. Food question is becoming serious as Germans are removing provisions here ...”*

On 23 December the Estonian London delegation sent its own alarming situation report to the Foreign Office. The Germans had sabotaged the defence and thus opened the way to Bolshevik invasion. It therefore *“urgently”* asked the British Government and her Allies *“to give military support, by arms, munitions and sending troops”*.

The double crisis triggered a conference in the Admiralty later that day, chaired by Fremantle, with John D. Gregory from the Foreign Office and with Colonel Steel from the General Staff Operations Department. The Admiralty had now come to the conclusion that *“we ought to clear out”*, if no major army operation could be undertaken. The navy could not do anything on her own, the mine danger was *“extreme”*; a valuable new cruiser had already been lost. If the

admiral and Bosanquet considered this relevant, some arms could be landed in Reval, Riga or Libau. A blockade the Soviet Russian Navy *“would be no good”* and risky because of the mines. Colonel Steel made clear that the General Staff *“could not contemplate landing a single man, even as instructors”*. Gregory thought *“that if we could not make certain of doing anything on a really efficient scale it was hopeless to land troops”*.

The meeting drafted a telegram to Sinclair to land what arms he thought relevant in the three ports and withdraw his whole force to Copenhagen on 1 January, bringing Bosanquet with him. Gregory took the draft to Balfour for approval. The Foreign Secretary did not react.

24 December General Thwaites recommended to Henry Wilson that a *“mission of instructors”* was sent to train and reorganize the Estonian forces. The behaviour of the Germans made this step necessary. However, the Director of Military Operations was against sending troops *“or even instructors”* in a situation, that did not give the *“solid ground ... to work on as the whole country is in the course of a landslide into Bolshevism”*. Wilson decided not *“to venture into Esthonia”*.<sup>47</sup>

On 26 December Lord Robert Cecil found that Sinclair’s 17 December report supported his analysis that the assistance to the Balts was futile. Neither Estonia nor Latvia had a settled government, and Lithuania was more Pro-Bolshevik than the Latvians. The North Russian Army was not a force that could be used. Both the Estonian and Latvian Governments *“are incapable of maintaining their independence against organized Bolshevik attack, and ... they look entirely to us*

<sup>47</sup> TNA. WO 32/5670. N.I.B./O.L. Note from the Director of Naval Intelligence to the Director of Military Intelligence of 22-12-1918 about “the substance of two telegrams, dated 21.12.18”. Estonian Delegation note of 23-12-1918. Baltic States. Conference at Admiralty. 23-12-1918 3.30 pm. D.M.I. note to C.I.G.S. (Through D.M.O.) of 24-12-1918. DMO comment of 26-12-1918 and Wilson’s of 27-12-1918.



*both to maintain order in their own countries and to protect them from the Russian Bolsheviks”.*

Sinclair *“appears to have carried out his orders with energy and consistence, and to have given the National Governments no ground for false hope...”*, but now there were only two options open, *either to withdraw after handing over the weapons or to intervene with considerable army forces.*

*“To adopt any middle course would have the effect of raising hopes which we have no intention of fulfilling and would jeopardise any prospect there may be of the Governments being forced by urgent necessity to co-ordinate their efforts to combine with the North Russian Army and to use all the Forces they can raise against their common enemy...”*

Thus Cecil saw withdrawal as the only usable option. It would also mean that the thinly plated cruisers and destroyers would not be exposed to the ice of the coming winter.

### ***Royal Navy activism and the approaching Bolshevik forces***

Now the situation and involvement escalated – or saw *“mission creep”* as it would be called in our time. Captain Bertram Sackville Thesiger, captain of the Cruiser HMS CALYPSO and the senior British officer in Reval, took his force into combat 26 and 27 December with Russian naval forces involved in supporting the Bolshevik offensive against the town with bombardment. During the different actions the Russian destroyers SPARTAK and AVTROIL surrendered. Hereby it became possible to give Pitka two destroyers for his navy without selling British vessels. The two vessels were loaned to the Estonians for the duration of the hostilities and given the names VAMBOLA and LENNUK. By the engagements off Reval, a naval blockade of the Russian navy was a reality as long as the Royal Navy stayed in the Gulf of Finland. It allowed free support to reach Estonia from

Finland and the Allies and made Estonian sea landings behind the Bolshevik lines possible.



Reval with a port nearly close by ice.

On New Year's day Sinclair sent his frustrated and pessimistic conclusion after six weeks of energetic and flexible effort to assist the Estonians and Latvians. After having seen how difficult it was to get results, he had *“come to the definite conclusion that these provinces are not yet sufficiently developed for their existing*



*form of democratic government*". I do not have to remind the reader that similar conclusions have followed longer efforts in later interventions.

Sinclair underlined that the actual crisis could not have come at a worse time. The young governments had had no time to gain the confidence of their people, and therefore had no real control, and the former upper class had used the German troops to delay and block their effort. *"The people are apathetic as regards the Government, and do not look to it in any way for guidance – in fact they appear to ignore it."*

*"This is not surprising as the government ... is undoubtedly incompetent and inexperienced, and inspires no confidence, notwithstanding the fact that the individual members of it are probably capable men in their own spheres of life. As a governing body, faced with a crisis such as the present one, they might as well not exist ..., and in neither province does there appear to be a real leader or master-mind among Ministers or Military Chiefs. ... Both the Cabinet and Army administrations are more concerned with petty jealousies of various kinds than with organization against the Bolsheviks."*

It is rather obvious that the former battleship captain now cruiser admiral had little experience with the working of his own – or any – government. He accepted that the Estonians were making *"a feeble effort"* to organize the defence, and *"a certain amount of energy"* had been shown by the army staff. The presence of the British ships had helped, and the capture of the two Russian destroyers had *"given a sense of confidence to the populace"*. Laidoner was very young, undoubtedly able and clever and a pleasant official to deal with, but could not really be trusted as he adapted his information to what he thought his listeners wanted to hear. Only the civilian Pitka was an enterprising, energetic, single-minded individual who did hard and effective work both on land with his armoured trains and now with the preparation of a navy.

*"Neither Government, Generals, or people of either province have any confidence in themselves or their efforts"*. Their leaders asked for a protectorate, for British commanders, and those involved in enlisting and drilling of soldiers underlined that the recruits showed apathy *"partly because there are no officers or officer class to inspire confidence, and partly because the people are chary of enlisting openly to fight the Bolsheviks where there appears little chance of success..."*

The described situation was why Sinclair had recommended sending a British general with staff. He wrote that description applied mainly to Estonia, but it also covered Latvia.

*"The Letts appear to have failed altogether, as they not only have made no attempt to defend their country but have shown themselves entirely unreliable and untrustworthy, and the only defence in Latvia appears to have been that made by the Baltic Germans. This is said to be the case to a great extent in Esthonia also, where the younger men and students of the upper classes have the reputation of being the only troops who are really to be trusted."*<sup>48</sup>

If the Admiralty wanted the operation continued, the disillusioned Sinclair was clearly not the man for the job, even if his work had been praised by Lord Robert Cecil on 26 December.

Sinclair made one final visit to the Estonian Government and other interested parties in Reval before leaving. The Estonians had drafted another application to have the country adopted as a British Protectorate, a wish now also repeated by the commander of the Russian Northern Army, who moreover repeated the request to have a British Commander-in-Chief appointed. The admiral told them once more that it was impossible.

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<sup>48</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1663. 6th LCS CARDIFF No. 30/283 of 1-1-1919.

He was also approached by another Russian general, who wanted support to establish his force. Sinclair told him to unite with the other Russians or the Estonians. The Russian underlined that this would only be possible under a British commander.



Sinclair left in the first row, the aggressive Thesiger left in the second. Päts, judged defeatist, and Laidoner, seen as bright, but slippery, sitting next to the admiral.

### ***Loss of Riga and the likely end of intervention***

On 30 December about 200 Finnish soldiers arrived on-board an Ice-breaker, the first of an expected force of 2 000 Finns. Sinclair decided that his two cruisers in Reval should participate in the transport of the rest. Thereafter the admiral went to Riga to make his farewell visit to the Latvian authorities. Arriving there on 2 January he was informed by Bosanquet and the Captain of PRINCESS MARGARET

that the German troops had evacuated the town directly after the mutiny of a Latvian regiment on 29 December. HMS CERES had opened fire on the Bolshevik quarter at the request of the Latvian Government. The mutineers had surrendered. The troops that had mutinied were actually part of the Government forces Britain had been helping prepare to meet the invading Bolsheviks. This made it clear how hopeless it was to prop up a local Government that rested on such weak foundations as the Latvian Provisional Government did in that early period.

The Bolsheviks were reported to be only ten kilometres from the town, and the only force moving to resist their entry was a small force of 600 Baltic German town guards. The Latvian Provisional Government had thereafter retired to Mitau (Jelgava). Patrols from the British ships had taken over patrolling the town, but would be withdrawn in the coming night as the ships would leave the river and sail for Copenhagen at daylight 3 January. It was expected that the Bolsheviks in town would thereafter rise and be joined by the Bolshevik Army outside the city. When departing, the minelayer-transport had nearly four hundred refugees on-board from the British community in town and some Latvian government officials. When she left, she still had 15 000 of the 20 000 rifles on-board because of Sinclair's policy not of handing over weapons before the instructors were satisfied that the recruits could use them.

Sinclair's initial report about the problems in Riga from 30 December had led Admiral Fremantle to ask the Imperial War Cabinet in its 31 December meeting if the Government wished to withdraw the Sixth Light Cruiser Squadron,

*“or to face intervention on a larger scale. There was a danger of our being drawn into operations from which it would be difficult to disentangle ourselves. A decision would have to be come to quickly, as the ships would*

*have to leave Riga before the middle of January if they were not to be ice-bound there."*

The Admiralty saw it as desirable to get the ships away the area, both because of the damage they might suffer from the ice, and because of the danger that ice would move or destroy the navigation marks marking minefields. That the Admiralty did not want to retreat from all the Baltic became clear when Fremantle continues that Libau was ice-free, and, *"as there was no Bolshevik trouble there, as at Riga and Reval, there was not the same danger of entanglement if a ship stayed there."* He wished to add, however, that *"it was probable that if we withdrew the ships from Riga the local Bolsheviks would massacre all their political opponents."* In the discussion of Sinclair's report, the meeting agreed that a decision could not be postponed till the general question of British policy in Russia was settled in Paris. Riga would be closed by ice before such a decision was reached.

The Imperial War Cabinet decided that *"the Admiralty should instruct the Admiral in Command of the Sixth Light Cruiser Squadron to withdraw his ships from Riga and Reval, owing to the danger of their being shut in by the ice, but that one ship might be left at Libau ready to be withdrawn at short notice."*



VAMBOLA, ex. SPARTAK on loan for the duration of hostilities.

### ***Leaving Reval***

In Reval, Captain Thesiger considered that he had three *"essential things to do before leaving"*: Firstly evacuate any women, children and old men who wished to go. Secondly to *"take steps to prevent the Bolshevik ships coming to sea for a week or 10 days, by which time they will in all probability be iced in for the winter"*. Thirdly, he wanted *"to delay the advance of the Bolshevik troops so as to allow more time to organize the Estonian Army, and to get over more Finnish Troops"*. On 3 January he took his two cruisers and two destroyers to transport refugees to Helsingfors and bring Finnish troops back. The total number arrived had grown to 600 when he returned. The ice was already too thick for the destroyers to complete the journey. After returning to Reval he took his cruisers and a destroyer on a patrol close to the Russian island of Hogland, expecting the Russians there to report their presence to Kronstadt so that the Russian ships



would be deterred to stay in base. Thereafter his force bombarded the Bolshevik positions east of Reval on the way back. It took place at a time of a heavy infantry engagement, where the Estonians were commanded by Pitka.



Rear-Admiral Walter Cowan, Sinclair's very different, terrier-like, bantam fighter replacement in the Baltic.

Thesiger left Reval with his force on 5 January for Copenhagen, where he met Rear-Admiral Walter Cowan, the next commander of the force in the Baltic. In his report to Sinclair Thesiger underlined that the situation had not changed much during the last days, however he had received a radio telegram that the Estonian troops had retaken a couple of villages, and that Pitka's armoured trains were advancing. *"Though this probably does not mean much, it may mean that they are holding their own."*<sup>49</sup> They were.

The successful counter-offensive to Narva during the next couple of weeks took place beyond the observation and influence of the departed British. It was a purely Estonian-Finnish project.

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<sup>49</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1663. The Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office. M 026270 Urgent Confidential 26-12-1918. 6th LCS CARDIFF No. 30/283 (*supplement*) of 2-1-1919. HMS CALYPSO Nr. 19 of 6-1-1918 to The Rear Admiral Commanding Sixth Cruiser Squadron. ADM 137/1664. H.M.S. "PRINCESS MARGARET" of 6-1-1919 to RA Commanding Sixth Light Cruiser Squadron "Report on occurrences at Riga during stay of British Squadron, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1918 – 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1919." CAB 23/42. Imperial War Cabinet 48, 31-12-1918, at 11 a.m., Item: Military and Naval Position in Russia. Geoffrey Bennett: Freeing the Baltic. (London 1964), pp.40-46.

## Chapter 4: Winter 1919: The Libau bridgehead.

### **The offensive beyond the ice**

After Thesiger's departure, what happened on the other side of the winter ice in Estonia was out of sight and reach of Britain and her navy. The decision-makers in London had been divided and half-hearted in their effort in late 1918, and Sinclair's experience and report had underlined how little chance Balfour's romantic ideas had of being realized.



Situation map for the War Cabinet indicating the British understanding of the situation at the beginning of 1919.

They had no idea that they had catalysed and supported the start of the initial liberation of Estonia. It had been completed at the end of January without any outside assistance beyond the in all senses extremely valuable assistance of the more than 2.000 Finnish volunteers.

Hereafter the growing Estonian forces had to defend against the deliberate, far more powerful Bolshevik offensive that took place from spring onwards.

### **Cowan's limited mission**

The orders for Sinclair's successor in the Baltic Sea, Rear-Admiral Walter Cowan's force, were drafted on 1 January 1919, before the collapse of the situation in Riga. The force was only to consist of two cruisers from Cowan's own First Light Cruiser Squadron and five destroyers. It was less than half of Sinclair's original strength. Cowan's orders repeated that the "*primary object of your visit is to show the British Flag in the Baltic and to support British policy as circumstances may dictate*".

The admiral was instructed to seek information about the local situation and the Bolshevik navy from Sinclair and take over Bosanquet and the interpreters from his predecessor. He was informed that the Estonians and Latvians had been given a total of 10.000 rifles plus some machine guns and ammunition. He might continue to supply weapons, if he was "*reasonably convinced that the Esthonian or other government is of a stable nature and can control the Army, and that the Army will not be used in a manner opposed to British interests*".

Cowan was informed that the general British interests and policy in the Baltic was to “*prevent the destruction of the Esthonian and Latvian provinces by external aggression, which is only threatened at present by Bolshevik invaders*”. A deleted sentence instructed him not to co-operate with the Germans in assisting the Estonians. The final order only informed him that the Germans were bound by the terms of the Armistice to evacuate Estonia, “*and in no case should you have any dealings with the Germans*”. The defensive naval support against the Bolsheviks practiced by Sinclair and Thesiger in December should be continued. “*A Bolshevik Man of War or Armed Auxiliary of any kind operating off the coast of the Baltic Provinces must be assumed to be doing so with hostile intent and should be treated accordingly*”. The admiral was instructed that he should not interfere in local politics, even against local Bolsheviks. His task was to give support against external aggression. The directive emphasized that no British land forces would be sent. The blockade should only continue against the Germans, not against Scandinavian shipping, and Russian ships should only be searched.

He was ordered to remain in Copenhagen with his flagship. “*Riga and Reval are not to be visited without Admiralty authority, except that, should you consider it desirable, a destroyer may be sent for purposes of communication, and to acquire intelligence*”. It was unacceptable to have ships trapped by ice in harbour.<sup>50</sup>

As already mentioned, Captain Thesiger had briefed Cowan on 7 January about his actions in the Gulf of Finland. The physically small, but by nature very aggressive admiral immediately asked for permission “*to pay visits at uncertain times to Reval, bombarding Bolshevik positions when practicable until the Esthonian and Russian resistance had stiffened sufficiently to enable them to hold their own*”. It would act as “*a considerable deterrent to Bolshevik operations*”. The Admiralty immediately rejected the proposal as “*in conflict with general orders issued*”.

<sup>50</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1664. Admiralty Confidential M.02 to C-in-C of 1-1-1919 with the directive to RAdm First Light Cruiser Squadron (draft and final).

On 8 and 9 January Cowan received information from the French Legation in Copenhagen that international Bolsheviks had decided in a meeting in Stockholm to place bombs on the Allied ships in Copenhagen harbour. He thereafter received assistance from the Danish Navy and state police to protect and guard his ships.

9 January he sent a cruiser with two destroyers on reconnaissance to Libau, the maximum he was allowed within his instructions. The small force returned on 13 January. Its commander, Captain Matthew Robert Best, reported that the Danish born Libau harbourmaster, Captain Nielsen, told them that “*a German General and a party of German Soldiers*” had raided the shed where HMS ANGORA had left 500 rifles in Nielsen’s care and thrown the majority of the rifles and ammunition into the harbour. Otherwise they had received the usual White Russian military and Latvian government contact delegations.<sup>51</sup>

The Russians wanted to inform the British about the situation. The German force in town had a total strength of 2.000, but only 800 were disciplined. It was supported by a militia of around 1.000 German speaking youth. The White Russian force consisted of 250 officers and men. The German military governor thought that he could hold Libau for ten days against a well-disciplined and “*amply-supplied*” Bolshevik force that was only 70-80 miles away. Part of the city population was being evacuated in German ships.<sup>52</sup>

### ***New British cabinet and its departure for the Paris Peace Conference***

On 10 January Lloyd George had changed the composition of his government to mirror the results of the 28 December Parliamentary Elections. Thereafter Balfour

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. CALEDON, Secret No. 1/531 of 14-1-1919 to the Commander-in-Chief, Grand Fleet.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. ROYALIST, No. 1/4 of 13-1-1919 to the Rear Admiral Commanding First Cruiser Squadron.



stayed as Foreign Secretary even if when to Paris as leader of the British delegation to the Peace Conference, but Lord Curzon acted in his place in London. Robert Cecil left the government. But the far most important change was that Winston Churchill replaced Lord Milner as War Secretary and was given the post as Air Secretary as well. He had been offered to choose between these two posts or the Admiralty by the Prime Minister before New Year. He suggesting joining Admiralty and Air, but on 9 January the decision was made to give him the Army and Royal Air Force. The energetic politician was supposed to manage the discipline and demobilization crisis in the army,<sup>53</sup> however being an incurable anti-Bolshevik, he thereafter took a leading role in driving and directing the British intervention operations in Russia.

Churchill was ready to present his clear views on the management and reduction of the army between the pressures on one hand to demobilize quickly and the other to maintain a strong British Army presence in the Rhine bridgeheads until Germany had signed a peace treaty. It was no easy task at a time of severe industrial unrest at home and the breakdown of discipline in part of the forces in France.<sup>54</sup>

### ***Searching for miracles at home and in Scandinavia***

On 11 January a Latvian government delegation led by Prime Minister Ulmanis and Defence Minister Jānis Zālītis informed the British Captain that the arrival of the British ships had prevented a Bolshevik uprising in the town. However, when the force left, it was likely to take place. Ulmanis wanted information if the British could evacuate 500 Latvian soldiers and 500 civilians. He told Best that the Germans had not equipped the Latvian soldiers as promised. If, however, the

<sup>53</sup> Martin Gilbert: Winston S. Churchill. Volume IV 1916-1922. (London 1975), pp. 178-196.

<sup>54</sup> TNA. CAB 23/9, War Cabinet, Minutes of the War Cabinet 521 held on 28-1-1919, Item "Demobilisation. Armies of Occupation, Overseas and Home Garrisons" and the discussions of the following War Cabinet meetings. Martin Gilbert: Winston S. Churchill. Volume IV 1916-1922. (London 1975), pp.219-235.

British used Libau as the base for naval operations and financial and equipment support for the support of the Latvians – especially if they sent "*a few hundred British Soldiers*" – the situation would quickly improve. If no such assistance was possible and it would be necessary to evacuate Libau, he requested that one destroyer remained to "*assist in preventing a massacre of many innocent persons*". The British commander agreed to forward the request.

12 January the force had a meeting with the international consuls to find out what number of their citizens that might need to be evacuated. Captain Best found that there was ample German shipping in town to carry out the evacuation. In a follow-up meeting with the Latvian Government, the Deputy Prime minister, Miķelis Valters, informed the British that Ulmanis had left by ship for Copenhagen.

Information Best had collected about the situation in Reval and Riga indicated that the situation in North Estonia appeared to have improved since late December. The Estonians expected that a Swedish volunteer force would arrive to reinforce the Finns. In Riga the Bolsheviks were developing their control.

Captain Best concluded:

*"as far as I can see, the Lettish Government's position is untenable, being opposed on the one hand by the local Bolshevik elements, and on the other by the German Military Governor, with Soldiers Council, whose decisions are taken independently of any representations made by the Lettish Officials.*

*The individuals forming the Lettish Government do not inspire confidence, and under these circumstances, the only course to be considered is whether outside assistance can be rendered to facilitate the evacuation of a large number of non-combatants persons.*

*There can be no question that the presence of even a small Naval unit would be immensely appreciated.”*

The report made Cowan ask for immediately permission to send Captain Best’s ship, HMS ROYALIST, back to Libau.

The ever-present Bosanquet had participated in Captain Best’s meetings in Libau. He reinforced the captain’s message in a telegram to the Foreign Office. The suggested that Britain should put strong pressure on Germany to live up to the demands of the Armistice Terms to defend Courland, including Libau, Windau (Ventpils) *“and other towns ... even if this necessitates the despatch of troops from Germany”*. Bosanquet repeated that a volunteer force should be raised in England, America and other allied states with a British general attached with staff in command. He urged that *“if possible, British ships should be sent to (Libau) ... and should remain there for the present”*.

In his 13 January despatch, Cowan had developed Bosanquet’s volunteer force-idea. A volunteer army under a British general would be the proper *“remedy for Bolshevik aggression in the Baltic Provinces”*. The admiral considered that the ranks for the army would quickly be filled with Scandinavians, Americans and British. However, he continued:

*“Whether the people of these Provinces are worthy of this help is another matter which must be considered apart from the world necessity of stamping out armed Bolshevism. Up to now there has been little to convince me that they are, and this is demonstrated by the feeble resistance and by very small numbers in proportion to the population, which has as yet been offered in the Riga, Reval and Libau districts – and by the lack of confidence*

*and co-operation always apparent between the Esthonian, Lettish and North Russian Armies.”<sup>55</sup>*

On 15 January the War Cabinet had a short discussion of the situation in North Russia: Murmansk and the Baltic Provinces. The Director of Military Intelligence saw the situation at Murmansk as unchanged, but the development in Estonia was *“not satisfactory”*. The acting Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, was a little more positive. The Estonian leaders might lack government experience, but some had good local reputation. They were holding on helped by 400-500 Finnish troops, but the situation remained precarious. Even if Riga had been lost to the Bolsheviks and the situation in Libau was basically the same, it *“had not yet fallen”*.<sup>56</sup>

It is obvious that the Foreign Office had become out of touch with the situation in Estonia, and the War Cabinet discussion did not lead to any decisions. On 17 January, however, Kilmarnock reported from Copenhagen about the first Estonian military successes on both eastern and southern fronts. To the east Kunda, “Vezenberg” (Wesenberg, Rahvere) and Taps (Tapa) been recovered and the front was from Isenhof (Kiviõli) to the north end of Lake Peipus. On the southern front Ruen, (Rujen, Ruhja, Rūjiena) in present northern Latvia and Dorpat (Tartu) had been taken, and the offensive continued towards Walk (Valga, Valka). Less than a week later, the eastern front had reached Yamburg (Kingisepp) east of Narva. The

<sup>55</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1664 CALEDON, COPENHAGEN No. 1/531 of 14-1-1919 to C-in-C Grand Fleet. With attachments: S.O.1<sup>st</sup>.L.C.S No. 202 of 7-1-1919 to Admiralty; C-in-C., G.F. Legation de la Republique Francaise, Copenhagen, le 7-1-1919 NOTE de l’Attaché Naval francais à Copenhagen. HMS ROYALIST No. 4/1 of 13-1-1919. S.O.1<sup>st</sup>.L.C.S No. 202 of 13-1-1919 to Admiralty. Bosanquet: HMS CALEDON, COPENHAGEN of 15-1-1919 to His Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, FOREIGN OFFICE, London.

<sup>56</sup> TNA. CAB 23/9. War Cabinet, Minutes of the War Cabinet held on 15-1-1919, Item “North Russia - Murmansk and the Baltic Provinces”.

Estonians now made clear to the British that they had fought for their freedom, and that it was now unacceptable to let Russians decide their future.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Lithuania again***

On 15 January Bosanquet reported from Copenhagen about a conversation he had had with the Prime Minister of the Lithuanian Provisional Government, Professor Woldemar (Augustinas Voldemaras) about the situation in his country. The German forces were kept under close control by their commanders, and they did everything possible to block the development of Lithuanian armed forces, including the actual destruction of 60,000 rifles. They still had around 300,000 soldiers in Ukraine, but in Belorussia they handed over the major towns to the Bolsheviks, the General Staff using officer controlled “*Soldiers’ Councils*” as a façade for its activities. The Lithuanian believed that the Germans still planned to keep control of the Baltic provinces. They aimed to do so by promoting anarchy that could justify intervention, by sabotaging the local national aspirations and by destroying evidence showing the damage they had done to the provinces. In their actions, the only thing that worried them was the possible penalties used against them by the Allied Supreme Commander, Marshal Foch. Woldemar proposed that the Allies used their bridgehead in Libau to support the defence of the provinces against the Bolsheviks, but if the Lithuanians lost control of Kowno (Kaunas), they could no longer be reached from the Courland port. Then Allied assistance could be blocked by Germany. The professor underlined that the Lithuanian government and people wanted independence and close relations with England, America and Scandinavia. They did not trust France because its support to Poland.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> TNA. WO 157/39. Baltic Provinces. Esthonia. 17-1-1919; Estonia. No. 247 Foreign Office telegram; Esthonia. Foreign Office telegram (from around 22-1-1919).

<sup>58</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1664. Bosanquet, H.M.S. “CALEDON” at Copenhagen 18<sup>th</sup> January 1919 into His Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

### ***Cowan’s reconnaissance visit to Libau, Estonian success noted***

On 14 January the Admiralty authorised Cowan to visit Libau. He sailed with HMS CALEDON and the three destroyers VALHALLA, WOLSEY and WRESTLER on 16 January, reached Libau next morning and departed again for Copenhagen on 18 February afternoon. He sent his report about the local situation on 21 January.

Mitau (Jelgave) had been taken by a small Bolshevik force, but it could not advance further without widening the railway gauge to Russian standard. In Windau (Ventpils) the situation was unclear. Riga was ice-bound and in Bolshevik hands. The Bolsheviks were about 100 kilometres from Libau, advancing slowly against the resistance of Germans, German Balts and Latvians. The number of defenders was around 1,200. The enemy could reach the town 27 January. The Germans were evacuating their troops by trains and steamers leaving every day. Very few of the remaining soldiers were reliable. Cowan asked his government to permit the landing of a corps of Swedish volunteers. They could encourage the Latvians to resist as the landing of the Finns in Reval had helped the Estonians.

Reval was presently free of ice and “*apparently*” safe, Dorpat (Tartu) had been retaken by the Estonians that were advancing further south and east from that town. Cowan concluded that

*“My opinion grows that there is little weight or cohesion behind this Bolshevik thrust and that a resolute and well directed resistance by a force of 10,000 or 15,000 men would break it up and enable these Baltic Provinces to steady up, gain breathing time and confidence, and then form their defence forces, and thereafter hold their own.”<sup>59</sup>*

On 23 January the Foreign Office could encourage Cowan that the situation in Libau could soon improve. On hearing that the Swedish considered sending a

<sup>59</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1664. HMS CALEDON no. 2/331 of 21-1-1919 for The C-in-C, Grand Fleet.



force of 3.000 volunteers to fight for Estonia, the admiral had sought British approval for the reinforcement. Now he was informed that London had communicated its 21 January approval to Stockholm. At the same time, however, the Swedish press made clear that the Swedish Government was not only against any official involvement, the volunteer movement “*is not receiving very warm support*”.

Kilmarnock reported from Copenhagen that Ulmanis had arrived there and made clear that he sought significant British assistance in the form of military equipment, food and loans. Wood and flax was offered as security. The press reported that Ulmanis had “*fled*” from Libau and arrived in Copenhagen via Bornholm. The Latvian delegation lobbying in Copenhagen continued supplying optimistic news during the following days. They claimed that Latvian resistance was stiffening and German weakening. The first detachment of Swedes could arrive any day. Then the Swedish Government made clear that no troops would be send without external financing. Some days later Kilmarnock had heard that the Germans were willing to give the necessary loans. The Latvians considered the offer “*a strategic move for retaining German influence in Latvia*”. A Swedish officer alleged that the Germans wanted to take Mitau and Riga with their own troops and only use Swedish and Latvian troops against secondary objectives.

The January 1919 estimate of total potential support the end of January reported that 6.000 Finns had applied to serve in Estonia, in Denmark a private organisation planned to find 1.000 volunteers, and Sweden might raise up to 30.000.



Success on the other side of the ice: Celebrating the first anniversary of the declaration of Estonian Independence – and the defeat of the initial Bolshevik offensives - on Tallinn Freedom Square on 24 February 1919.

In some authorities in London the Baltic Provinces were still unknown land. As late as early February the War Office daily briefing still dealt with Letts under the heading “*Lithuania*”.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1664. Foreign Office No. 10395/W/38 of 23-1-1919 to Secretary of the Admiralty. WO 157/39. Esthonia. Extracts from Foreign Press (from around 22-1-1919). Denmark. Foreign Office telegram (F.O.T.) No 232. Sweden. Help for Esthonia. F.O.Tel. Lithuania. Press Extract. Baltic Provinces. Esthonia. Appendix “B”. WO 157/40. Lithuania. F.O.T. 102, 272, 279 and 324.

### ***Bolshevik offensive stalled outside Libau***

On 27 January Bosanquet sent a supplement to Cowan's 21 January report. Following a later visit to the port by Captain Best in HMS ROYALIST it was clear the Bolshevik advance towards Libau had been making little progress in the previous week. He could also report that the first 500 Swedes could land within a week, if the Swedish government received both a financial guarantee from Britain and formal consent from the Allies that the force could be sent. The Swedes would also like to have the force armed by the Entente powers.

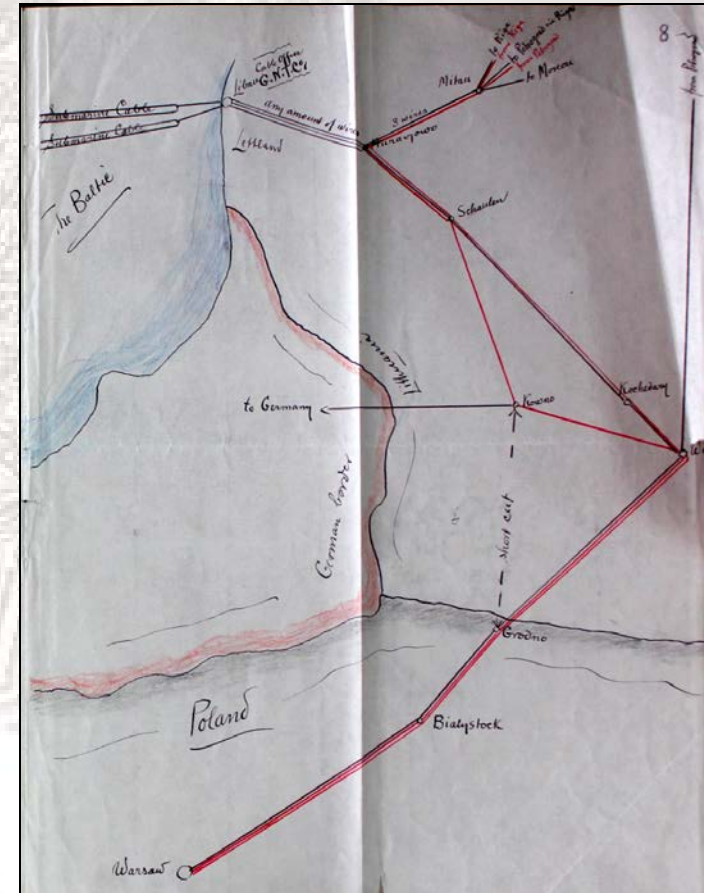
Bosanquet also reported that the Germans proposed to send in fresh troops that would pretend to work under the Armistice terms, but in reality wanted to regain German control a territory including Riga, mirroring the effort they made to keep control of Lithuania.

On the next day Bosanquet had to report to the Foreign Office that the Danish newspaper "*Berlingske Tidende*"s Stockholm correspondent had made clear that the Swedish government had given up sending the planned military expedition to Courland because the Latvian government had failed to get the required guarantees. Cowan had requested that the British decided to finance the force and thereafter informed Stockholm of its decision.<sup>61</sup>

30 January Cowan returned to Libau with his flagship HMS CALEDON and the same three destroyers. He arrived at the next day. Due to ice the force could not enter the harbour, and as in the first visit it only stayed one day before leaving for Copenhagen again.

The admiral landed during his short stay to conduct meetings with the Latvian Deputy Prime Minister, Valters, and the Defence Minister, Zālītis, as well as with a

Swedish major. Ulmanis was now in Stockholm. Cowan also met the harbour captain and the representative of the Danish "*Great Nordic*" telegraph cable company.



All cables from the Entente to Western Russia went through Libau.

The military situation had improved a little. A minor Bolshevik advance had been defeated at Shrunen (Skrunda) by Baltic German forces, and the main Bolshevik forces were still around Tukcum (Tukums) and Mitau (Jelgava). There were no

<sup>61</sup> TNA ADM 137/1664, HMS CALEDON of 27. January 1919 to His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State, for Foreign Affairs. TNA ADM 137/1664, HMS CALEDON of 28. January 1919 to His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State, for Foreign Affairs.



significant enemy forces closer than Goldingen (Kuldīga). The German forces had been withdrawn from Windau (Ventspils), but the town had not been occupied by Bolsheviks. In Libau itself the situation had become quiet. A mobilization of Latvian officers and non-commissioned officers had started on 28 January and a general mobilization would start on 4 February. *“Students and the upper classes will be sent to the front, the working classes being retained for base work”*. The German authorities controlled and censored all use of telegraph. The food situation was becoming difficult. The new German commander, General von der Goltz, had still not arrived. The first 700 – fully equipped – Swedish volunteers were expected daily, to be followed initially by 1.000 more and finally by 800 when funds allowed. There were rumours that the German forces in town – organised in the *“Iron Division”* – were being reinforced.

The admiral received information that the Estonians were fighting *“with resolution”*, but they needed food and ammunition. Cowan wanted to send them supplies with the supply ship HMS HYLTONIA. Bosanquet, who had met the admiral in Copenhagen, was now ordered to Reval.

### **Renewed supplies**

At the end of his 3 February report Cowan proposed to return with his force to Libau and hand over 6.000 rifles and 40 Madsen light machine guns plus ammunition for the weapons to the Latvians in Libau *“if they can guarantee effectual control of it”*.

He received green light, and on 7 February Captain Best transferred 5.320 rifles and 52 light machine guns with ammunition from HMS ROYALIST to a Latvian steamer.



HMS CALEDON, HMS VALHALLA and HMS WRESTLER in the ice off Libau after arrival 31 January 1919

The Latvian Defence Minister, Zālītis, who received the weapons, informed the British that the new German general, von der Goltz, had arrived on 3 February. Goltz apparently saw himself as the commander of the future combined – German, Swedish, Russian and Latvian – anti-Bolshevik forces. However, even with these aspirations, German-Latvian tensions continued. The German military policed Libau and monitored conversations between Latvian government members and it had sent troops to try to take over the Latvian steamer. The Latvians informed Best that the military situation had worsened as the Bolsheviks had occupied Windau. The total Latvian number of troops was expected to be increased from less than 900 to around 1.500 with the local mobilisation planned



for the following week. Ulmanis had not succeeded in getting the Swedish volunteers despatched from Stockholm and had gone to Helsingfors to seek Finnish support. The Finns informed the British that his attempt would fail.<sup>62</sup>

On 4 February the War Office had received information that Estonian forces on the southern front had reached the Russian town of Pechori (Pechory, Petseri) south of the Lake Peipus, taking 1.400 Bolshevik prisoners.<sup>63</sup>

### ***Withdrawing from all Russia or not***

In the War Cabinet meeting on 12 February, Curzon, the Acting Foreign Secretary, outlined the situation for the British forces in Russia. In all places where Britain was making an effort – North, South and in Siberia – “*Our enterprises ... were crumbling*”. Churchill wanted to go on supporting Russian forces that were making headway against the Bolsheviks. Lloyd-George observed that the Anti-Bolshevik forces seemed to fail because of lack of popular support. Curzon underlined that “*Before deciding ... (to withdraw) the War Cabinet should be perfectly clear that they were doing all they could in what he could call the bolstering policy. In any case, we could only provide forces for Russia by means of volunteers, not only British volunteers but men of other nationalities. M. Scavenius had mentioned to him the possibility of getting Swedish volunteers*”. “M. Scavenius” was probably the strongly anti-Bolshevik Danish Foreign Minister, Harald Scavenius.

The Prime Minister wanted “*to know the extent of the obligation we had undertaken in promising the protection of such States as Poland, Esthonia, and Lithuania*” and he concluded that he wanted the War Office to produce a paper on the effects of four alternatives: 1) “*Intervention*”,

<sup>62</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1664. HMS CALEDON no. 4/331 of 3-2-1919 for The C-in-C, Grand Fleet. The Commanding Officer, HMS ROYALIST “Report of Proceedings” No. 32/79 of 9-2-1919 to RA, First Light Cruiser Squadron.

<sup>63</sup> TNA. WO 157/40. W.O. S of I 4-2-1919.

2) “*Evacuation*”, 3) “*A middle policy of giving all possible help by way of arms and money to the anti-Bolshevik Governments of Russia*”, and 4) “*The defence of all these States which depend upon the Great Powers for their protection*”.<sup>64</sup>

In that meeting, Vice-Admiral Fremantle covered the “*The Baltic Provinces*” in a separate agenda item. He stated that the situation had improved, especially in Finland, but not only there. “*The Letts, also, were showing activity. They had already mobilized their officers, and were trying to mobilise their men*”.

The army, meaning Churchill, had prepared its requirement for naval support “*for the future should the Allied Governments decide on active intervention in the Baltic Provinces*” for the meeting. The navy should protect transport and landing of troops and thereafter the sea lines of communication. It should prevent the Bolsheviks receiving reinforcement by sea, bombard enemy territory and troops and carry out attacks by naval aviation.

13 February, the day after the meeting, Lord Kilmarnock sent another of his optimistic messages from Copenhagen. He had heard from Cowan and Bosanquet that the Latvian Government had become stronger, cooperation with the Baltic Germans had improved and Estonian-Latvian friction reduced. More encouragement should be offered these small states in their struggle for existence. The arrival of Swedish and Danish volunteers “*would have a most heartening effect*”. Any remaining difficulties would disappear if the Allies sent an officer of “*superior rank*” to take command.<sup>65</sup>

On 14 February, the G. W. Bisseneek (Georgs Bisenieks) and General A. Missin (Augusts Misins) from the Latvian Legation in London presented a “*Memorandum*

<sup>64</sup> TNA. CAB 23/9, War Cabinet 531, pp.136-138 item “*The Situation in Russia*”. For Churchill’s view see: Martin Gilbert: Winston S. Churchill. Volume IV 1916-1922. (London 1975), pp.235-242.

<sup>65</sup> TNA. CAB 23/9 Minutes of the held on 12-2-1919, p.138. WO 157/40. Foreign Office telefram No. 426.

on the political situation and military requirements of Latvia” to the British authorities. After a long introduction it noted that the Germans acted contrary to the Armistice Treaty. They do not inform the Latvian government of its decision so that it had no chance to react, they smashed or stole property to sabotage Latvian management, and they obstructed the creation of a national Latvian Army, leaving it “without any means of resistance to the Bolshevik invaders”. Therefore Latvia needed arms, ammunition, equipment, machine guns, artillery, aeroplanes, armoured cars and every kind of war material. Because it had lost control of most of the country, Latvia needed the possibility to recruit volunteers in Allied and neutral countries.

*“Further, having in view the great moral assistance and support rendered by the presence of British Squadron at Riga in December last year, we have the honour of requesting the British Government that several units of His Majesty’s Navy should be stationed at Lettish ports. Such ships would not be required to undertake active assistance to the Lettish troops, but would serve only to give moral support to the loyal Letts.”<sup>66</sup>*

### **Zones of influence?**

On 15 February the French government presented its ideas about support of the Baltic Provinces to the British. France had received wishes for armed support, instructors, equipment and subsidies as other governments probably had. It was in the interest of all the Allies that the support against “Bolshevist progress towards the West” should be as effective as possible. Therefore the support should be coordinated, not by an Inter-Allied organization in each of the states. The Western region of Russia should be divided into “zones of influence”, as had already been done by the Agreement of 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1917, when France had

<sup>66</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1664. Memorandum on the political situation and military requirements of Latvia, presented to J. D. Gregory, Esq. by G. W. Bisseneek and General A. Missin. 14-2-1919. WO 157/40. Appendix “B”. “A” Branch, 12-2-1919.

taken responsibility for action in Ukraine and Siberia and Great Britain for Don, the Caucasus and North Russia. France was fully occupied in Poland and Czechoslovakia. England had already started her support for the Balts by the dispatch of the squadron and the distribution of some arms. Therefore it would appear logical that the British Government was to be entrusted with the question of material support for Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and eventually to Finland. France would continue with Poland and Czechoslovakia. The division would not rule out the sending of military missions of other powers, “for the purpose of making enquiries and for propaganda”<sup>67</sup>

Military support was risky and difficult. Humanitarian support was politically far easier. On 3 February the Latvians had asked for permission to import fish from Norway to alleviate the food crisis in the country. The Allied Blockade Committee decided on 24 February that it would be a matter for the Allied Supreme Council of Supply and Relief, and on 28 February days later, the Admiralty recommended that the permission to send food was given.<sup>68</sup>

On 15 February the War Office information summary noted that the Allied Blockade Committee considered start of normal trade with Estonia premature but approved shipment of military equipment and coal to the country. This had been sent to the Supreme Council of Supply and Relief and the Superior Council of Blockade in Paris for approval.

The anti-Bolshevik forces on the Estonian southern front were now preparing to take Pskoff (Pskov, Pihkva). The War Office noted that the Estonian military organization had improved “considerably”.

<sup>67</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1664. France. Political. Telegram en clair from Lord Derby (Paris) No. 322 (BY BAG) of 14-2-1919.

<sup>68</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1664. M.0597, of 28-2-1919 to The Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office.

Recruitment of volunteers proceeded well in Denmark, 250 men could leave within a week if properly equipped, and the force total could reach 1.000. The Danish Government did not want to be involved and left recruiting to a private enterprise.

16 February the War Office had received information that Lithuania had made financial and military arrangement with Germany to cooperate in the fight against the Bolsheviks. The German money and arms had made it possible to keep control of Kowno (Kaunas).<sup>69</sup>

### **Churchill's activism**

On 17 February Churchill drafted a letter draft to Lloyd George, describing the motives for his activism in relation to Russia:

*"There will be no peace in Europe until Russia is restored. There can be no League of Nations without Russia. If we abandon Russia, German and Japan will not. The new States which it is hoped to call into being in the East of Europe will be crushed between Russian Bolshevism and Germany. Germany will regain by her influence over Russia far more than she has lost in colonies overseas or provinces in the West..."*<sup>70</sup>

At noon on 20 February, a two days old report from Mr Clive in Stockholm reached the British government about his conversation with "Mr Uldecims" (Ulmanis), the Prime Minister of Latvia. The Latvian told of his work to create "a combined front against Bolsheviks from Finland to Lithuania". The Lithuanian representatives in Stockholm supported the idea, and he was now proceeding to

<sup>69</sup> TNA. WO 157/40, War Office Summary 15-2-1919 and Russian Summary No. 39. S. of I. relative to European Russia w/o 16-2-1919.

<sup>70</sup> Martin Gilbert (ed.): Winston S. Churchill. Companion Volume IV. Part 1 January 1917-June 1919. (London 1977), p. 544: Winston S. Churchill to Lloyd George: unsent letter. Paris 17-2-1919.

Kowno (Kaunas). The Lithuanians depended on Libau, so they had to support a common front. Ulmanis told Clive that the Estonians had already reached North Latvia. They were joined by Latvian forces that they gave equipment. The Estonian success had been created by moral and massive financial support from Finland. If the Finns were supplied with "sufficient supplies of foodstuffs", they could be encouraged to take Petrograd.

In Libau they needed funds and 2.000 foreign troops, "Swedes if necessary". The support was necessary to encourage the local population as had happened in Estonia. Clive had informed Ulmanis that the issue of a joint Allied loan was under discussion in Paris. Ulmanis suggested that the timber of the forests under Latvian control near Libau could be offered as security for the loans. The Latvian had concluded that food to Finland and financial support for his government was essential for progress.

In his report Clive commented that the loan should be offered without any conditions.<sup>71</sup>

### **Back to Reval when the ice had melted**

On 15 February the British envoy in Copenhagen had asked on behalf of the Estonian representative in the Danish capital whether the British government would be prepared to send a squadron back to Reval "when the ice melts, in view of possible action by the Bolsheviks' fleet". After some discussion in the Admiralty the Foreign Office was informed on 26. February that the only thing that would happen until a general policy as regards Russia was decided was that the two supply ships HYLTONIA and HOLYWOOD would be sent. The "should ha a good effect". The Estonians should also be informed that any assistance would depend

<sup>71</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1664, Sweden. Political. No. 368 D of 18-2-1919.



on the effectiveness of the sea defence of Reval, meaning Estonian control of the sea forts around the port. 4 March the Foreign Office informed Balfour in Paris that no action would be taken *“for the reason that it might have an adverse effect on the situation, which would be inconvenient if it were subsequently decided to afford effective assistance to the Baltic States”*.<sup>72</sup> The staffing by the London authorities underline that they were totally unaware of the improvement in the situation that had taken place after they left Reval before New Year.

The two supply ships were sent to Reval on 17 February, escorted by the light cruiser HMS INCONSTANT and a destroyer. The senior officer, Commander Evelyn Claude Ogilvie Thomson, was instructed to leave the warships outside the harbour and only enter on-board the HYLTONIA. The two supply ship would deliver ammunition and 300 MADSEN light machine guns. When in town, Thomson’s mission was to gather intelligence about the military situation in general and about the state and morale of the Estonian and Bolshevik armies. He should identify the main needs of the Estonians to carry out its operations and whether Finns continued to arrive. He should finally gather any other information *“that would be useful in order to plan future operations or to render more assistance, but being careful not to give the Esthonians any hope of armed assistance form us”*.

He should also try to find out if the Bolsheviks had any vessels in Riga or planned to send some, if there had been additional mine-laying and the state of their vessels in Kronstadt. He was forbidden to communicate with Germans.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1664. D.C.N.S. 26061 Date 18.2.19 Subject “Denmark. Request from Esthonian Representative that Bt Sqdn be sent to Reval to guard against Bolshevik action” and the attached documents.

<sup>73</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1664. HMS CALEDON No. 523.F Orders for Commander Evelyn C. O. Thomson, D.S.O., Superintending Delivery of Munitions to Esthonians of 17-2-1919.

### ***The coming German offensive in Courland***

On 22 February Cowan reported that he had returned from a third visit to Libau. This time the ice situation allowed his force of two cruisers and four destroyers to enter the harbour. The Latvian acting Prime Minister and the Defence Minister had informed him, that Goldingen (Kuldiga) had now been recaptured and a bombardment (carried out by his cruiser) had forced the Bolsheviks out of Windau. It was thereafter occupied by a force of 550 Germans and German Balts and Russians for the Baltic “Landwehr”.

Strong fresh German troops were arriving and von der Goltz contemplated an advance on Riga on the pretext of ridding Latvia of the Bolsheviks. The Latvian government is too weak to counter the German pressure. The Latvians were far less united than the Estonians. Inspired by a meeting with Valters and Zālītis before departing Cowan wanted firstly clear British support for Latvia against the Germans, secondly a clear effort to control the *“overbearing, and often cruel treatment of the civil population”* during German military operations and thirdly that Britain responded to the often repeated, urgent Latvian requests for money, food and clothing. The lack of funds had made the Latvians unable to pay for the Swedish volunteers. When Riga was retaken, the Allies should send food immediately.

Cowan had the impression that the Germans wanted to prevent that the British donated weapons reached the Latvians. The weapons were still on-board a ship in port. Quoting a French intelligence officer, who had escaped from Moscow, the Bolshevik army was increasing and the regime’s influence in Russia was increasing rather than decreasing. The Red forces fought well against their countrymen, but were quickly demoralised when fighting outside forces such as Finns.

During the visit to Libau, Bosanquet had been ashore together with the Captain of HMS PHAETON, Captain John Ewen Cameron, who would be acting force

commander when Cowan returned to England on 21 February with the largest part of the Royal Navy units in the Baltic Sea.

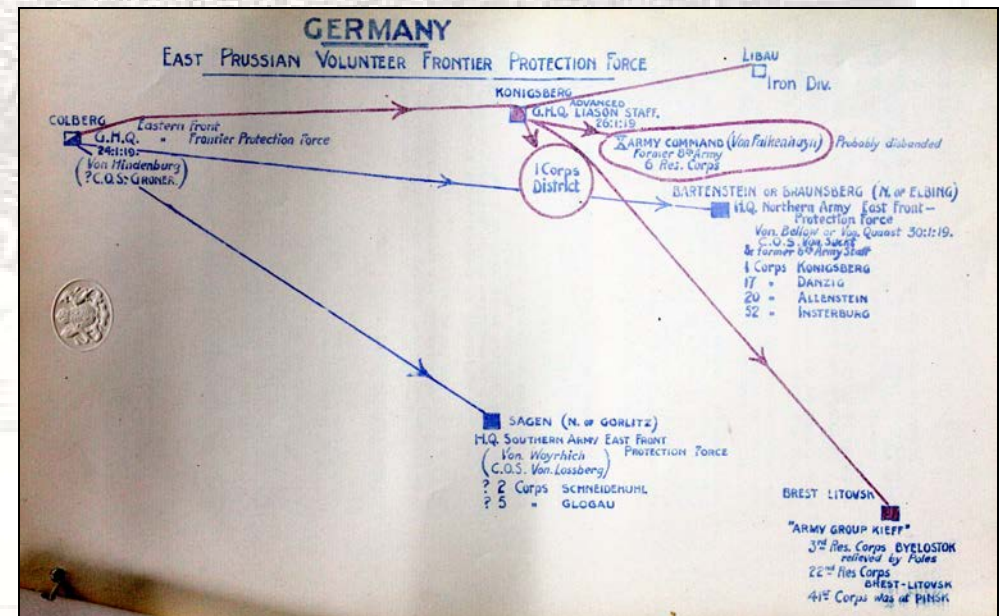
Bosanquet also sent his report on 22 February. He described the divisions in the Latvian government – two ministers were pro-German and the rest supported the Entente - and went on to outline the changed military situation. On 18 February the Germans had landed the first major contingent of fresh, well-disciplined troops – 1.470, including 400 cavalry. I was only the first part of a much larger force. The Latvian Defence Minister estimated that an advance on Riga would start early March. A German officer had told Bosanquet that the mission was to establish a forward defence of Germany against the Bolsheviks. The German “*had disclaimed all connection between the military action now being taken and the terms of the Armistice, and had implied that the Germans were acting purely in their own interests*”.

Bosanquet expected that German forces would operate from Shaulen (Siauliai) in Lithuania towards Mitau (Jelgava). The new forces would advance from Wainoden (Vainode) on Latvia’s southern border towards Riga. The Latvian and Baltic Germans would move north to take Windau. Part of the British donated weapons in Libau was now in use at the front. The Latvian mobilisation only slowly yielded results; however there were signs that some of the members of the Red Latvian forces that had invaded the country on behalf of Soviet Russia became ever more willing to change sides to the national army. The tendency was also nourished by the heavy losses and harsh winter conditions in the fighting with the Estonian – and by the observation that the Russian Bolsheviks fought very badly. The working class in Riga was turning against the Bolsheviks on account of the rising prices.

The Latvian Defence minister had complained that the Germans still acted as an occupation force. Von der Goltz had declared that all forces were under his

command, and ignored the national government. Bosanquet wrote about his conversation with the designated commander of the Swedish volunteers and other Swedes. The corps would require a large budget donation, friction between the Latvian government and the Baltic Germans blocked the arrival of the first 1.000 volunteers, a force that needed 800-900 rifles and 24 machine guns.

There was a general suspicion between the Baltic Germans and the Latvian leaders. The former wanted formal equality of the German with the Latvian language and protection of their property right, something that the government found unable to accept to guarantee the traditional local rulers.



British mid-February 1919 Military Intelligence view of von der Goltz forces’ – the “Iron Division’s” - relationship to the German Army command structure.



Bosanquet concluded that the differences between the Latvian government and the Baltic Germans would create serious problems when the Bolsheviks had been driven-out. The differences would be reinforced by Reich-German intrigue. In spite of the problems with the Germans, Germany's increased military activity in Courland "can only be welcomed" due to the Bolshevik danger.

### ***Cameron acting Senior Naval Officer, Baltic Force***

On 20 February, the day before he departed from Copenhagen, Cowan gave his directives to Captain Cameron. Libau should be visited at no longer than ten days interval and according to the situation to keep the British Government updated. The 500.000 rounds of ammunition left in the HOLYWOOD should be handed over to the Latvians "by the first convenient opportunity". The blockade against Germany should be maintained and measures should be taken against Bolshevik sabotage.<sup>74</sup>

The Latvians continued to encourage support by underlining the progress made. On 23 February the War Office noted that the Latvian Delegation in Paris had informed the Allies that it had now been able to mobilise five infantry and one cavalry regiment for use on the Courland front.<sup>75</sup>

### ***Churchill and the Baltic theatre of anti-Bolshevik operations***

On the morning of 24 February, the Imperial General Staff presented a Russia policy memorandum that should have been a response to the Prime Minister's 12 February wish. It underlined the fundamental change in the British Army's attitude to the fight against Bolshevism that had been the result of Churchill's

<sup>74</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1664. . HMS CALEDON no. 6/331 of 22-2-1919 for The C-in-C, Grand Fleet. (Bosanquet) On board H.M.S. "CALEDON" 22-2-1919 to His Majesty's Principle Secretary of State, for Foreign Affairs.

<sup>75</sup> TNA. WO 157/41. File 9/G/4 Russian Report w.o. 23-2-1919.

take-over. He has chosen the Baltic as the most important area. The memo initially stated that

*"The primary responsibility of the Allies is to ensure the protection of the following States whose integrity has been guaranteed, namely: Finland, Esthonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Rumania. , The first essential is to establish definitely the boundaries of these States. Having done this, the Bolsheviks should be given peremptory orders to withdraw beyond their frontiers. If they do not do so, it is the duty of the League of Nations to enforce its will. This may entail direct military intervention and definite responsibility must be allocated for various parts of the Western Front."*

The main Allies should take responsibility for the different listed countries. The United States should have Finland, France and Italy Poland and Romania. The Americans should also take responsibility for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, but if they failed to do so, England should step in. The troops at Archangelsk and Murmansk should be closed down before summer; the White forces in Siberia should only have equipment support. The main British effort outside the Baltic should be in the south. Denikin should have volunteer British instructors and the British force in Southern Caucasus that controlled Baku should remain.

In his forwarding not, the War Secretary made clear that he completely supported the staff's position. He asked that the War Cabinet gave their approval "in principle" and that he was given "full authority to act within their scope and limitations so far as British forces are concerned".

Churchill recognized fully "the enormous difficulties which beset the Cabinet in arriving at any decision of general policy, having regard to the divergent



*counsels among the Allies. But it is indispensable to have some decision which can govern and guide the employment and safeguarding of British resources and interests in the various theatres where we have commitments*".<sup>76</sup>

Later that day in the War Cabinet meeting Lloyd George underlined that Russia had been discussed three times. In spite of British efforts, no common position had been developing. Churchill stated that the General Staff had developed the four options ready that the Prime Minister had asked for on the 12<sup>th</sup> and underlined that the situation in North Russia required an early decision.

Lloyd George thought that all policy about Russia should be dealt with by the allies together. When Churchill pressed again to days later for a British discussion on the basis of the General Staff Memorandum before the Prime Minister left for Paris, the latter rejected the possibility. He knew the position of the War Cabinet and would present it to the Allies. Churchill could not force the British delegation to present his preferred strategy.<sup>77</sup>

### ***Events in and off Courland***

The German Courland counter-offensive had started on 3 March, the day before the Latvian request of 14 February was sent to the Admiralty. The Admiralty was uncertain about the position of the two Latvian representatives, but it repeated requests made earlier through various channels. On 9 March, the Director of Naval Intelligence noted that the Latvian government "*worthy of support*", and on that day the Admiralty made the Foreign Office clear that nothing could be done until a policy had been decided. The question of whether to support Latvian

<sup>76</sup> TNA. CAB 24/75. G.T. No. 6885 "NOTE FOR THE CABINET ON FUTURE MILITARY OPERATIONS' IN RUSSIA" of 24 February 1919.

<sup>77</sup> TNA. CAB 23/9 Minutes of the 535<sup>th</sup> meeting on 24-2-1919, p.162, and 437<sup>th</sup> meeting on 26-2-1919, p. 176.

independence remained "*unsettled*". Now it wanted to make clear to the Foreign Office that the work of the naval officers in the Baltic would be "*much facilitated if they could be informed of the policy which they are to support*". The Admiralty wanted "*urgently to impress*" on the Foreign Secretary that such a policy was necessary.<sup>78</sup> The thinking pause created by the ice was over.

The acting British naval commander in the Baltic returned to Libau on 28 February, one week after Cowan's departure. Due to his illness, Bosanquet had now been replaced by Mr. Neil Buchanan as political advisor. Captain Cameron sent his report on 5 March.

Short time after his arrival he was joined in Libau by Pitka on-board the LENNUK. The aggressive Estonian naval commander had intended to bombard Windau when he realized that the port was occupied by Germans. He came to make the German authorities hand over vessels that they had requisitioned in Reval, especially an ice-breaker that he would need in an attack on Riga. Pitka informed Cameron that there was still serious fighting on the Narva front whereas the Estonians were advancing in the south-east and hoped to take Wolmar (Valmiera) in north-eastern Latvia. Pitka did not consider the Bolshevik ships in Kronstadt a serious threat due to their low maintenance status and indifferent crew training.

Cameron had meetings with Acting Prime Minister Valters and Defence Minister Zālītis. As they told him that Ulmanis was expected to return to Latvia late 1 March, the Captain decided to delay his departure to 3 March. The two Latvians repeated the request for a permanent British naval presence in Libau. The need was now justified by "*unforeseen complications*". The Latvians had found letters that the Baltic German leaders planned a coup against the Provisional Government, prepared together with von der Goltz. The Latvians would be

<sup>78</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1664. F.O. 30746 of 4-3-1919 Proposal that British warships should be permanently stationed in Lettish ports. (Admiralty) M. 01040 of 9-3-1919 to The Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office.

replaced by Baltic Germans that would also appoint a Baltic War Lord as formal supreme commander. As part of the coup, the Germans had tried to take over the British donated weapons and ammunition, stored on-board the freighter SARATOV. The attempt had been blocked by Latvian forces, but to protect the weapons, the freighter was now moved from the Inner to the Outer Libau harbour. The German Libau Governor tried to limit the mobilised Latvian forces to 300 due to their alleged Bolshevik tendencies. The government's attempt to recruit volunteers to bypass this limitation had largely failed.

The conspirators had failed because von der Goltz had distanced the Reich Germans from this "Baltic Plot", and the two Latvian ministers now considered that the position of the Provisional Government had been strengthened. It is probably Cameron's report of the coup attempt that made the Director on Naval Intelligence support a permanent naval presence in his 9 March comments.

The Latvians estimated that von der Goltz was concentrating a force of 9,000 near Wainoden, preparing to start an offensive towards Mitau and Riga on 5 March. The Germans were still landing fresh troops in Libau. The morale of the German troops was good, but *"the increasing antagonism of the Germans and the Balts on the one hand and the Letts on the other seems to be hampering military operations against the Bolsheviks"*. So far the Latvians had only played a small part in the effort to recover their country. The government's financial situation remained weak because of the negative attitude of the merchants, mainly German and Jews.

In the meeting with "Uhlmanes" (Ulmanis) after his return, the Latvian Premier noted with satisfaction that he had reached agreement with the Estonians and Lithuanians about military cooperation in the border districts. The Latvian wanted to take over the administration of Libau and the recaptured towns of Windau and Goldingen from the Germans, and Cameron recommended that the Entente

supported that request. The Germans might agree because of the existing friction between von der Goltz and the German police director.

Ulmanis was happy to hear that the British planned to send a mission to Libau;

*"only by entering into closer relations with the Allied Powers and by dissociating themselves from the Baltic and German element, could the Provisional Government hope to obtain the cordial support of the Lettish population, which was very hostile to the Germans"*.

The Prime Minister underlined that beside basic military equipment and heavy weapons for his developing military forces, he would need 1,500 tons of flour or cereals a month for Riga after the city had been recaptured, he *"considers this essential for if the populace cannot be fed there will be grave risk of a local uprising ..."*.

Cameron concluded that *"It seems clear that at present the Lettish troops are incapable of driving out the invading Bolsheviks and that only the Germans can undertake this operation. However, the result will be that the Germans will become predominant in the country and the great majority of the people are strongly anti-German."*

*If this state of affairs is not desired by the Allied Governments, it would appear to be absolutely necessary to land a force of sympathetic Allied troops before the Germans can be ordered to withdraw.*

*A comparatively small but well-equipped British Force would restore confidence and prevent local Bolshevism while at the same time it would greatly encourage the Lettish recruiting and tend to uphold the Lettish Government."*<sup>79</sup>

<sup>79</sup> TNA. ADM 137/1665. "PHAETON" Secret of 5-3-1919 to the Secretary to the Admiralty.

There were no easy options. The Admiralty sent copies to the Foreign Office and War Office.

The military situation continued to improve in Estonia and northern Latvia in early March. The Estonians had landed on Ösel (Saaremaa) and captured the main city, Arensburg, and Finnish volunteers had advanced more than 60 kilometres south of Walk (Valga, Valka).

Balfour reported 4 March from Paris that he recommended to loan to Estonia that her delegates sought. They had cleared their country of the Bolsheviks, and it was important to avoid them taking a German loan. If France supported Poland and Czecho-Slovakia financially, Britain could help the Baltic Provinces.

On the same day Kilmarnock reported that he had information from the British Military Attaché in Copenhagen that the Germans planned to start their offensive towards Riga the next day. They would use the 3.000 German troops they had in Libau and the 9.000 in Wainoden (Vainode). The Latvian force had not been invited to participate. On 6 March the Latvians were reported to be involved in clearing the railway between Libau and Windau at the same time as German troops advanced towards Talsen (Talsi) in central Courland. In another telegram he reported that Tõnisson had found that the French seemed to support a pan-Russian policy rather than supporting Baltic independence. *“Any such policy would be bitterly opposed in Baltic States”*.

10 March, a week after they had started their Courland offensive, the Germans to complain about the Allied obstacles to the effort against the Bolsheviks. A telegram from Libau to the press underlined that the blockade placed the German troops *“in a difficult and dangerous position”*.

Lord Kilmarnock reported the next day that Ulmanis had returned to Libau from Lithuania. The Lithuanian Government had strengthened its position and was increasingly getting the support of the landowners. The German troops in

Lithuanians were holding the front against the Bolsheviks east of Kowno. The Lithuanian leaders wanted to delay any offensive against Vilna (Vilnius) until they and not the Germans could take the city. The Kowno government was *“most anxious”* to come to an arrangement with the Entente.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> TNA. WO 157/41. White Summary. Baltic States. Operations. Baltic Provinces. Possible German attack against Riga. Foreign Office telegram 588 of 4-3-1919; Esthonia, Foreign Office telegram 589 of 4-3-1919; Loan to Esthonian Government. Foreign Office telegram 414 of 4-3-1919; Lithuanian Government. Foreign Office telegram No. 591 of 5-3-1919; Operations. Foreign Office telegram No. 615 of 6-3-1919; Germany, Norning Post of 10-3-1919.



## Chapter 5:

### *Spring 1919: A period of Alliance politics confronted by politico-military activism.*

#### ***Half-hearted intervention stalled***

During the first months of the intervention the decision about whether or not to assist the Baltic nations in their ambitions had rested in London and with some mid-level Royal Navy officers in the Baltic. The decision group members had been divided; even the leaders of the Foreign Office disagreed, and no British policy had been developed before the key players moved to Paris, where the Peace Conference had started in the second half of January.

Only the Royal Navy had an updated awareness of the developments in the Baltic Provinces and responsibility for operations in the region, and by 9 March the Admiralty was losing patience with the politicians. The Foreign Office had only forwarded the 14 February support request from G. W. Bisseneek (Georgs Bisenieks) and General A. Missin (Augusts Misins) from the Latvian representation in London to the Director of Naval Intelligence. He considered the Latvian government “*worthy of support*”, however, any the Admiralty reaction to such requests “*would be much facilitated if they could be informed of the policy which they are to support...*” The navy intended to continue its presence in Latvian and Estonian waters, and it underlined the British interests in the two countries would be “*considerably advanced*” if British diplomatic, commercial and military representatives were established in their capitals. Then the British government could be advised about which form of assistance that would be most effective and the use of the support could be monitored.

The already authorised support had now been delivered. On 9 March Commander Evelyn Thomson reported that he had handed-over the weapons he had found on-board the HOLYWOOD and HYLTONIA on 4 March. 12 field artillery guns and 6 howitzers, 20.000 Russian army rifles; 300 Madsen light machine guns had been supplemented with 181 Lewis guns – all with ammunition - 20 light trucks and 10 other cars, coal and petrol. When he left Reval on 5 March the port had been ice free. Thomson also forwarded reports about atrocities carried-out in Bolshevik controlled areas during the winter. He also reported on the military at the Estonian fronts and the naval situation and the urgent supply requirements. According to his information, the larger Red Baltic Fleet vessels at Kronstadt lacked fuel for operations and in a meeting on 17 January Trotsky had considered the whole fleet unfit for active service. He saw it as necessary to abolish the ship committees and restore authority to the commanders to rebuild effectiveness. The Estonians, the Bolsheviks may be able to have the battleship PETROPAVLOVSK, the cruiser OLEG, three modern destroyers and three submarines ready for operations in the spring. The Estonians were making their coastal batteries ready. Laidoner had handed over a list of additional requirements that included 25 armoured cars, 8 bomber aircraft, 4 hydroplanes, 250 machine guns and 300 additional Madsens as well as boots, military overcoats and cloth for winter uniforms.

The political situation in the country was dominated by discussion of the land reform issue up to the April elections to the Constituent Assembly. In a conversation with Thomson on 27 April, Konstantin Päts had underlined that

because his soldiers were farmers, he has come to terms with the Bolsheviks no later than end April, hopefully “*as a result of victory in the field*” or by inducing the Finns to start operations on their Russian border. The burden of the war was also crippling to the economy. A crisis would come two months later.

The Naval Staff Director of Operations, Captain Dudley Pound, noted on 14 March that it seemed to be “*an undoubted fact*” that Estonia would have to make peace “*this year*”, probably from a situation of weakness. To stabilise moral it would be necessary to continue the Royal Navy ships’ visits to Reval as well as to re-open trade to overcome unemployment. Fremantle agreed with the suggestions and it was decided to re-opened trade from 1 April.<sup>81</sup>

Otherwise the information about the threatening crisis later in spring did not help Cowan, his representative in Libau, and the Board of Admiralty. They had to wait. Now the officials against or critical of support to the Balts were in a position to freeze any follow-up action or increase of what had been done since late November. Now they just had to underline that the big five Allied powers – France, Great Britain, the U.S., Italy and Japan – had to develop a common policy before any further assistance could be given. In 1918 the leaders of the three Baltic Provinces had been able to concentrate on convincing a few key decision-makers in London, Paris and the Scandinavian capitals about the justness of their cause, they now had to large, heterogeneous delegations of especially Great

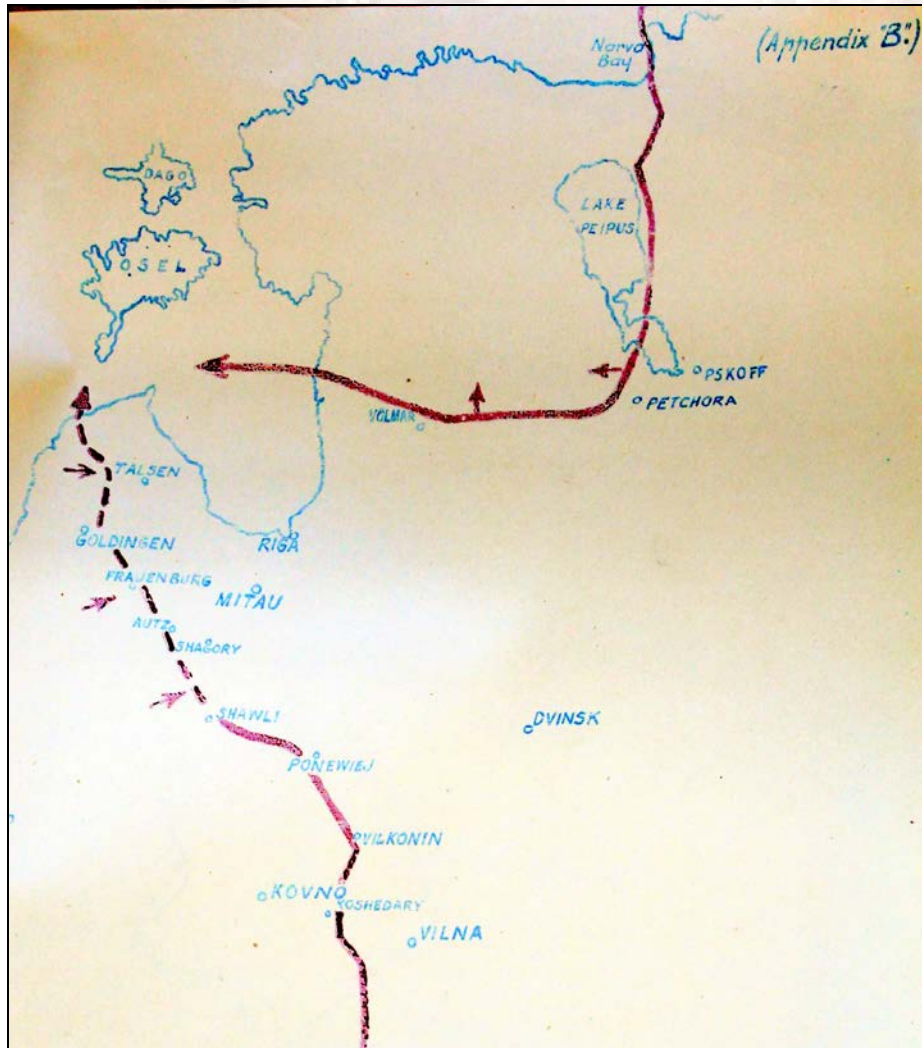
Britain, France and the U.S. Now the issue was no longer only the value and relevance of their arguments that counted. A decision in principle in their favour was not enough. They also had to force the conference to formulate a relevant policy as well as authorise and co-ordinate implementation of that policy.

This was an up-hill effort. The Allied Powers did not want to do something that would undermine the effort to replace the Russian Soviet State with anything else, and anti-Bolshevik Russian lobbyist had few problems finding willing ears among those members of the delegations that considered support of the Baltic ambitions hair-brained idealism. Fortunately for the Baltic States the actions the General von der Goltz in Latvia forced the Allies to decide and act before they would otherwise have done. The purpose of the conference was to make peace by containing Germany. The fact that effective German units did to the local Bolsheviks on land what the Allies had no will to do themselves was just nice.

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<sup>81</sup> TNA, ADM 137/1664. M.01040 to The Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office of 9-3-1919 with DMI note to F.O.30746 “Proposal that British warships should be permanently stationed in Lettish Ports” of 4-3-1919; ADM 137/1665, HMS VERDUN to Senior Naval Officer, Baltic Force; British Vice Consulate, Reval, 24-1-1919; Translation of Professor Dr. Med. Wolfgang de Beyer’s narrative with regard to the atrocities, committed by the Bolsheviks at DORPAT of 21-1-1919; “Report on the Position of Affairs in Esthonia”, HYLTONIA 5-3-1919; “Summary of conversation with Gen. Laidoner, C in C of Esthonian Forces”, 28-2-1919; “Summary of interview with Mr. Päfts at Reval” 27-3-1919, “Urgent Naval Requirements” from Captain Pitka; “Register of articles which have to be ordered in England for the Esthonian government”; D.O.D.(H) comments of 14-3-1919.





### **Four personalities**

The four great power personalities that came to define what happened in the Baltic States in 1919 – and thereafter – entered the scene during the winter and early spring months. Three have already been mentioned. Von der Goltz took command of the increasing number of reliable German volunteers and prepared to use them to balance the effect of the Entente victory in the West by establishing control of Western Lithuania and Courland.

Cowan had arrived as Sinclair's far more self-confident and aggressive replacement as Royal Naval senior officer in the Baltic in winter and gradually expanded his freedom of action envelope. By March he had already established the Royal Navy routine role in Libau. In this chapter the operations of the Light Cruiser Squadron will only be covered when he plays an active or new role.

The always aggressive and ambitious Churchill, Secretary of War and Air, looked for a role, hopefully visible, for his forces. Not an easy task considering his government's rejection of another land force commitment. During spring he did not see any possibilities in the Baltic.

The fourth key person was the young convincingly competent British civil servant Stephen George Tallents. However, even if he entered the region during spring, he had to wait before he could play a significant role. Late February he was dispatched from his job as his country's food aid representative in Poland to clarify the need for aid to the Baltic provinces. After a few years as civil servant before the war, the then 30 years old former Territorial Army officer had joined the Irish Guard as a platoon leader. He demonstrated his analytic powers after his first frontline weeks by writing a trench warfare guide for platoon leaders that was accepted for general distribution by the army. In spring 1915 he had received a serious leg wound, and during his recovery he worked in David Lloyd George's Ministry of Munitions building a defence of skilled workers against War Office recruiting that would undermine the increase of production essential to the war

The British War Office evaluation of the situation in the Baltic States mid-March 1919. Estonia under the pressure of Bolshevik counter-offensive.

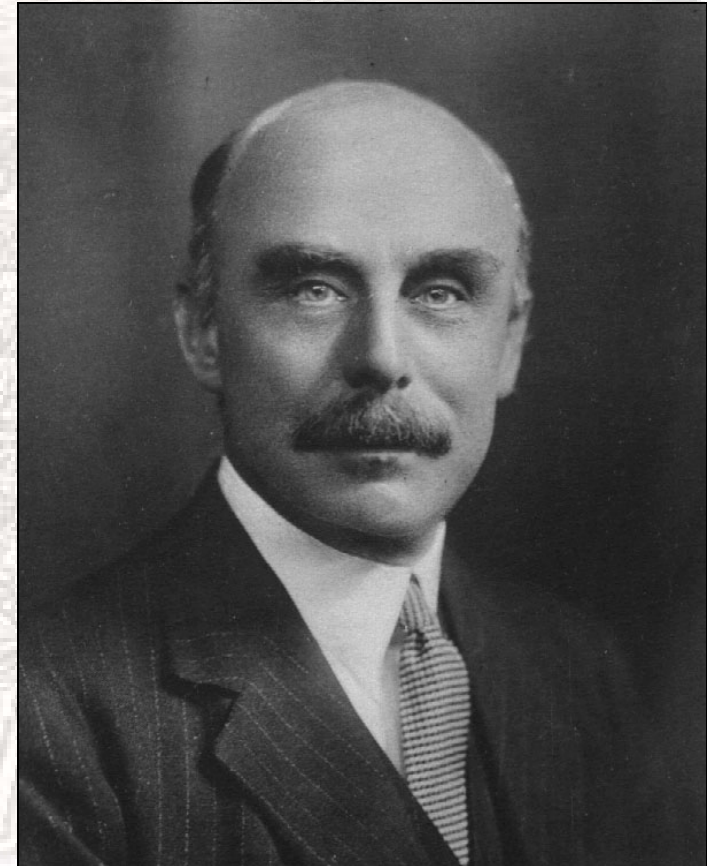
(The National Archives)



effort. After his recovery he was transferred to the Ministry of Food and was given a key role by – now Prime Minister – Lloyd George’s government in the accelerated introduction of rationing necessary to meet the serious food crisis in British cities in winter 1917-18. After the Armistice he volunteered to go to Poland to participate in the distribution of Allied food aid to that country. In order to make him effective he was given the temporary rank of lieutenant-colonel that matched his age, leadership and management experience as well as natural authority.<sup>82</sup>

### **Tallents and Keenan**

Late February Tallents was dispatched by from Warsaw to the Baltic coast on a fact-finding tour by the British delegation to the Peace Conference in Paris. He arrived on 12 March in Libau on-board a British destroyer from Danzig. Via the light cruiser HMS INCONSTANT landed and was met by the Major Keenan, who had arrived with two assistants on 6 March as British military and political commissioner in town. General Staff temporary Major Augustine Henry Keenan mission had been decided mid-February, but his arrival had been delayed.



Stephen Tallents, who now entered the scene gradually to become a key actor.  
The portrait from later in life.  
(Man and Boy)

According to the diplomat Herbert Adolphus Grant Watson, who joined Keenan a couple of weeks later, the major was an intelligence officer. Keenan had been a flax-trader in the area before the war and knew Latvia well. Von der Goltz had granted Keenan and his assistants’ freedom of move in the town. The German general was in the process of building-up his forces. Tallents noted that some

<sup>82</sup> A summary of the substance of chapters VII-XVII in Sir Stephen Tallents: Man and Boy. London 1943; TNA, FO 608/266, "Situation in Baltic", dated 13-2-1919.

were drafts not motivated to carry-out offensive operations. On 9 March even before Tallents' arrival, Ulmanis informed the INCONSTANT's captain that the arrival of Keenan's mission had "a great effect" on the German authorities. Their "tone" in relation to the Latvians had shown a marked improvement.

Tallents saw the Latvian force of estimated 2.000 poorly equipped soldiers undergoing training, met Ulmanis and a group of local business leaders and a couple of trade union leaders who underlined that the situation was still far from stable.

He also met the Lithuanian government delegation that has been sent to Libau to contact the Allies. One in the group was a railway engineer who underlined that the Bolsheviks had removed much of the rolling stocks from his country. A replacement he needed 500 locomotives and 10.000 railway trucks. Tallents listed all the massive requirements from both Latvians and Lithuanians and sent the compiled result by destroyer to Paris via Copenhagen. He thereafter cabled Paris that the immediate need was two ship-loads of flour to be administered by the senior naval officer in Libau. When Tallents collected requirements his assistant visited the front and came back with the impression that the moral of the Red forces was far from solid. On the other hand, the German troops he had met in Libau were "in a much better state of discipline than those I saw at Danzig". The Lithuanian delegation that he met in Libau impressed him more than most of the Latvians.

Members of British delegation in Paris read Tallents' full and very detailed report about Latvia and Lithuania 2-3 weeks later. It was noted that Tallents was in line with what Major Keenan had sent and that "This is a very interesting report and strongly favours the view that if this region is to be saved from the Bolsheviks and Germans limited quantities of food must be sent at once."

On 15 March Tallents continued his fact-finding trip, arriving in Tallinn the next evening, proceeding morning 17 March to arrange a meeting with Konstantin Päts

and later members of his government. Even before the meeting he obtained a list of military and civilian requirements from a newly arrived American relief representative and agreed to follow him on a visit to the front. The situation there would decide if relief assistance was relevant. After having sent the immediate list of needs to Paris via Helsinki, Tallents travelled to the front by train on 18 March and the next day he observed the Estonian forces in heavy skirmishing with Bolshevik forces close on the small railway station in Piusa north of Pechory. He met and was suitably impressed by Pitka, who had equipped the armoured trains with guns from his ships, and then commanded the local action on the southern front. Tallents returned to Tallinn on 22 March. By investigations by his assistant and by his own discussion with Laidoner Tallents got a clear impression of the Estonian army and its needs. 9.000 of the force of 25.000 still lacked all equipment. The white Russian force in the country had difficult relations with the Estonia. The Finnish volunteers who accosted in the capture of Narva some weeks earlier were no longer available. A force of 2.000 Latvians training in Tartu was still not ready for the front.

After another meeting with Päts, Tallents travelled home via Helsinki, reaching London on 3 April and then onwards to Paris. Early April – probably on the 8<sup>th</sup> - he briefed Lord Robert Cecil about his journey, underlining that the Baltic countries badly needed support if they were not to come under either Bolshevik or German rule. He also made clear that the picture given by the London papers that the fighting in Estonia had been done by the Finnish volunteers was basically wrong. They had withdrawn from the fighting after they pay had been embezzled. In spite of lack of weapons, equipment and funds, far the largest part of the fighting was done by the Estonians themselves, inspired by dynamic tactical leaders as Pitka and wisely managed by Laidoner. After describing the Estonian military effort, Tallents analysed the political situation in the country and noted that Päts stated that he planned to fight until Petrograd had been captured. Thereafter he passed the information that the U.S. was trying to clarify the Estonian requirements for food and raw material.

Tallents concluded that *“Lithuania, Lettland and Esthonia require continuous attention at close quarters ... All three countries feel themselves to be utterly dependent on Allied support, moral as well as material”*. Close attention was needed because of the basic differences of their situation. It was unfortunately that the Peace Conference was so ill-informed about the situation. If Britain and the other Allies decided to help the three states towards independence “with some form of rapprochement with a new Russia” a suitable person should be sent with a strong British mission to report and guide support. Tallents was personally willing to assist such a mission, which should be based in Reval, where it would also be well placed for “an extension into Russia”. In the report he clearly saw himself as its *“second in command”*.

Robert Cecil noted after their conversation that the *“Report of Colonel Tallents is scarcely my pidgin”*. He probably referred to its very long and detailed description of the fighting observed in South Estonia and his less than full agreement with Tallents’ forceful endorsement of the Estonian effort. However, in spite of his stated scepticism, Cecil suggested to his private secretary, Sir Eric Drummond, that Tallents became appointed *“as chief of a British Mission to Reval”*. Even as early as 4 April it was noted in the War Office information sheet that it was *“understood that he will return to the Baltic Provinces”*.

After consultation with others, Cecil informed Tallents that he was to lead a mission covering all three countries and that he should go to London to recruit and organise the group. This proved far from simple, and he was not ready to go to Paris until late May, where he was informed that his British Mission would operate parallel to an international military mission would be established under General Sir Hubert Gough.

Tallents left Paris on 27 May to travel to the Baltic countries via Central Europa, again arriving in Libau on destroyer from Danzig 1 or 2 June.<sup>83</sup>

### ***Goltz occupying Courland for right-wing Germany***

Since his departure mid-March von Goltz had dominated and effectively destabilised Latvia hoping to alter the geopolitical situation in favour of his objective of creating a German soldier colonised area that could bridge Germany’s and Russia’s future co-operation against the Entente and from here influence the political development at home in a right-wing, National-Conservative direction.<sup>84</sup>

The development in Courland after Tallents left for Tallinn mid-March was closely monitored by Keenan. He reported directly to the British delegation in Paris. On 27 March German forces had reached the river Courish Aa (Lielupe) southwest of Riga from Mesoten (Mežotne) to Kalnzem (Kalnciems) and Kemmern (Ķemeri) on the coast of the Gulf of Riga. Three days later he reported about the Bolshevik forces defending the river line. Three out of the four Red regiments were reported to be Latvian Rifle Regiments.

The next day the foreign press noted that even if open British-German co-operation was ruled out until the peace treaty had been signed, they acted “in accord” in practice. *“The Germans and English are at on the main question, viz: - the necessity for fighting the Bolsheviks...”*

<sup>83</sup> TNA, FO 608/184 Tallents “Situation in Latvia & Lithuania” of 15-3-1919; “Report by LT.COL. Tallents, S.E.C. British Relief Mission on a visit to Esthonia: March 1919”; Robert Cecil to Sir Eric Drummond stamped 8-4-1919; Tallents, pp. 287-307; ADM 137/1665, The Commanding Officer, HMS INCONSTANT to the Senior Naval Officer Baltic Force on 16-3-1919; Herbert A. Grant Watson: An Account of a Mission to the Baltic States in the Year 1919 with a Record of Subsequent Events, London 1955; WO 157/42, Baltic Provinces, British Representatives in the Baltic Provinces.

<sup>84</sup> Accurately summarised by Tallents, p. 280 many years later on the basis of von der Goltz’ memoirs.





Map attached to Keenan's 27 March report. The blue interrupted line show the Bolshevik lines on 3 March, the red line the situation 24 days later, now with German control of Mitau (Jelgava) with its railway junction. The situation in Estonia added.  
(The National Archives)

Earlier on the day Keenan had passed-on a German request to be supplied with more than twenty locomotives of different types and roughly a thousand various railway wagons. The equipment was needed to supply the population of Riga and other large towns in western Latvia. The military situation made an early capture of the Latvian possible, but this could only happen if the town could be supplied. If Riga was left in Bolshevik hands, they might attempt to reinforce their forces in

Courland. The readers in Paris were unhappy "that owing to our inactivity the Germans are playing so large a part on this front". They noted that the want of rolling stock was the result of earlier requisitioning. It would be best to wait until Riga could be reached by sea again. Keenan was instructed on 31 March to reject the German request, but even before then he had raised the issue of logistic support of the German offensive again. The Germans depended on the railway lines along the coast to Libau and onwards to Prekulin as well as the better one from Tilsit over Shavli (Šiauliai) to Mitau (Jelgava) for supplies, where, however, the last part was still not repaired. If they lacked what they needed, they would start local requisitions in the districts already left with little after the Bolsheviks' retreat. He recommended that the Allies eased the naval blockade of military supplies from Germany to the Courland ports. Balfour replied to Keenan on 2 April asking about the local coal situation in Libau as the Germans had informed the Allies that the stocks were empty. Keenan should report about the most urgently needed supplies.

### ***Grant Watson joins Keenan***

On 28 March the diplomat Herbert Grant Watson arrived in Libau. He had been in the port one month earlier during Captain Cameron's visit and had now been detached from the Copenhagen representation to replace Bosanquet in Latvia as the latter had been posted to Reval. Watson underlined after his first contacts that it was essential that supplies were sent. The Latvian government was threatened by a workers' revolt and would fall without early and visible sign of Allied support, and thereafter the Germans were likely to assume full control. Watson's proposal was supported by a telegram from Lord Curzon to Balfour on 1 April. The situation would be "hopeless" if the Allies did not accept that the limited support that they had allowed for Estonia should also be given to Latvia. Keenan reported on 31 March that the Bolsheviks the day before had started a counter offensive at Schlock (Sloka) close to the Riga Gulf coast, but the Germans had been able to stop them. He also noted that the unsettled situation among the

Libau workers was the result of reduced bread rations. The arrival of Watson in Libau meant that it would be possible to start covering Lithuania without leaving developments in Libau unmonitored. The next day Keenan reported that the Germans had stabilised the situation, but on 6 April Keenan reported that the Bolshevik offensive continued.

On 2 April Keenan's comprehensive written report of 26 March reached Paris. Much of its contents just added to what he had written in reports from 18 and 22 March. Much had been repeated in the telegrams he had sent in the next days, but the letters had more space for analysis and arguments. The intelligence officer's view of von der Goltz was that *"He is a man who will make an unscrupulous dictator, if he is allowed to get too much liberty here"*. Keenan had no information about Goltz' real intentions, but as he had done on 18 March he guessed that he aimed at reaching the railway between Riga and Dwinsk (Dünaburg, Daugavpils), thereby cutting the Bolshevik supply line. There were rumours that Goltz had agreed with Laidoner that their forces should meet at Friedrichstadt (Jaunjelgava) halfway between Riga and Dwinsk.

### ***Sabotage of Latvian mobilisation and risk of Allied withdrawal***

The Germans appeared to sabotage the Latvian mobilisation attempts. On 18 March Keenan had estimated that even with this sabotage it would take at least three months to build-up a viable Latvian force. On 6 April Keenan asked the Allies to put pressure on the Germans to make them allow the Latvian mobilisation and to force them to force them naming Goltz' *"Occupation Army"* corps as *"German Auxiliary Force in Latvia"*.

The same day the British delegation received Keenan's telegram from 1 April that seemed to confirm that the Estonians advanced south. The now advanced along the railway from Alt-Schwanenburg (Vecgulbene) towards Kreuzburg (Krustpils).

On 31 March the British War Cabinet had one of its now very rare discussions of Allied Policy in Russia. The meeting was chaired by Bonar Law in the Prime Minister's absence. It was provoked by a statement to the Chamber of Deputies by the French Under-Secretary of State for War that the military intervention in Russia would end immediately. The cabinet discussed the different practical problems related to getting out of the Murmansk-Archangel area, but thereafter moved to a general discussion. With a general withdrawal from Russia "the fate of Esthonia would be sealed" and would mean that Britain deserted the group of states that were fighting the Bolsheviks. Austen Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, recommended a deal with the Bolsheviks. Admiral Fremantle suggested that it was urgent to decide the policy in regard to the Baltic States as *"a perilous situation"* for British forces would follow the breaking of the ice. When Churchill entered at the end of the meeting, he considered that the French statement might "gravely endanger" the lives of the 13.000 British soldiers in Russia. He wondered if the statement had the approval of the British Paris delegates. The next day Lloyd George cabled from Paris that he did not approve the making of the statement *"but is does in fact represent his strong opinion and the opinion of his colleagues on the Council of Four"*.<sup>85</sup>

In the Baltic region, March had been dominated by the German offensive from the Libau bridgehead to the railway junction of Mitau (Jelgava) just west of Riga.

<sup>85</sup> TNA, FO 608/184, B.M.4 "The Situation in Latvia" of 18.3.1919; B.M.5 "The Situation in Latvia" and 22 March 1919; K.12. "The Situation in Latvia", letter of 26-3-1919; K.21. German demand for rolling stock to provision Riga; K.22. Situation in Courland, both of 27-3-1919; K.25. "Military Situation in Latvia" of 30-3-1919; K.24. "Situation in Latvia" of 29-3-1919, Mr. Balfour to Major Keenan sent 2-4-1919; Grant Watson "Supplies for Lettish Government" of 29-3-1919; Lord Curzon to Mr. Balfour No. 414 of 1-4-1919; K.28. "Situation in Latvia" of 31-3-1919; B.M.14 "The Situation in Latvia" of 1-4-1919; K.29. "Military Situation in Esthonia" of 1-4-1919; K.32 "The situation in Latvia of 6-4-1919; CAB 23. War Cabinet 552, Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held on 31-3-1919, item "Allied Policy in Russia"; WO 157/42, Baltic Provinces, Latvia – General situation, Extracts from Foreign Press of 28-3-1919.



There is very little doubt that with the extremely weak commitment to support the Balts among the Allied leaders, the development had been dominated first by the surprising Estonian offensive and thereafter by Goltz' aggressive use of the Libau bridgehead.

Now the centre of events was at the Peace Conference in Paris. As Lloyd George had made clear, the Allied leaders simply wanted to go home. Some saw Baltic States' independence as the fair and just implementation of the Wilson principle of self-determination; others could only consider full Baltic independence politically attractive if the aim was to create a cordon sanitaire between Germany and a Bolshevik Russia. However, for most a far better outcome would be the replacement of the Bolshevik regime with a White ruler loyal to the Entente. If the White challengers of the Bolsheviks rejected the idea Baltic States independence, the realists would hesitate to give other support than what was necessary to keep the population of the larger cities well enough fed to inoculate it against renewed broad support of the Reds.

The victorious Estonians were keenly aware that their military success might only be temporary and therefore had to be used politically before any worsening of the situation. On 9 March the *"Russian Political Council"* had asked that any discussion of the future of the territories within the 1914 borders of the Russian Empire with the exception of *"the ethnographical Poland"* should be deferred. On 25 March the Estonian Foreign Minister, Jaan Poska, who represented his country in Paris protested. Poska underlined his people's right to decide its own future, keeping it separate from a Russia that had descended into anarchy and barbarism. The Russians in Paris suggested that the Estonian government should only be regarded as provisional. Poska argued against such a solution, underlined his country's *"formidable sacrifices"* in the unequal fight against the Russian Bolshevik that had been offered in confidence that the Allies would give assistance and sympathise it with support of its aspirations. Therefore he asks the Allied powers to extend de jure recognition of his country.

As previously the Estonians used other channels to launch or reinforce their message. On 12 March, only a few days after he had taken over his new position, the new British envoy to Copenhagen, Sir Charles Murray Marling, wrote that the Estonian representative, Karl Menning, had informed him that his countrymen *"are much depressed that Russian Committee are determined that Finland and Baltic provinces should be re-united with Russia"*. It might demoralise the soldiers fighting for the country's independence. In some weeks they would also be drawn to their farms. The British naval officer in Tallinn estimated that the Estonians could only go on fighting two more months. On that day Menning had also reported that an officer representing General Nikolai Yudenich, who called himself *"Commander-in-Chief on the Baltic Front"*, had offered to give the Estonians and Latvians assistance against the Bolsheviks. His effort would be reinforced from Finland and supported financially by the Baltic German landlords. Menning had asked the Finns for information and had been informed that very little support would come from Russians there. The British delegation in Paris concluded that this was *"an example of the intrigues of Balts (meaning Baltic Germans) & Russians to discredit the Baltic national movements"*.





Sir Charles Marling has been appointed Envoy to Denmark on 8 March 1919. He immediately continued the work for the Baltic States started by his predecessor.  
(en.wikipedia.org)

On 27 March Marling continued his help to the Estonians. Menning had underlined that the situation was becoming critical due to lack of money and

food. Provisions promised by Paris had not arrived. The departure of the Finnish volunteers had affected the moral of the troops negatively. Uncertainty about what the Entente wanted combined with the strengthened position of the Baltic Germans to nourish local Bolshevism. The only positive element was the arrival of Bosanquet as Consul to Reval, but material assistance was essential to built-up optimism.

At the end of March came information from a White Russian naval source in Paris that the Bolsheviks were in the process of reorganising the naval forces for operations against the Estonian flank and against Helsinki. Such information was likely to alert Cowan.

Late March also brought the critical news from Estonia the Finnish troops had left. The British envoy in Helsinki underlined that the reason was that the Estonians had not fulfilled their obligation to pay the volunteers.

### ***Curzon's push***

The Estonians may have catalysed the basically sympathetic analysis that the acting Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon sent to Paris on 28 March. The French were expecting the British to support the Balts as France was concentration on Poland and Czecho-Slovakia. The Estonians were pressing to receive a loan, but the British Treasury stalled, asking for a decision of the "*Russian problem as a whole*". The Baltic States were now exposed "*to the menace of extinction*", either from the Bolshevik state or from "*revived Czarism*". British actions since December had led them to believe that the Allies supported their independence or "*Quasi-independence*". Therefore the Allied governments should make up their minds: *Firstly* if their policy was to create an anti-Bolshevik cordon sanitaire; *secondly* if the countries would get full recognition or only provisional autonomy, *thirdly* if the Allies would give the states all assistance, financial and material, with the exception of sending troops. If the decision became to give support, the British government to take formal leadership of the support to the tree states. If the

decision was not to give support, the Allied governments should be prepared to accept any agreement between the Baltic States and the Bolshevik government.

Lord Curzon underlined that the Peace Conference had to decide before London could act. He also underlined that if assistance was also given to the White commander, general Nikolai Yudenich, as the French wanted, *“such a course would apparently conflict with the policy of supporting the Baltic States”*, as his type of imperialism would lead to the absorption of the countries. Either the Allies assembled in Paris should come up with *“a definite decision ... distinct from a pious recommendation”* or they should suggest what type of actions the relevant departments of the British government should follow in the relief efforts in the Baltic States. Until then the departments were *“condemned to an attitude of inertia from lack of clear instructions...”*



George Curzon, 1st Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, the Acting Foreign Secretary until October 1919, when he formally took over from Balfour. In April 1919 he had become impatient with the lack of decisiveness in the Peace Conference.

(en.wikipedia.org)

Commenting on Poska's 25 March letter, a member of the British delegation in Paris supported his position on 3 April: *“It is obvious that the states cannot withstand Bolshevism without some security as to their position”*. Therefore some decision should be reached about the question. Robert Cecil only added his signature without commenting.

The Latvian delegation had sent its own reaction to the Russian position on 24 March, and on 3 April the British delegation noted that it was similar to the Estonian. The concluding comment from 10 April (by Arthur Balfour) was that the only solution would be to offer Estonia and later, when possible, Latvia recognition.

On 5 April Lord Curzon added pressure on the Paris decision makers. Goltz' forces were the most effective tool against the Bolsheviks, but they were blockaded by the Allies. On 4 March the Supreme War Council had directed Cowan to prevent any further landing of German troops. However, now Cowan, Keenan and Grant Watson jointly questioned the wisdom of this policy. Curzon saw it as *"illogical to withhold from the German force the means of rendering it effective"*. Depriving it of supplies exposed the force to *"grave risks"*. There he added two questions to his previous list, *firstly* if the Allied governments facilitated the action of the German force in Latvia, and *secondly* if the Allied governments should cooperate with and assist the Germans. 27 March Grant Watson underlined from Libau that the Germans used the Allied blockade for propaganda purposes: it was they who hampered the operations against the Bolsheviks. It was staffed in the British delegation on 9 April, but no solution could be reached.

Dudley Pound from the Admiralty Naval Staff had noted on 8 April that *"It is evident that our present policy of refusing aid to Latvia and at the same time maintaining a strict blockade of their coast is affording the Germans an excellent instrument for anti-British propaganda"*. Re-opening of trade and food supplies were both essential for economic and political stabilisation. Apparently his argument and logic was accepted or his superiors of the same mind, because less than one week later the Allied Blockade Council authorised trade with Lithuania in spite of the fact that the country remained under German control. The only qualification was that imports could not be re-exported.

On 8 April a copy of Konstantin Päts' letter to the British Prime Minister arrived in Paris. It had been brought back by Tallents from Reval for London. He underlined what had been achieved during the last few months. His country had no aggressive designs and its military requirements were very small compared to what had been consumed during the previous four years. He underlined that Tallents could describe from his own observations how well the Estonian troops used their very limited means. He ended: *"Lenin in a speech in Moscow lately gave a solemn promise that Esthonia should be conquered. I pray the English people to give their promise, not less solemn, and far more effective, that Esthonia shall remain free"*. The desk officer was the later influential left-wing historian Edward Hallett (E.H.) Carr. He noted on 17 April that it was desirable that a reply was sent, perhaps signed by Balfour. It could, however, *"only take the form of rather vague assurances of sympathy"* that followed the supplies that had been sent or were on the way. It was decided that a draft reply should be approved by Balfour for Lloyd George's signature.

On that day, 8 April, Ulmanis' government underlined via their representative in Paris that Riga could not be captured before the Allies could supply the city with food. The situation in the city was reported to be terrible.

11 April the British Paris delegation considered the Latvian delegation's memorandum of 3 April where it stated its claim for independence. Carr noted that it was *"Quite a good statement of the Lettish case"*. The frontier claims were only *"slightly exaggerated"* in one or two places. However, Carr's superior noted the next day that even if the conference probably would agree, *"but for the moment they are not likely to do anything"*.

The draft letter for Päts was ready on 25 April, and it followed the line proposed by Carr. It praised the Estonians for their achievements and courage. His Majesty's government certainly did have the needs of Estonia in mind; however, her resources were strained by more than four years of war and many other



pressing demands. Armoured vehicles should be supplied by France and food by the U.S. Otherwise the Prime Minister sent his *“most sincere good wishes for the future success and prosperity of a liberated Estonia”*.<sup>86</sup>



General Nikolai Nikolayevich Yudenich.  
([www.hubertlerch.com](http://www.hubertlerch.com))

<sup>86</sup> TNA, FO 608/184, Delegation D’Estonie en France A Monsieur le Président de la Conference de la Paix of 25-3-1919; “The Situation in Esthonia”, Sir C. Marling No. 673 of 12-3-1919; Charles M. Marling “Situation in the Baltic States” of 12-3-1919; Sir C. Marling No. 804 of 27-3-1919 “Assistance for Estonia”, Memorandum by Lord Curzon “Allied Policy towards the Baltic States” of 28-3-1919; “Estonian Claims” of 1-4-1919 with note added two days later; Delegation Lettone Paris 24 Mars 1919; Konstantin Päts’ letter, Reval 23-3-1919 to the Prime Minister of England; Grant Watson “Supplies for German forces operating in Latvia” of 27-3-1919; J. Tschakste letter of 8-4-1919 staffed as “Urgent Need of Supplies for Latvia” the next days; British Delegation “The Independence of Latvia” with Délégation Lettone Mémoire of 3-4-1919; Note of 17-4-1919 on “Appeal for Assistance for Estonia”; Draft His Excellency M. Päts of 29 April 1919; ADM 137/1665, D.O.D.(H) of 8-4-1919; WO 157/42, Finland, Return of Finnish Volunteers from Estonia, F.O.Tel. No. 170 of 30-3-1919; Russian Summary, No. 44, The Fleet, late March-early April 1919; WO 157/43, Baltic Provinces, Lithuania, “Resumption of Trade Relations”.

### ***Roots of the Yudenich offensive***

Late March the idea of a White Russian offensive along the Finnish Gulf towards Petrograd was developing. It had been developed by the group of Russian officers around Yudenich in Finland during the winter. Late January a representative of the Northern Army had estimated that an offensive against Petrograd would

require a corps of 25.000, 16 field artillery pieces, and equipment for a further 10.000 recruits as well as provisions for the Petrograd's population of one million. Early February the Russian general had proposed to open a new front against the Bolsheviks, first taking Petrograd and from there using the good roads towards Moscow for an offensive. Yudenich had moderate and right-wing Russian political support and Finnish businessmen and industrialists were willing to give economic support. He had a 3.000 man corps of the Northern Army available in Finland and could draw on Russian officers and NCOs now in Scandinavia. Via Admiral Kolchak in Omsk he had asked the Entente Powers for arms, tanks, aircraft, money and supplies *"of the Army and Petrograd which could not capitulate without its supply being guaranteed"* in early February. Kolchak's French liaison officer had forwarded the request to Paris. On 21 February Yudenich had specified his arms requirement to be 50.000 rifles, 1.000 machineguns, 200 field cannon and 60 howitzers, armoured cars, 100 tanks and all other types of technical military equipment. This was a massive requirement compared to what had been supplied to Estonia and Latvia by the British. On 4 March the French Foreign Minister had recommended a positive answer to his Prime Minister. He had earlier, on 11 February, underlined *"how important it is in my opinion to grant to the smaller Baltic States and to General YUDENITCH the support which they are asking for"*. Then he had recommended the sending of French military missions to organise support *"on moral grounds and on account of our interests in those regions, as well as in order to obtain more precise information..."* One such mission should go to Finland. Now he recommended that Yudenich was given handed-over German equipment was suitable. On 18 March Lieutenant-General Baron Charles Pierre René Victor Scipion Corvisart, the Chief of the French Mission to the War Office, had inquired what support Britain had given to Yudenich army. He was informed that nothing had been given or planned for, and that no decision had yet been taken about responsibility for military support to the Baltic States.

The Yudenich Petrograd offensive project had thereafter been analysed by the Military Section of the British Paris delegation. The result was that there were

three elements in Finland that wanted to capture Petrograd: Finnish pro-Allied elements working within the framework of the Finnish government; Russian right-wing elements working with Germans and pro-German elements in Finland; and finally pro-Allied forces under Yudenich working with Kolchak and Denikin. The pro-German forces had been weakened by the defeat of their forces in the Pskov area together with the Estonians. Yudenich force was presented as a non-party movement wanting to restore order in Russia. He aims at operating a force of 10.000 from Finland and Estonia, but is hampered by the fact that Finns and Estonians did not trust his motives. Finland had forbidden him to assemble more than 250 in one place. The Estonians had refused Yudenich the possibility for assembling volunteers in their country or to reinforce the existing Russian force in the country until the general was backed by a political organisation. That organisation should be recognised by Finland and pledge to co-operate with that country and Estonia in the capture of Petrograd, and it should recognise Estonian independence. The Military Section noted that the relations among the Russian generals were poisoned by intrigue, and it was clear that any progress depended on Yudenich ability to reach agreement with both Finland and Estonia.

The section thought that if the French and British supported the idea, Mannerheim would like to make a Finnish attack to capture Petrograd and become the saviour of Russia from the Bolsheviks, *"an attractive lure to the vanity of any man"*. It would also remove the Bolshevik threat from Finland's gates, maybe add part of Karelia, Ingermanland or possible even Petrograd to his country. Support from the Allies was essential for re-provisioning Petrograd and might result in a guarantee of Finland's independence. However, with the political development in Finland it was unlikely that a Finnish offensive against Petrograd would be able to muster sufficient support to make it realistic. Parts of the army were also likely to be highly sceptical. In its summing up the Military Section concluded that a Finnish attack on Petrograd would be against Allied interest as it was likely to result in constant Finnish-Russian hostility, no matter which government ruled Russia. Yudenich's force might be used in the project to

establish “a cordon from the Baltic to the Black Sea”. The difficulties and dangers to be overcome were the Finnish and Estonian distrust of all Russians, at “*The possibility of a premature and abortive attack being undertaken*”. Yudenich should be induced to operate under Allied control, and the right of Baltic States to “*at least provisional autonomy and self-determination*” should be granted to add to forces able to resist the westward spread of Bolshevism.

At the same time in late March Russian businessmen in London and interested British supporters were lobbying for action against Petrograd. On 21 March the “*British Russia Club*” sent a memorandum named “*The Occupation of Petrograd*” written by like-minded people in Finland to the War Office. The memo started by stating that “*Bolshevism is now nearing its end*”. After having experienced Bolshevik rule, the only Bolsheviks left were those in the government, and the only supporters are the soldiers of the Red Army, because in the army, they get more or less sufficient food. The occupation of Petrograd by an anti-Bolshevik force will be met by enthusiasm and acclaim and be a mortal blow to all Bolsheviks of the world. The distance from Finland to Petrograd was only 24 kilometres, and the limited force necessary was already available under Yudenich. He should just be supported and be supported by a high-level Allied military official. The cover letter of the Russia Club stated that the Finns were prepared to co-operate with the Russian general.

On 17 March Yudenich’s representatives had arrived in London to lobby for the operations. They had a meeting in the war office. The minutes from the meeting underlined that the occupation of Petrograd would lead to the overthrow of the Bolsheviks in Moscow, removal of the Baltic Fleet from Red control and capture the bank-note printing press and thus collapse the economy. Yudenich claimed that his forces were sufficient for the operation from the Finnish-Russian border, as the Bolshevik defending force was weak. He needed 30,000 tons of bread to cover the requirement during the first two months and a high level Allied military representative as his liaison with the Finns. The staffing comments in the War

Office showed scepticism, but Churchill’s notes from 22 March indicated interest in the potential of the operation, noting that the Russian general would be “*ill advised to leave his present position close to Petrograd*”. However, the Secretary for War and Air’s interests had been caught, and he seems to have been monitoring the situation thereafter. In the War Cabinet meeting on 6 May, when he discussed the possibilities of supporting the various White Russian forces with Russian officers, he noted with regard to Generals Mannerheim and Yudenich, that “*it was very uncertain what their movements and intentions were.*” The War Office was sending out a mission to investigate the position. It is most likely that he meant the Allied mission that was being prepared in that month.<sup>87</sup>

### ***Grant Watson and Lithuania***

Early April left Libau for his first visit to Kowno. On 4 April, before he could report, Esme Howard reported from Warsaw that there were signs of a Polish-Lithuanian confrontation about Belorussian territory. Howard wanted the Lithuanians to be informed that the borders would be decided at the Peace Conference.

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<sup>87</sup> WO 32/5748, Colonel de Wahl, Reval 27-1-1919; General Janin No. 529-521, Omsk 2-2-1919 to Minister of War (translation); French Minister of Foreign Affairs No. 863 to French Prime Minister, War Minister of 11-2-1919; Colonel K. Russian Military Attaché in Stockholm on 21-2-1919; French Minister of Foreign Affairs No. 1377 to French Prime Minister, War Minister of 4-3-1919; General Corvisart to Col. R. A. Steel of 18-3-1919; War Office (R. Steel) B.M. 2000/M.0.5 to Baron Corvisart of 21-3-1919; British Russia Club of 21-3-1919 to Major Sir Archibald Sinclair, Bart., The War Office with the memo “*The Occupation of Petrograd*”, Note of 22-3-1919 “*Representatives of General Judenitch...*” with “*Finland and Operations Against Petrograd. Notes of a conversation at the War Office with Mr. W. A. Lessing on 17th March, 1919*”; CAB 23, War Cabinet 563. Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet, 6-5-1919, agenda item “*Provision of Russian Officers for Service in North Russia and Siberia*”.



Watson reported from Kowno after his return to Libau. The Lithuanian government crisis had been solved with Mykolas Sleževičius as Prime Minister and Augustinas Voldemaras as Foreign Minister. The Germans were holding the line against the Bolsheviks all the way from Bausk (Bauska) in Latvia to Lida in Belorussia. Total number of German troops in Lithuania was 30.000 of whom 20.000 were paid by the Lithuanians. The Lithuanian army of 8.000 had advanced beyond the German lines, but had been driven back by the Bolsheviks. The Lithuanian forces lacked officers, but had French and Swedish instructors. The relations between the Lithuanian and German troops were bad, and the German maintained constant contact with the Bolsheviks. Whenever the Lithuanians planned operations, the Germans warned the Bolsheviks. The Lithuanian forces needed machine guns, rifles, ammunition and boots. Watson informed London that Sleževičius would send the territorial claims to Paris. It would include Memel, as the possession of the port would *“enable Lithuania to hold free intercourse with the outside world and would liberate the timber trade from German control”*.

Late April Lithuania organised a conference in Kowno to discuss a regional common policy against the Bolsheviks. Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Poland and the Ukraine were invited. The countries should quickly form national armies and form a common front.<sup>88</sup> As the focus was anti-Bolshevik, the conference did not challenge German policy and interests directly.

### ***The Allied Supreme War Council ... recommends***

Let us return to the discussion of Allied Baltic Policy in Paris. The start of a solution to the points raised by Lord Curzon during previous weeks came in the recommendations of the Allied Supreme War Council in its meeting on 11 April.

<sup>88</sup> TNA, WO 157/42, Russian Summary, No. 45; .Lithuania – Threat against Poles, F.O. Tel. of 4-4-1919; Lithuania, F.O. Tels. Nos 22, 24 & 25 of 20-4-1919.and 31 & 32 of 24-4-1919, WO 157/43, Baltic Provinces, “Conference of Baltic States Ministers”, mid-April.

The military representatives had been asked to consider the situation in the Baltic States and outline measures to be taken.

The German – Goltz’ - policy was quite clear when the Supreme War Council took its decision. Three days earlier the Admiralty forwarded information from Cowan to its representative in Paris that Goltz had officially refused the Latvian authorities permission to mobilise.



The Allied Supreme War Council painted at a 1919 meeting. On 11 April the council defined a positive policy towards the Baltic States ending political hesitation. (Imperial War Museum)

Therefore the generals noted that the Germans tried *“by all means” to re-establish their power and influence in the Baltic States*”. They had initially

withdrawn without authorisation, left arms and provisions to the Bolsheviks, placed obstacles to defence efforts of the local governments, seized railway equipment and interrupted telegraphic communication. Apparently their aim was to create anarchy, justifying intervention. The Entente should put an end to the German activities as early as this was made possible by the local defence measures. Therefore the Allied governments should urgently take a decision in principle on the future of the Baltic States and thereafter determine the nature of the assistance to be given.

The military representatives underlined that no allied country considered sending army units. However, they proposed that a single power be entrusted to give the military material assistance to the three states. The U.S. would continue to take care of the food supplies. An Inter-Allied organisation should be created that took contact with the local governments to determine their defence needs, make arrangements for to facilitate the required assistance as well as ensuring that Allied decisions about the German troops were carried out. The Germans should be demanded to repatriate Estonian, Latvian and Estonian prisoners of war to facilitate the creation of local forces. The line in the east to where the Bolsheviks were to be forced back should be decided.

### ***Tallents' appointed, Allied Mission decided***

The decision to use Tallents was probably the first result of the military representatives' meeting. 12 April Balfour proposed to Curzon that the colonel should lead a "*United British Mission for the Baltic States with branches at Reval, Libau and Kowno (Kaunas)*". The Germans were in complete control of Libau and Lithuania, and Estonia was still seriously threatened by the Bolsheviks: "*it seems to be essential that we should have a strong mission there to maintain British influence*". Tallents should be "*Chief British Commissioner for the Baltic States*", co-ordinating the efforts of Bosanquet in Reval, Keenan in Libau and Grant Watson in Kowno. If Curzon agreed, he might have proposals for Tallents' staff. The positive reply from Curzon came on 22 April. Tallents had been informed of

the decision and sent to London to form his staff as he awaited detailed instructions. It was decided by the delegation in Paris that his team should not await the dispatch of the future Inter-Allied Commission.

The Allied commission had been decided by the "*Council of Four*" – President Wilson plus the British, French and Italian Prime Ministers – on 17 April on a proposal from Wilson. It was meant to form a common judgment of the situation and co-ordinate reactions.

Following Carr's proposal Balfour wrote Curzon on 25 April that Tallents might later become the British Delegate of the international group, "but there is no reason why he should not start independently". On 10 May Robert Cecil had to write to Austen Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to make certain that the Tallents mission was sent. It had been held-up by lack of Treasury sanction. It was essential launch the mission as the "*situation is ... exceedingly critical*".

Even if the military leaders had stated that their prime ministers were to take the decision about the future of the Baltic States, the German actions had in fact provoked them to move a little. On 15 April the diplomats of the British delegation stated their agreement with the proposals, and on 17 April Balfour informed Curzon that during previous day's meeting President Wilson had proposed the establishment of the Inter-Allied Commission to study the situation in the three states.

In that meeting Balfour had "*pointed out anomaly of using German troops more or less as Allies while we were still at war with Germany*". This partly helped the



Germans to built-up their influence in the Baltic provinces “under our very noses”.<sup>89</sup>

### ***Pressure from the humanitarian crisis in Riga***



Riga's bridges 1919 with Hasenholm just above the railway bridge.

<sup>89</sup> TNA, FO 608/184. "THE ACTION OF GERMANY IN THE BALTIC STATES" (Conclusions reached at the 56th Meeting of the Military Representatives, held at Versailles, on April 11th, 1919, at 10 hours 30.); Telegram from Admiralty London to Admiralty Paris of 8-4-1919; Telegram from Mr. Balfour to Lord Curzon No. 693 of 12-4-1919; Telegram from Mr. Balfour to Lord Curzon D. 16.40 17<sup>th</sup> 1919, No. 711 URGENT; No. 844, Urgent, For Mr. Austen Chamberlain from Lord Robert Cecil; Telegram from Lord Curzon to Mr. Balfour, No. 534 of 22-4-1919; No. 534. "Proposed Inter-Allied Commission to the Baltic States of 22-4-1919; Telegram to Lord Curzon from Mr. Balfour No. 760 of 25-4-1919; WO 32/5750. Circulated to the King and War Cabinet. No. 711 URGENT of 17-4-1919.

Mid- April it had become clear that the situation in Latvia had become critical. The delegation received a message from Cowan that the Bolshevik authorities in Riga had started a large scale transportation of people to Hasenholm (Zaķusala) island in the river Dwina (Düna, Daugava) “for deliberate starvation and systematic massacre by mob”. This meant a pressure for humanitarian intervention that should be easily recognised a century later. At the same time the German troops in the front line west of Riga were unable to advance and relieve the town due to the effects of the naval blockade. Cowan asked for the opening of the blockade for supplies and permission to take destroyers up the river if the ice allowed and offer the German command to land their troops in town. The Admiralty had informed the aggressive admiral that it rejected co-operation with Germans and only allowed moral support and some supplies to the Latvian government. It had also informed him that it had recommended to Paris that the Germans were given permission to land reinforcements and supplies in Libau. However, even if there were no naval objections to such an opening of the blockade, a rejection “seems to be a question of policy”, as Rear-Admiral George Hope, the Deputy First Sea Lord, wrote to Balfour. The outcome was that Balfour agreed on 13 April to an opening of the blockade for supplies on the explicit condition that the German stopped impeding Latvian recruitment and organisation.

The Germans also used other channels to press the Allies. On 16 April Clive reported from Stockholm that a special correspondent from the daily “*Svenska Dagbladet*” had just returned from two months in Latvia, where he had been “embedded” with Goltz’ forces. Riga had been exposed to famine for weeks, and now Bolshevik tribunals had started a systematic annihilation of the bourgeoisie, executing hundreds and transporting others to Hasenholm in the river. German and Latvian forces were too weak to start an offensive, and the reinforced Bolsheviks might break through their lines in a counter-offensive. Clive had sent a copy of his telegram to Copenhagen, and the next day Charles Marling repeated the story of the horrors of Riga, now, however, referring to Russian sources.



### ***Cowan enters and try to bridge to Goltz***

Cowan had returned to the Baltic on 3 April, replacing Cameron as Senior Naval Officer, Baltic Force. He remained in Libau port during the next three crucial weeks. On 8 April he reported that the American Mission in town undermined the work for Keenan by being far too supportive of the Germans; however on 16 April, he wrote that “*from the first*” he had disagreed with the policy that had allowed the Germans to send troops to Libau and thereafter prevented those sending supplies and reinforcements. The small admiral considered that his mission was to fight Bolsheviks, and as von der Goltz was effective in doing that, he should be assisted. On that basis he had a meeting with the German general on 12 April and asked him if he could give a day for the capture of Riga if the British government raised the blockade. The German had answered “*Admiral Sinclair*” in writing two days later that he needed to consult his government about Riga, that made his force immobile, and the Bolshevik forces were so strong that even with the blockade lifted, he might fail to hold the existing front line. Eager to agree with Goltz, he did not see that the German was lying. He had asked Cowan if lifting the blockade depended on his taking Riga, and if the Allies were prepared to feed the city’s population. The admiral answered that he lacked instructions about the lifting of the blockade, and he had confirmed that Riga would receive the necessary food. On 14 April Goltz had been informed of the temporary lifting of the blockade on the condition that he did not interfere with the Latvian mobilisation, and the admiral waited for his response.

In his report Cowan then described his contacts with the Latvian government and underlined that he had sent the destroyer HMS SEAFIRE, commanded by Andrew Cunningham, into the Naval Harbour and placed alongside the SARATOV to protect the steamer, on board which all the British delivered weapons and equipment not distributed to Latvian units were stored. On Keenan’s initiative, the 20 Madsens that had arrived with HMS PHAETON in March had also been stored on-board the steamer.

SARATOV’s engine had broken down. The SEAFIRE engineer officer estimated that repairs would last more than a day.

During the admiral’s meeting with Ulmanis on 15 April, the Latvian had felt uneasy about the situation. He sensed that the Germans were “*contemplating some stroke*”. In the morning of 16 April seven hundred rifles from the steamer were sent to the Latvian headquarters without German interference.

### ***The Libau raids of 16 April***

However, on 16 April Cowan’s week-long attempt to bridge to Goltz collapsed with the general’s response, where he rejected the link between the lifting of the blockade and – especially and repeatedly – the link to the forced mobilisation of Latvians “*of the Bolshevik taint*” (bolschewistischen Verseuchung). The same morning a regular German volunteer unit raided the headquarters in the naval harbour of the Latvian troops. They wounded several soldiers, disarmed and arrested the officers and looted money and papers. The Latvians did not resist, but one private soldier was killed trying to escape. An officer escaped and reported to Cunningham, who went ashore to investigate what had happened at the headquarters. He noted that the raid had been conducted by a regular battalion – with a band – something not considered likely by Cowan to have taken place without Goltz’ knowledge. Cunningham had realised that SARATOV had to depart immediately. The steamer’s machine was ready and escorting the steamer SEAFIRE prepared to fight the Germans to get past the swing bridge across the naval port channel. However, the two ships joined Cowan in the outer harbour without incident.



A photo from Cowan's report taken in the Latvian Headquarters after the raid by Westphalian troops on 16 April.  
(The National Archives)

On the same day Baltic German forces moved against the government. Ulmanis sought protection in the British and American Missions, which became surrounded by hostile troops. Later the Latvian government sought Royal Navy protection by moving to the steamer SARATOV. Cowan sent his report of events in Libau to the Admiralty on 23 April.

Cowan reacted by sending Cunningham with two destroyers into the commercial port channel into the town centre to protect Allied interests and watching German ships, forcing the disarming of troops found on one. In the afternoon Baltic German troops surrounded the Latvian government offices and arrested those found there. Ulmanis and his minister of finance were close to Keenan's

British Mission and sought protection there; two other ministers got on-board the HMS SEAFIRE. The leaders the coup in the "*Committee of Safety*" informed the British that their action was independent of Goltz and without knowledge of what had happened the same morning against the Latvian headquarters. They sought meetings with Keenan and Cowan to gain formal recognition. On 19 April two French naval vessels had arrived and the admiral convinced them that they should remain in Libau during the crisis. The "*Committee*" was informed that food supplies had been stopped and that they had become responsible for the starvation of their country.

Cowan doubted – as the Baltic Germans - the Latvian forces would be free of Bolshevism, repeated his earlier observation that a British general with staff should be sent to command the locals and his 16 April report ended by reporting that he would keep his whole force in Libau, maintaining to a destroyer as radio link in Copenhagen.

On 21 April Goltz informed the Allies that both the German operations on 16 April had been unauthorised, but that the arrest of the government was "*a necessary evil*". The Allied demanded the removal of the German officers and units responsible for the two operations and the Latvian units should be re-established. Thereafter the Allies would recommend that the Latvian Provisional Government represented "*all parties in Latvia*", meaning including the Baltic Germans.

During the evening after the meeting followed rumours that the Germans would carry further operations against the Latvian troops. These actually took place on 27 April when German troops disarmed Latvian troops around Libau.

Cowan concluded that the coup had failed, mainly because of Cunningham's timely move of the SARATOV out of reach and the failure to capture the Latvian leader. On the morning of 23 April Prince Lieven visited Cowan to ask for advice if he should try to form a government. Cowan told him that local politics were outside his instructions, but he personally thought that the prince should get back

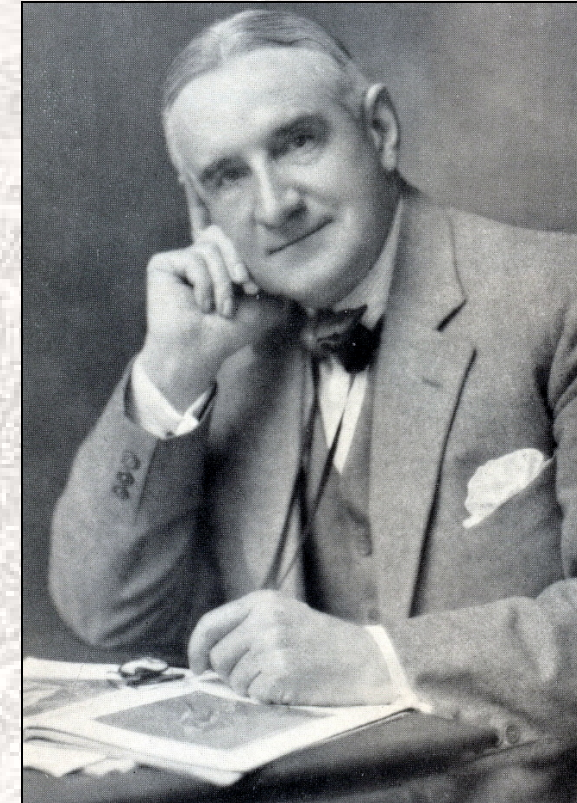


to the front line. The events during the coups had proven Cunningham to be “*an officer of exceptional value and unerring resolution*”. After the then commander’s service in the next war, the reader must agree. Later Cowan was informed that the Goltz’ Latvian force commander, Colonel Ballod (Balodis) had also been approached and had rejected to take over government.

### **Reading Goltz’ motives**

In a very sharp and clear note from 17 April the British scientist James Young Simpson, who worked in the British delegation to support Finland and the Baltic States, outlined the situation.

He did not have to wait for Goltz’ post-war memoirs to read his motives. Simpson noted that the Germans had established themselves in Latvia with fighting the Bolsheviks as a secondary purpose only. Goltz sought an area where he could recruit and train an army for later reactionary purposes at home. It was not difficult to suppress 2000-2500 Latvians with 25.000 Germans plus 4.000 Baltic Germans. Moderate Latvians would be pushed into the Bolshevik camp. The whole project was meant to challenge Entente supremacy in Eastern Europa. Simpson predicted that Goltz’ next move would be against Poland or Estonia. Britain had to take active steps to enhance its prestige.



Professor James Simpson, the embedded lobbyist for the Baltic States in the British Delegation.  
(en.wikipedia.org)

A few days later, Keenan reported that the friction between Germans and Latvian had resulted in an incident at Durben (Durbe) close to Libau, where a few were killed on both sides. On 23 April he reported that Latvian troops had killed five German Baltic cavalrymen.



On 19 April the Foreign Office sent Grant Watson's 1 April analysis of the situation in Latvia to Paris. Both Carr and the military section of the delegation considered Watson's report interesting. The diplomat noted that most Latvians would prefer their country to become a British protectorate; the second choice is to become independent. The first priority of Ulmanis was "to root out Bolchevism". Thereafter the government would "turn out Germanism". The population in the towns and the landless peasants were still highly discontented because of the food scarcity and other hardships. This meant that the chief aim of the government was to raise money to buy food and to equip an army to fight the Bolsheviks. When possible, the Latvians wished to develop a close military and economic co-operation with Lithuania, Estonia and Finland. Ulmanis had underlined that the domestic policies of the government would be "socialistic" with public ownership and management of railways, telecommunications and former Russian Crown forests. The sale of flax and linseed would become a government monopoly. He had considered national management of the economy as necessary due to the destruction of war. It was necessary to manage and contain the discontent, because if the local Bolsheviks rose, the Germans were likely to take full control of the country. The German offensive had stopped at Courish Aa (Lielupe) because von der Goltz considered it a natural defensive line against the Bolsheviks. He had offered to assist in the capture of Riga, but the Latvians could only guess the ulterior motives behind that offer. The Germans were expanding their position. During the winter they had offered the Latvians a beneficial loan, they had offered to operate the Latvian railways and the German volunteers had been offered land by the German Balts for fighting the Bolsheviks. Ulmanis had noted that most of the Bolshevik units on the front were manned by Latvians or Germans. The result was an extremely barbarous civil war, where both the Bolsheviks, German Balts and regular German units killed their prisoners. Grant Watson noted that without the support of the Entente, the Latvian government would fail. He therefore recommended that the necessary support was given.

Keenan reported on 20 April that he did whatever possible to avert hostilities between Latvian and German Baltic troops. The day before the British had been informed by the Latvian representative that his government would demand compensation from Germany for the requisitions, etc. that German troops had carried out. Carr noted that the Latvian demands would fall on deaf ears. Just to get the German troops of Latvia, the Allies either had to send their own forces or make officers and instructors available for the Latvian army.

On 25 April the British delegation in Paris finally received the 31 March report from HMS PHAETON's captain, John Ewen Cameron, then Senior Naval Officer, Baltic Force. It was read within the context of the recent German Baltic coup against the Latvian government two weeks earlier. His analysis of the political and economic situation was in line with what was sent by Grant Watson the following day. The ended by recommending that Royal Navy base for the Baltic Sea operations was moved from Copenhagen to Libau. The port was highly suitable, protected against Red submarines, and it was "without the restrictions involved in working from a neutral harbour like Copenhagen". As we shall see, Cowan did not agree after the events of 16 April.

28 April Keenan reported that the political situation in Libau was still volatile. He had reports that Germans were in the process of disarming Latvian rear-area troops and they rejected returning the rifles they had taken from the Latvian force in the naval harbour.

He also reported that the French Military Mission that had been established in Kowno (Kaunas) needed the military equipment requested one month earlier.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> TNA, FO 608/184. Telegram No. 526 from Admiralty London to Admiralty Paris of 12-4-1919; George Hope letter to Balfour of 12-4-1919; Balfour note of 13-4-1919; Major Keenan K.44 "Situation in Latvia" of 18-4-1919; Grant Watson, Political No. 4, Libau of 1-4-1919; Keenan K.45. "Situation in Latvia" of 20-4-1919; No. 673 "Lettish claims against Germany" of 19-4-1919; Keenan K.47 of 23-4-1919; Admiralty M. 01474 of 10-4-1919

Grant Watson's dispatch of 25 April arrived the same day. He noted that Ulmanis considered that the most important issue was the Latvian mobilisation. The Germans should be compelled to stop their sabotage. "...until a Lett peasant army is formed Government will still be at mercy of German and Baltic intrigues".

The German coup meant that the British War Office realised on 20 April that something needed to be done. The Director of Military Intelligence concluded that the coup was "*an expression of the settled German policy in the Baltic States, and ... of ... the extraordinary consistency ... in this direction no matter what form of Government in Berlin has been*". The conflict between the Baltic Germans and the Latvians was natural because of the antagonism between the peasantry and the big landowners, and because the government had no money to pay compensation, when their land was distributed. After the coup, the German troops ought to be forced to leave, but because they had prevented a Latvian mobilisation, they were likely to be replaced by the Bolsheviks. Replacing the German troops with Allied was no option. Any volunteers that did join the forces were needed at Murmansk or Archangel. The only possibilities left was to exert pressure on the Germans "*extreme, if necessary*" to get them to reinstate the Latvian government, to make them recall von der Goltz and to make them hand-over the coup leader to Latvian trial. An Allied military officer of high rank and an adequate group of instructors should be despatched. In order to prevent a

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"Situation in Latvia" with Professor Simpson's short note of 17-4-1919 (signed J.X.S.); Nr. Clive (Stockholm) No. 722 of 16-4-1919; Marling (Copenhagen) No. 956 of 18-4-1919; Keenan K.50. of 28-4-1919; ADM 137/1665, CALEDON (Cowan) to The Secretary of the Admiralty of 8-4-1919; CALEDON (Cowan) to The Secretary of the Admiralty of 13-4-1919; Translation VI Reserve Corps, General Command Riga to the Officer Commanding British Naval Forces in the Baltic, Admiral Sinclair, Libau of 13-4-1919; CALEDON (Cowan) No. 11/531 to The Secretary of the Admiralty of 23-4-1919; Translation General Command, VI. Res. Corps. To The British Rear-Admiral Sir Walter Cowan of 16-4-1919; CALEDON (Cowan) No. 12/531 to The Secretary of the Admiralty of 7-5-1919; Andrew B. Cunningham: A Sailor's Odyssey. The Autobiography of Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Cunningham of Hyndhope, (London 1951), pp.103-105.

reoccurrence, He should be supported by a naval demonstration. As soon as the Latvians became ready, the Germans should be withdrawn. The Director did not think it was a good idea to cut off the German troops from their supplies until they could be replaced.

The intelligence evaluation was supplemented by Grant Watson's report about the events, Keenan's 17 April telegram and Marling's cable about the coup leader – all from 17 April - and an Admiralty 12 April report about the suffering of the Riga population and German troops stalled by the Allied blockade.

Watson considered that the Baltic Germans had carried out the coup to make the Paris Conference help them get protection of their privileges and estates. Keenan underlined how well and detailed the coup had been prepared, and how brutally it had been carried out.

Keenan followed-up with another cable on 18 April. As on the previous day, he had addressed it directly to the Intelligence Director. He described how the British and American Missions in Libau as well as the Royal Navy had helped saving the Latvian ministers from arrest. Keenan declared that he was unable to predict what would happen next. There were rumours of a similar coup attempt in Reval. In a third telegram Keenan reported about the Baltic German skirmish with Latvian troops at Durben (Durbe).

A second report from Marling arrived on 19 April relating how von der Goltz had prepared the Libau coup by deploying the Latvian units to the front and withdrawing the Baltic German Landwehr to the line of communications area around Libau. Marling underlined that Ulmanis government did not have the political freedom of action to compromise with the Baltic Germans. On 18 April supplemented with a report on his conversation with the German Baltic Baron Ungern Sternberg. Roman Nikolai Maximilian von Ungern-Sternberg had grown-up in Reval. He presented the normal Baltic German analysis. The Latvian troops could not be trusted to fight Bolsheviks. The coup was made by Baltic Russians



and Germans to prevent the Latvian government to carry-out a planned expropriation of land. The only solution was to deploy western troops. According to the baron von der Goltz was opposed to an alliance with Bolshevism but believed that the German government would prefer such an alliance to accepting crushing peace terms from the Allies. The War Office had also received a report from the British representative in the Armistice Commission in Spa, General Sir Richard Haking, that Cowan had authorised supplies to Goltz through Lithuanian and Courland ports.

It is clear from the case archive that the War Office was wholly out of touch with the situation in the Baltic States. They were not monitoring the situation, but making up their mind on the basis of a handful of recent reports.

The Deputy Director of Military Operations, Colonel Walter Kirke, who would be advisor to Finland six years later, considered a reaction urgent or probably too late. The alternative would be to leave the Baltic Rim to the Germans. The long-term advantage would be that German possession of the Baltic ports would nourish long-term hostility between her and Russia. Henry Wilson was uncertain "*how this matter stands in Paris at this moment*". However, he was in favour of supporting the Germans in the Baltic States as this would bring them into collision with a regenerated Russia under Kolchak "or some such person". When Churchill read Wilson's comment on 2 May, he agreed.

On 29 April the British delegation had to deal with a two days old request by from the International Red Cross to the Peace Conference. It assumed that the Bolshevik government had fled Riga leaving a starving population behind. The Red Cross suggested that an Allied fleet was dispatched to give protection and assistance. It was rejected by Captain Cyril Fuller, the Admiralty planner of the delegation. It was simply not feasible "*at present*".

30 April Keenan's reports from 13 and 15 April – his last before the Baltic German coup - reached Paris. The first underlined that thaw contributed to keeping Goltz'

troops stationary. Roads were impassable and the ice on the rivers was breaking. He noted that situation on the Estonian south front was unstable, small advance in one sector, withdrawal in another. The arrival of an American steamer with 800 tons of flour had eased the situation in Libau as the price of bread had been halved. He attached a German "*slightly exaggerated*" memorandum calling "*Riga the mass grave of 70.000 human beings*" and underlining that this situation could be blamed on the Allied blockade. In the second report Keenan noted that the Germans had carried out a major reconnaissance raid southeast of Bausk (Bauska). He noted that Goltz had informed Cowan that it would be impossible for his forces to take Riga the following 2-3 weeks. The Germans showed no inclination to stop blocking Latvian mobilisation. This was critical, because even if the peasants that had experienced Bolshevik rule during the winter were "*very willing to fight*" if mobilised, they would not volunteer; because that would expose their families to brutal revenge should the Bolsheviks return. The Latvian ability to equip an army had improved a little. It had managed to purchase boots in Helsinki and uniform cloth in Copenhagen. Keenan had attached the German language Libau newspaper "*Libauische Zeitung*" that pressed for the end of the blockade in an article with title "*For the Liberation of Riga!*"

On the same last day of April, Marling reported from Copenhagen that according to the Latvian representative in town there was another good source of military manpower. There were about 5.000 Latvian prisoners of war in Germany awaiting repatriation. They were "free from Bolshevik tendencies" and only needed transport home, arms and equipment.

At the end of April the Allied Foreign Ministers were asked to discuss a report from two American "*Technical Advisors*". They proposed that their governments issued an ultimatum to Goltz to stop interfering in Latvian government and administration, political prisoners released and property restored. German troops should be evacuated in some weeks, the three Baltic governments recognised, and Baltic States reparations demands should be dealt with by a mixed body for



decision. For good reasons the British considered the recommendations naïve or premature and did what they could to stall any real discussion of the report.

On 1 May Keenan reported that Goltz response to the Allied demands were to ignore them. The guards surrounding the missions were removed. The German troops that had raided the Latvians in the Naval Harbour had moved to disarm the troops at Durben outside the Libau. Apparently the Baltic Germans moved to replace the Latvian national government by one of their own.

In his note commenting on the development, Carr proposed that the Allies demanded a removal of von der Goltz, but there was no real solution to the “impossible” situation created by the German coup until the Allies were willing to send troops.

In his next telegram sent two days later, Keenan reported that the Germans proceeded with a systematic disarmament of Latvian troops. He considered it likely that they would provoke an incident among the Latvian troops at the front west of Riga that would give an excuse for disarming them. He concluded “Germans’ and Balt’s aim is to destroy all Lett power”. 2 May Grant Watson reported that the local Baltic German authorities in Libau tried to undermine the political potential of the U.S. food supplies by misinformation about the source of the improvement. The response of the Allies to the German coup was to freeze further food supplies to Libau. After some days Cowan was asked if that measure worked and should be continued. The admiral answered on 9 May that it did work and that it should continue.

### ***Piip appeals to British honour***

On 3 May, Ants Piip, now in the Estonian delegation in Paris used the one year anniversary of the formal commitment to his people’s self-determination to express “the most sincere gratitude” to the British government “and personally

*to you for this act of sympathy which has given Esthonia so much moral support ...”* against German terror and aspirations.

The situation was becoming desperate. Bosanquet reported on 4 May that the country could not long continue military operations without external financial and other support. The leaders realised the disastrous results of a separate peace, but they were powerless to prevent it “unless Allies adopt a much more definite policy of assistance”.

Some days later, on 8 May, Curzon renewed his pressure on the Allies to move to effective support to the Baltic States. Nothing had apparently happened to follow-up the recommendation of the Supreme War Council four weeks earlier, and the situation in Estonia was becoming critical. Four days later Balfour answered that the Estonian question had been discussed on 10 May and that the Allied great powers had agreed to form an Inter-Allied Committee “to deal with Baltic questions forthwith”. On the same day Balfour had urged the War Cabinet of the importance of sending Estonia some assistance in the form of equipment, food and money combined with an indication that the Peace Conference supported them against the Bolsheviks and the aspirations for independence.

On the same day the French London ambassador inquired if it was possible to authorise a partial lifting of the blockade to relieve the humanitarian situation in Riga. He wanted information if it would be possible to import supplies to territory controlled by the Russian Soviet government. In the concluding comment on 15 May Carr noted that no supplies could be sent until order was restored, which should be done by reorganised Latvian forces that could capture the city in a land offensive. The next day, the British delegation considered a report from Cowan sent 16 April that repeated the newspaper article about Riga as the grave of 70.000. Cowan considered that even if it was German propaganda, it probably gave a fairly accurate picture. Sir Esme Howard from the delegation wondered if it

would not be possible to permit Latvian and German Baltic troops to occupy the town and offer supplies to ease the situation.

The reports of the suffering meant that the Admiralty authorised Cowan on 13 May to give the Germans permission to send a steamer, OSTSEE, to Riga to evacuate their national and Norwegian refugees from the city. The German representative to the Allied military authorities at Spa had requested the transport on 18 April.<sup>91</sup>

On 3 May Bosanquet reported that Päts had informed him that he was in the process of forming the new government. It followed his report from 15 April

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<sup>91</sup> TNA, FO 608/185. Conference de la Paix, Secrétariat General of 27-4-1919 and notes on "Situation in Riga" by E. H. Carr of 29-4-1919 and Cyril Fuller of 31-4-1919; Keenan B.M. 17 "The Situation in Latvia" of 13-4-1919, with the memo "Riga das Massengrab für 70,000 Menschen"; Keenan B.M. 18 of 15-4-1919 with the "Libauische Zeitung" special edition of 15-4-1919 that included the article "Für die Befreiung Rigas!"; Grant Watson No.37 of 25-4-1919; "Allied Policy in the Baltic States" of 24-4-1919; Keenan, K.51 of 1-5-1919; Keenan, K.52 of 3-5-1919; Grant Watson Confidential My telegram No. 4 of 2-5-1919; Délégation D'Esthonie No. 791 of 3-5-1919 to Balfour; Curzon, No.645 Urgent to Balfour of 8-5-1919; Marling (Copenhagen) No. 1080 of 5-5-1919 about the capture of Narva; Clair Telegram to Lord Curzon from Mr. Balfour No. 857 of 12-5-1919; Admiralty London to Admiralty Paris no. 694 of 9-5-1919; Ambassade de France a Londres 23-4-1919 and the staffing on "The Relief of Riga" started 10-5-1919; "Famine Conditions in Riga" of 9-5-1919; No. 9851 "Situation in Riga" of 13-5-1919 with Extracts from General Haking's Despatch N. 168 of 4-5-1919; Tallents, pp 306f; WO 32/5750. DMI "The Libau Coup d'Etat" 20-4-1919; Telegram from Admiralty dated 12-4-1919; Grant Watson No. 25 of 20-4-1919; Keenan to the D.M.I. of 17-4-1919; Sir C. Marling (Copenhagen) No. 952 of 17-4-1919; Sir C. Marling (Copenhagen) No. 953 of 17-4-1919; Sir C. Marling (Copenhagen) No. 955 of 18-4-1919; Keenan to D.M.I. on 18-4-1919; Keenan K. 44. Of 18-4-1919 to D.M.I.; General Haking, Spa to War Office A.C./1937 of 17-4-1919; Kirke's note of 21-4-1919; H.W. note of 21-4-1919 for S.of.S with Churchill's agreement from 2-5-1919; ADM 137/1665, Secret HMS PHAETON to The Rear Admiral Commanding First Light Cruiser Squadron of 23-3-1919 with attached report by Captain Cameron; WO 157/43, Baltic Provinces, Latvia, "Repatriation of Letts from Germany", F.O. Tel. No.1043 of 10-4-1919; Baltic Provinces, "Esthonia", F.O.Tel. No. 24 of 4-5-1919 and F.O.Tel. of 10-5-1919..

about the results of the election to the Constituent Assembly. Päts wanted the British representative to underline that the new ministry ought to mirror a moderate and pragmatic policy line, which he had done. Carr commented that he supported Bosanquet, as "*It has now been decided to give some assistance to Estonia*". The Bolshevik recapture of Narva to days later underlined the urgency of the situation.

### ***Possible operations against Petrograd and Kronstadt***

6 May Konstantin Päts had outlined a new possibility to Bosanquet to present to his government. He informed the British representative that after negotiations with the Finns, Finland was ready – "*in principle*" - to support Estonia with 10.000 men and a large sum of money, "*provided that the Allies approve*". The conversation was described immediately and covered again by the consul's general report from the next day. The force should be used in an offensive against Petrograd, where the Russian Northern Army and Estonian volunteers would also take part. Päts was eager that the Russian capital should be taken and put under a civilian administration instead of a military dictatorship. Bosanquet thought that one Estonian motive was to get Yudenich's force out of the country. Without endorsing the idea, Bosanquet had agreed that the matter should be investigated. He had reported on 4 May that the Russian general was in daily communication with the staff of the Northern Army in Reval. Carr and one more marked it as read without adding comments. Considering that both Finland and Petrograd had been declared out of bound of any British operations, when intervention had been considered in November 1918, the hesitation is understandable, if anybody in the delegation still remembered that fact. The idea seems to have been a result of a meeting in Helsinki in early May. The Estonian government had been informed by its representative in Helsinki that the Finns were worried that Estonia would make peace with the Bolsheviks. It was an issue that had been discussed between Bosanquet and Päts just after the elections on the basis of discrete contacts to Piip in London to get British reactions. To avert any risks of an Estonian separate



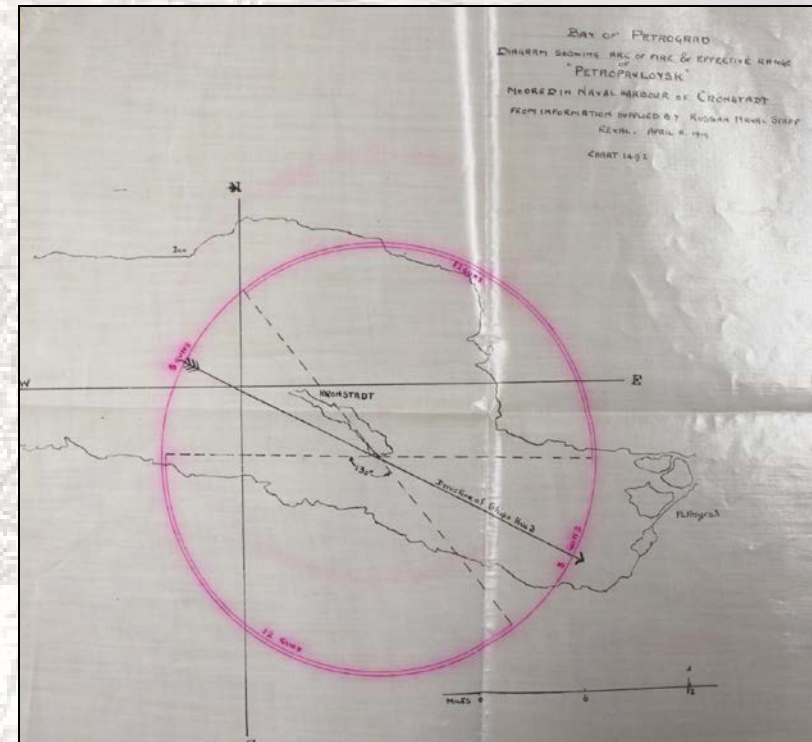
peace, Finland might offer assistance, and Estonian Foreign Ministry and War Office representatives had gone to Helsinki to negotiate. On 8 May the British envoy to Helsinki was instructed to contact the Finnish government “*unofficially*”.

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On 7 May Cowan reported that he had moved from the awkward political-military deadlock to Reval. On 24 April, the day after his previous report, Pitka had arrived in Libau on the LENNUK with a Russian naval captain, Knupffer, who represented the Russian Northern Army. They were eager that Cowan should co-operate with them in an advance on Kronstadt “*on land and by sea*”. Such an offensive would need the deployment of monitors (coastal artillery vessels) and aircraft. Knupffer wanted an initial operation where leaflets promising food for surrender. Pitka stayed until 26 April morning when he informed Cowan that he had a radio telegram that informed him that the Bolshevik ships had left their base. To make LENNUK’s return trip possible, Cowan donated fuel to the Estonian destroyer, departed with his cruiser, HMS CALEDON, and two destroyers for Reval and ordered the cruiser CLEOPATRA and all destroyers from Copenhagen to join him. Cowan arrived in Reval at midnight on the start of the quest that would catalyse British policy in the region during the next months and shape his personal reputation. On his arrival Cowan found the Estonians pressed both militarily and politically, the latter because of a Hungarian offer to mediate between them and the Bolsheviks. The local Baltic Germans supported with the coup in Libau and the Russian Northern Army had no sympathy for the Estonian cause or independence. Knupffer and the local commander urged Cowan to support the transfer of Yudenich from Finland to Estonia to lead an offensive towards Petrograd. As they

<sup>92</sup> TNA, FO 608/185. Mr. Bosanquet (Reval) No. 20 of 30-4-1919; Mr. Bosanquet (Reval) No. 23 of 3-5-1919 and comments on “Political Situation in Esthonia” F.O. No. 2907 of 9-5-1919; Mr. Bosanquet (Reval) No. 27 of 6-5-1919; British Consulate General, Reval No. 11 of 7-5-1919; WO 32/5750. Mr. Bosanquet (Reval) No. 5 of 15-4-1919; WO 157/43, Baltic Provinces, “Esthonia”, F.O. No.24 of 4-5-1919.

lacked equipment, he gave them his cruiser’s fighter aircraft and one gun with mounting.



Kronstadt, Cowan’s focus from May 1919. Probably handed over by Pitka late April.  
(The National Archives)

On 1 May Cowan started operations against the Bolshevik navy, when he took his two cruisers with four destroyers to counter a rumoured landing operation east of Reval. Finding no Russian force he continued to the island Hogland (Gogland, Suursaari) halfway to Kronstadt. He ended by underlining that the situation in



both Libau and the Gulf of Finland forced him to remain in the Baltic for a foreseeable time.<sup>93</sup>

10 May later the British delegation had to consider a note of the Russian ambassador to London about the miserable state of the Russian units in Estonia. If nothing was done to assist them with military equipment and supplies, “all hope of liberating Petrograd from the West would be lost”. On 16 May the British War Office gave support to the ambassador. Some of the equipment supplied by Britain to Estonia should go to the Russian troops in the country. There was the possibility that the Estonians concluded a “premature” peace with the Bolsheviks. If so the Russian troops would be in a very difficult situation. On 22 May Bosanquet was instructed to underline to the Estonians that “a fair proportion” of the arms and equipment should be supplied to the Russian troops. Bosanquet had reported on 7 May the Russian Northern army now had an authorised strength of 5.000 and its main force was concentrated on the Narva front. The army was not trusted by the Estonian government, but if it could be concentrated outside Estonia, it could be given direct support instead of via the Estonians.

Yudenich was still in Helsinki. The Estonians would not welcome him and the people who surround him in Reval as they realised that they wanted to reconstitute Great Russia with Estonia as a part. The majority of the newly elected Finnish parliament (Diet) was against any profile or part in an offensive against Petrograd. Mannerheim might want to exchange the city for Eastern Karelia, but the Diet considered an operation to capture Petrograd as “*an aggressive foreign intervention*”. As the Estonians the Finns distrusted the Russian general’s motives, and both had hindered his organisation of the total of 8.000 men he had in the two countries into an effective fighting force.

Some days later the War Office wrote that the public opinion was behind the Diet’s critical attitude to Mannerheim’s activism. Therefore the general had given up all ideas of using the regular Finnish army. The War Office suggested that the Finns should be told “distinctly” that the future of Eastern Karelia would be decided by the Peace Conference, it would not be influenced by events in Petrograd that Yudenich considered possible to take with only 15.000 men.

<sup>93</sup> TNA, ADM 137/1665, CALEDON (Cowan) No. 12/531 to The Secretary of the Admiralty of 7-5-1919.

## ***E. H. Carr responds to Piip***



Edward Hallett Carr. In 1919 he still supported action against Bolshevism. His minute and his other comments from mid-May finally led to a crystallisation of British policy in line with Balfour's commitment one year earlier.

(National Portrait Gallery)

On the same day, 10 May, the Estonian delegation to the Peace Conference found it necessary to repeat the request for support, and on 16 May Carr underlined in an extremely sharp and clear minute that *"It may not be inopportune to recall the obligations which His Majesty's Government have undertaken vis-à-vis Esthonia"*, most clearly in Balfour's letter of 3 May 1919 to support the wishes of its people.

The clearly stated wishes of independence of the recently elected Estonian "Diet", Britain was committed. Britain wanted to keep the Estonians in the fight against the Bolsheviks, but they had little reason to fight without guarantees that the Allies would not hand back their country to Russia under a new government such as one under Koltchak. "To expect them to fight without some guarantee of this sort is to ask them to fight against their own policy".

However, even such a guarantee did not rule out that Estonia would choose to enter a new Russian federation voluntarily. The minute noted that any type of recognition would *"annoy Koltchak and his friends"*, as the recognition of Finland had done, but *"he cannot afford to press his annoyance very far"*, and Britain could not at present bind themselves to reactionary ideas, *"whether held by Koltchak or anyone else"*. The minute concluded that Britain should fulfil the commitment she had entered, *"rightly or wrongly"*, and recognise their independence to secure the whole-hearted co-operation of the Estonians in the fight against Bolshevism. The only conditions should only be that a future Russia should be guaranteed free use of the Baltic railways and ports and that the relations between the future members of the League of Nations: The Baltic States and Russia should be examined by the League. Carr's superior, Charles Hardinge, supported the minute's conclusions completely.

### ***Offensive operations from Estonia***

Cowan returned to Libau on 11 May, after reports that the situation *"unfavourable and unchanged"*. On arrival he found that the American Mission had broken with the Allied conditions for giving food aid. Its policy was that food should be distributed whatever the situation, giving no guarantees against food falling into German or Bolshevik hands. It meant that the British could be presented as the "Blockaders" and the Americans as "Food Providers" in the propaganda. On 13 May Cowan was back in the Gulf of Finland. Patrolling of the Russian island of Seskar (Seiskari) at the western end of Petrograd Bay, he blocked Bolshevik naval interference against the flank of the Russian Northern

Army's offensive east from Narva and Estonian marine raids behind Bolshevik lines in support of that offensive. It was the start of the offensive that Yudenich would later take over. On 16 May the British signals intelligence against Russian radio communications got information that anti-Bolshevik forces had been landed at the mouth of Luga River north of Narva.

On 19 May Gowan heard of Goltz' capture of Riga but considered it inadvisable to do something until ordered to do so.

On 15 May, the British delegation discussed Finnish support for Estonia with the Finnish foreign minister, Rudolf Holsti. He had got the impression from conversations with Americans that the British had changed their attitude to support to Estonia, and his country would not act without British approval. He was informed that Great Britain was eager to support the Baltic Provinces, but she was awaiting a decision about their future status. Britain would be glad if Finland would help Estonia, *"but it must be understood that such action would have to be purely defensive as we did not wish to encourage the plan of an attack upon Petrograd at the present time..."* The complications of such an attack would be impossible to foresee. On the other hand the situation in Riga was desperate, at Great Britain would be grateful for Finnish support to an Estonian southern front attack directed at the occupation of that town. At the same time the issue of Finnish support had been discussed in Reval, where the Finnish Consul had underlined that any help would be linked to Estonian economic *"concessions"*. Bosanquet reported that the Estonian foreign minister had rejected the idea. Poska had told the British diplomat that his country *"must eventually seek protection of some power and Finland could not of course be that protecting power"*. Bosanquet underlined that Estonia simply needed credits to continue fighting and that Finland also depended on British finances to help. The discussions ended with Finland offering on 22 May to send 500 volunteers, if Great Britain agreed to cover the costs. It was rejected even if Carr considered it *"well advised to do so"*.

The near freeze of effective support for Estonia that had started when the Peace Conference assembled in Paris was still on. It was only to be eased end May with the arrival of the Estonian steamer ELLIND in Reval on 25 May. It was escorted by British destroyer and brought arms and ammunition from Britain. Ants Piip cabled that day that *"the transport enables us to continue our heavy fight for the liberty of Esthonia"*, Laidoner simply expressed his nation's gratitude.

On 18 May Bosanquet forwarded the report of Sir William Athelstane Meredith Goode, the Canadian journalist and financial advisor who had sent Tallents to the Baltic States in March. Goode had just returned from a visit to the Estonian southern front, the first made by a British observer since Tallents' two months earlier. The Estonians had continued fighting an ever increasing Bolshevik force and were tired by six months constant combat. They lacked ammunition for the handful of British field guns available and none for the heavier pieces. Other artillery was obsolete and in very bad condition. Fortunately the Bolsheviks were ineffective in handling their much larger artillery. They had their own improvised armoured cars, but begged for modern types usable in the hilly terrain. Both the men and their officers gave Goode a very good impression, in spite of their lack of uniforms and equipment. Bosanquet endorsed Goode's report and requests. Goode's report was somewhat more optimistic than Bosanquet's own evaluation of the situation from 7 May. Here he had not only mentioned that the Estonian soldiers were tired. The Soviet propaganda had some effect, and many soldiers were anxious to go home to tend their farms. Estonia needed men, money, munitions, equipment and provisions War-weariness was apparent. He had concluded that unless the Estonians get strong moral and material support, their country would be forced to make peace with the Bolsheviks. Now was the time to act.





Tallents' former boss, Sir William Goode. Also correspondent for the Manchester Guardian and admitted secret service agent, who repeated his front visit in May 1919.  
(National Portrait Gallery)

On 19 May Carr dealt with the issue of the Russian troops in Estonia raised by the Russian London ambassador in April and again, now more comprehensively, on 3 May. The ambassador he saw the risk of Estonia coming to terms with the Bolsheviks, removing the base for a Russian army operating against Petrograd. Carr noted that Britain could only work through the local national governments.

The “deck” was now “cleared” for the Treasury delayed launch of the Tallents’ mission a couple of days later.<sup>94</sup>

### ***After the Latvian thaw***

In Latvia the development now accelerated both the political and military fields. Keenan reported on 15 May that the Germans had completed their coup against the Ulmanis government by installing a conservative German Baltic cabinet with the Latvian Lutheran clergyman Andrievs Niedra as the front, but when the People’s Council protested and demanded the reinstatement of Ulmanis’ government, he fled. Keenan’s conclusion was that the situation was “nothing less than German Military Dictatorship”. On 10 May the Latvian foreign minister has asked the British to assist getting Latvian soldiers home. There were some at Archangel in the north and with Denikin in the south, but the bulk – 4.000 men and 400 officers – were with Kolchak in Siberia. Another 6.000 were still as Prisoners of War in Germany.

What happened during this period took place within the framework created by the presentation of the Peace Treaty text on 7 May. Any possible action should

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<sup>94</sup> TNA, FO 608/185. British Consulate General, Reval No. 11 of 7-5-1919; Foreign Office No. 308 to Mr. Bell (Helsingfors) of 8-5-1919; Ambassade de Russie, Londres of 30-4-1919; No. 9872 “The Independence of Esthonia” of 13-5-1919 with “Minute” by Carr of 13-5-1919; No.9905 “Organisation of Russian Forces in the Baltic States” of 14-5-1919; Bosanquet No. 32 of 12-5-1919; Bosanquet No. 41 of 14-5-1919; “The Question of Finnish Assistance to Esthonia” of 15-5-1919, “Russian Forces in Esthonia” of 23-5-1919; Bosanquet No. 50 of 18-5-1919; “Question of Finnish Help for Esthonia” of 31-5-1919; “Expense of Finnish Volunteer Force for Esthonia” from 31-5-1919; “Arrival in Esthonia of Supplies of Arms from Gt. Britain” of 31-5-1919; “British Assistance to Esthonia” of 5-6-1919; ADM 137/1665, CALEDON (Cowan) No. 12/531 to The Secretary of the Admiralty of 7-5-1919; ADM 137/1666, CLEOPATRA off SESKAR ISLAND(Cowan) No. 13/531 to The Secretary of the Admiralty of 20-5-1919; WO 157/43, Finland, “Political” early May; Baltic Provinces, Esthonia, “Operations” Russian Wireless; Finland, Finnish aims, “Abstracts from various reports dealing with .. Finnish volunteer movement against Bolsheviks”.

be to counter what the German considered unfairly unjust and unfair terms. Goltz could hope to help provoke a rejection of the terms.

In the War Office's "resumé" of the Latvian situation from 12 May, the British General Staff rejected that the 17 April Libau coup had only been a Baltic German operation. It had been "*incited and supported by the Germans*". The General Staff also underlined that the American mission, who "*fear Bolshevism more than Germanism*" considered that von der Goltz should be used as a "*barrier against Bolshevism*". However, Keenan, Marling and the British and French Senior Naval Officers in the Baltic agreed that his removal was necessary. Until effective action could be taken against him, it would be impossible to form a Latvian army. Until Goltz lived up to all demands, including the return of the confiscated British arms and the renaming of the German "*Army of Occupation*" into "*German Auxiliary Force*", no supplies for Goltz should be allowed through the blockade.

The requests had been made to the German representative of the Armistice Commission on 5 May. Four days later it had replied that the German had not been involved in the Libau coup, the German forces in Latvia would not be renamed and there was no reaction to the demand to withdraw Goltz. The German fighting forces would be withdrawn from Latvia and Lithuania "*in as short a time as possible*". However, withdrawal would only take place after a period that "*will secure the property belonging to the German Government in Latvia and Lithuania*". General Haking considered that the withdrawal of Goltz was covered by that general statement of intent. Grant Watson had reported on 8 May that von der Goltz had been called to Berlin "*for enquiry into recent events*". Apparently he had denied any involvement in the coup. On 12 May the Germans informed the Armistice Commission that investigations had proved Goltz' innocence.



Prince Anatoly Lieven, the independent thinking, Great Russian, player on the 1919 Latvian scene.  
(ronsslav.com)

On 15 May the delegation started to staff Grant Watson's report from the 2 May that with the Russian-manned element of von der Goltz force that was



commanded by the German Baltic Prince Anatoly Pavlovich Lieven. Watson reported that the prince co-operated with the Germans. He had recruited his force of about five hundred among Russian prisoners of war in Germany and it was to be funded by Germany when Riga had been captured. Lieven wanted to place his force under Kolchak when he later advanced together with Latvian and German volunteers into Russia. He wanted the British to release two former Russian steamers for his use. Watson's report was sent with a note from 15 May from the Foreign Office that warned that there were indications of German co-operation with Kolchak. Carr underlined again that Britain should support the national forces of the Baltic States rather than by *"supporting Russian forces organised and financed by the Germans and recognising Kolchak"*. On that day, 15 May, Grant Watson reported that commission from the Russian Northern Army in Estonia had travelled to Germany to purchase war material. It was another example of co-operation between Germans and anti-Bolshevik Russians in the Baltic Provinces. 20 May the delegation started dealing with a report from Marling that passed-on Latvian information about Lieven's visit to Germany. He tried to recruit officers among the Russian Prisoners of War. The result would be *"small Baltic States in a large Russia which would moreover ne under German influence"*. Then the Latvian representative in Copenhagen informed Charles Marling that the German government intended to make 2000 tartar Prisoners of War available for Lieven to terrorize the Latvian peasantry. When the Foreign Office forwarded Marling's cable to Paris on 29 May, it concluded that the German government tried to poison the relations between the Latvians and Kolchak, who was represented by Lieven. It was *"most important"* that the attempt was blocked. Carr thought that the best channel was would be the Allied representation in Berlin rather than the Armistice Commission. He added that any Russian reinforcement, not only Tartars, would complicate matters and make a reinstatement of Ulmanis' government more difficult.

### ***American independence, Riga retaken and Gough's thoughts***

Mid-May Sir Marling had reported about the new problem for the Allies in Latvia that he recognized when he debriefed a Royal Navy captain returning from Libau. The head of the American Mission, Colonel Warwick Green, tried to dominate Allied policy at this critical time. Green had led himself be unduly influenced by his Baltic German contacts, whose language he spoke. As they he exaggerated the Bolshevik leanings of the Latvian population. The Royal Navy reported that one result was the Americans intended to ignore the Allied decision to make further distribution of American flour to the reinstatement of the Ulmanis government. Carr had noted on 17. May that the Americans in Paris were content to have the coming Allied Military Mission under British leadership, and a strong British political Mission under Tallents was about to leave. In his opinion this combination would secure *"British predominance in the Baltic"*. However, on 20 May Carr's superior, Sir Esme Howard, noted that the delivery had to stop as most went to supply von der Goltz' troops, but at the 23 May meeting of the main Allied powers, the British was forced to accept the continued deliveries to non-Bolshevik areas linked to a promise that steps were taken to prevent deliveries to the Germans.

In the military field the Baltic German force was increased by recruitment. All information indicated preparations for an advance into Riga. Goltz spread rumours that they prepared evacuation at the same time as he marked their volunteer regiments as local by re-naming them *"couris"* after the region. Grant Watson had reported on 14 May that Riga would be recaptured *"immediately"* with the main object of saving Germans and Baltic Germans and allowing them to leave the city.





Ragged First of May Parade in Riga a couple of weeks before the Bolshevik force fled.  
(Wikimedia Commons)

On 19 May Marling sent information from Menning that the Bolshevik troops had mutinied and shot some of their leaders. Most of the mutineers were Latvians and had opened negotiations with anti-Bolshevik Latvian and Estonian troops in the vicinity. Before the British Paris delegation had time to deal with the report, Riga had fallen. The report was read by Tallents just before his departure for the Baltic States

26 May the British delegation answered the Foreign Office in line with Carr's ideas during the previous two weeks. Britain should work through the local Baltic national governments, but the conditions in relation to Russia for formal recognition was still being worked-out. To encourage formation of Russian forces

would lead to friction with the local anti-Bolshevik forces, especially if the Russian units were organized and financed by the Germans.<sup>95</sup>

Even before Tallents returned to the Baltic States, the chief of the Allied Military Mission, General Sir Hubert Gough, was making up his mind about what needed to be done. On 23 May he communicated his first observations via Grant Watson.

The general noted that the situation was intolerable as it was "*derogatory to prestige of Allied Powers*". The Germans should be ordered to permit the Latvian government and to withdraw their troops to home "by certain date". The Latvian forces should be given some British instructors. All Baltic States would be dealt with as one question. It is understandable that Carr commented "Nothing very much in this".

<sup>95</sup> TNA, FO 608/185. Sir C. Marling (Copenhagen) No. 1106 of 9-5-1919; Keenan, K.57 of 15-5-1919; Grant Watson, No.42 and "Prince Lieven's Volunteer Anti-Bolshevik Force" of 15-5-1919; British Delegation No. 808 to the Foreign Office of 26-5-1919; Grant Watson No.55 of 14-5-1919 and No. 57 of 15-5-1919; "The Situation in Latvia" of 21-5-1919; "Situation in Latvia" of 27-5-1919 with Sir C. Marling (Copenhagen) No. 1154 of 19-5-1919; "German Government and Prince Lieven's Corps" of 29-5-1919 with Sir C. Marling (Copenhagen) No.1191 of 24-5-1919 & Foreign Office No. 3439 of 29-5-1919; WO 157/43, Latvia, "Resumé of the General Situation", Appendix "B", "A" Branch 12-5-1919; "Germans and Latvia", Spa Armistice Commission Despatches Nos. 174 & 175; Latvia. "Reforming of Lettish Government", F.O. Tel. No. 49 of 8-5-1919; Baltic Provinces, "Activities of General von der Goltz", Armistice Commission Despatch No. 176.



The unfortunate General Sir Hubert Gough, the summer 1919 visitor to the Baltic complexity.  
([www.greatwarcollection.nl](http://www.greatwarcollection.nl))

On 30 May the German representative at the Armistice Commission was informed that Goltz could stay in Latvia, but only if would support the coming broad based Latvian government, if he returned the confiscated arms to the Latvians, if he stopped blocking Latvian mobilization, and if he let the Latvian government free to carry-out its functions. He had a period from 1 to 15 June to live up to these conditions. On 2 June it was proposed that Marshal Foch should in addition to the conditions demand an apology from the German government and demand a removal of the guns I Libau harbor. The British knew it would be difficult. During

the last days of May Goltz had been reinforced by 3.000 soldiers and 400 pioneer troops, and all Latvian troops had been ordered to leave Libau naval harbor.<sup>96</sup>

### ***Towards Petrograd***

Cowan was still in Reval on 25 May when he reacted to the Admiralty's order to use Libau as a British naval base if the Germans refused to accept the terms of the Peace Treaty. He considered the idea ludicrous. Goltz had ignored all Allied orders and he controlled the town and its port with troops and artillery. During the previous days the German soldiers had become still more hostile and have placed ten field guns in the Naval Harbour. If the Germans refused to sign, the Allied missions should be evacuated. The Admiralty accepted the argument and on 31 May Cowan got freedom to evacuate to either Reval or Copenhagen if he considered the move necessary.

Cowan noted that a sign of the German attitude had been the recent arrest of five junior British naval officers by guards. In reality Cowan knew that this incidence had been caused by illegal and undisciplined behavior of the five and that Goltz was justified in refusing to apologize for the incident.<sup>97</sup> It meant a massive loss of face in relation to the German general and can have reinforced Cowan's

<sup>96</sup> TNA, FO 608/185, Sir C. Marling (Copenhagen) No. 1112. Very Confidential of 11-5-1919 and notes on "Attitude of the U.S. Mission in Latvia; "Question of Distribution of American Flour in Latvia" of 20-5-1919; "Allied Policy in the Baltic States" of 28-5-1919 with Grant Watson No.73 of 23-5-1919; Extract from the Report D.194, Received from the Chief of the British Delegation to the Permanent International Armistice Commission of 30-5-1919; Admiralty, Paris to Admiralty No. 920 of 2-6-1919; WO 157/43, entry BALTIC PROVINCES", "German attitude", probably 21-5-1919.

<sup>97</sup> TNA, ADM 137/1666, CLEOPATRA, Reval (Cowan) No. 404/525.C. to The Commander-in-Chief of Atlantic and Home Fleets and the Secretary of the Admiralty of 25-5-1919; Admiralty, Telegram to S.N.O. Baltic on 31-5-1919; CinC Atlantic Fleet "Situation in the Baltic in the event of the Germans refusing to sign the Peace Treaty" of 2-6-1919; M. 02332 Secret of 4-6-1919 to The Commander-in-Chief, H.M. Ships and Vessels, Atlantic Fleet; S.N.O. Baltic Confidential (Docket) 416/522 of 3-6-1919.



determination to concentrate on the more straightforward problems of fighting the Bolsheviks in the Gulf of Finland.

Cowan covered the next two weeks' development in his report from 3 June. He had stayed off Seskar Island until late 22 May, whereafter he had returned to Reval, leaving the destroyers in place. In Reval he met HMS LUCIA and the five boats of the 7<sup>th</sup> Submarine Flotilla that were to take over patrolling the mouth of Petrograd Bay from the destroyers. Gough's Allied mission arrived on 24 May and met the somewhat war-weary Estonian government and command. Cowan noted the extremely good impression and encouragement created by the arrival, especially as the steamer ELLIND arrived the next morning with military supplies. On Cowan's request an American shipload of flour was sent quickly from Libau, which further reinforced the good impression.

In the meeting the Allied delegation raised the issue of giving Yudenich command of the Petrograd offensive with the Estonian government, and on the morning of 25 May the Russian general arrived in Reval on-board a French destroyer. The Estonians were extremely annoyed and Gough explained that he had no prior knowledge, and the Russian general returned to Helsinki to await events. On 26 May Gough and Cowan crossed over to Helsinki, where the mission was expected to urge the Finns to advance on Petrograd "*whereas the opposite was the case*".

The squadron returned on 30 May to the Seskar waters and on the following morning it fought an engagement with a Bolshevik force of a battleship, a destroyer and two smaller craft, all supported by an aircraft and the local coastal fort. Another engagement between British and Bolshevik destroyers followed on 2 June. On that day the Allied mission and the Estonians reached agreement about the framework for the Russian offensive against Petrograd from Narva.

On 3 June the agreement was mirrored in Paris. The Estonian Paris delegation informed the British that the "*Russian Corps of the Estonian Army*" had moved beyond the borders of the country and its logistic support was therefore no

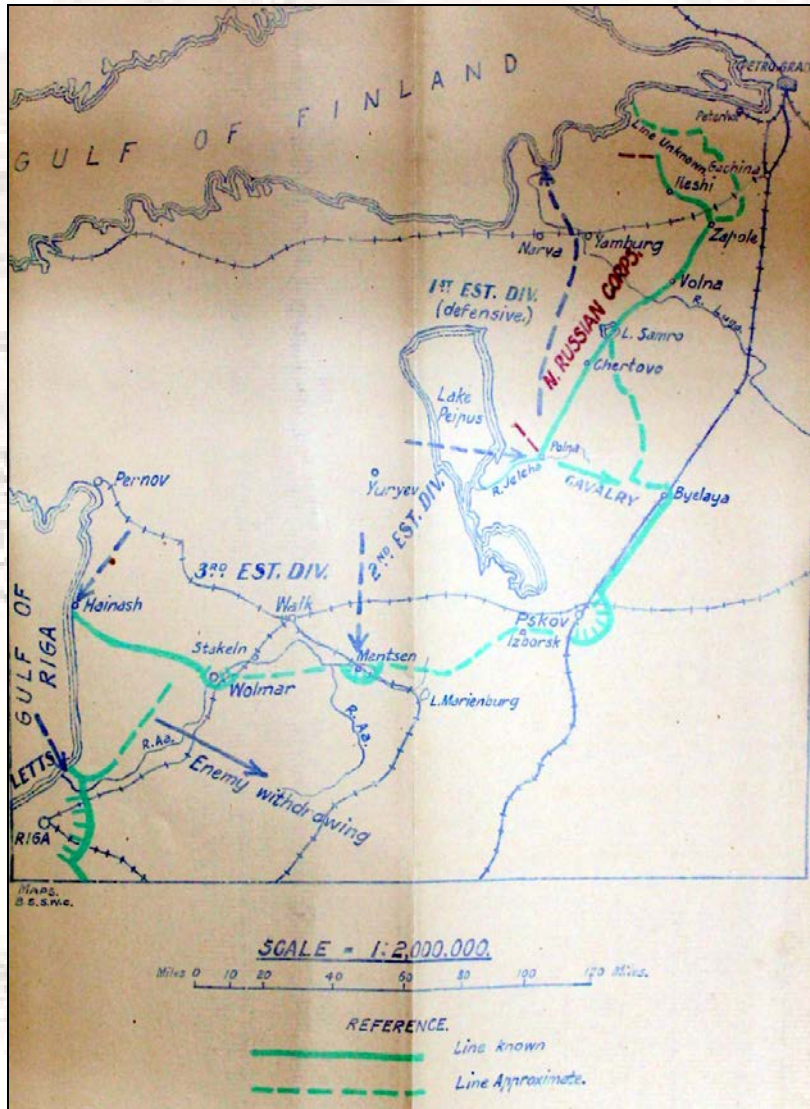
longer an Estonian responsibility. This was confirmed by the Military Section of the British Delegation. On 21 May London had information that anti-Bolshevik troops had reached the outskirts of Peterhof. Yudenich could take command. His deputy commander issued a proclamation to the population of Petrograd that "*their liberators are coming; Russia will be built up again on a democratic basis; ... Red troops who surrender will suffer no harm ... the Tzarist regime will not be restored*".

### ***Post Riga-liberation operations start in Latvia***

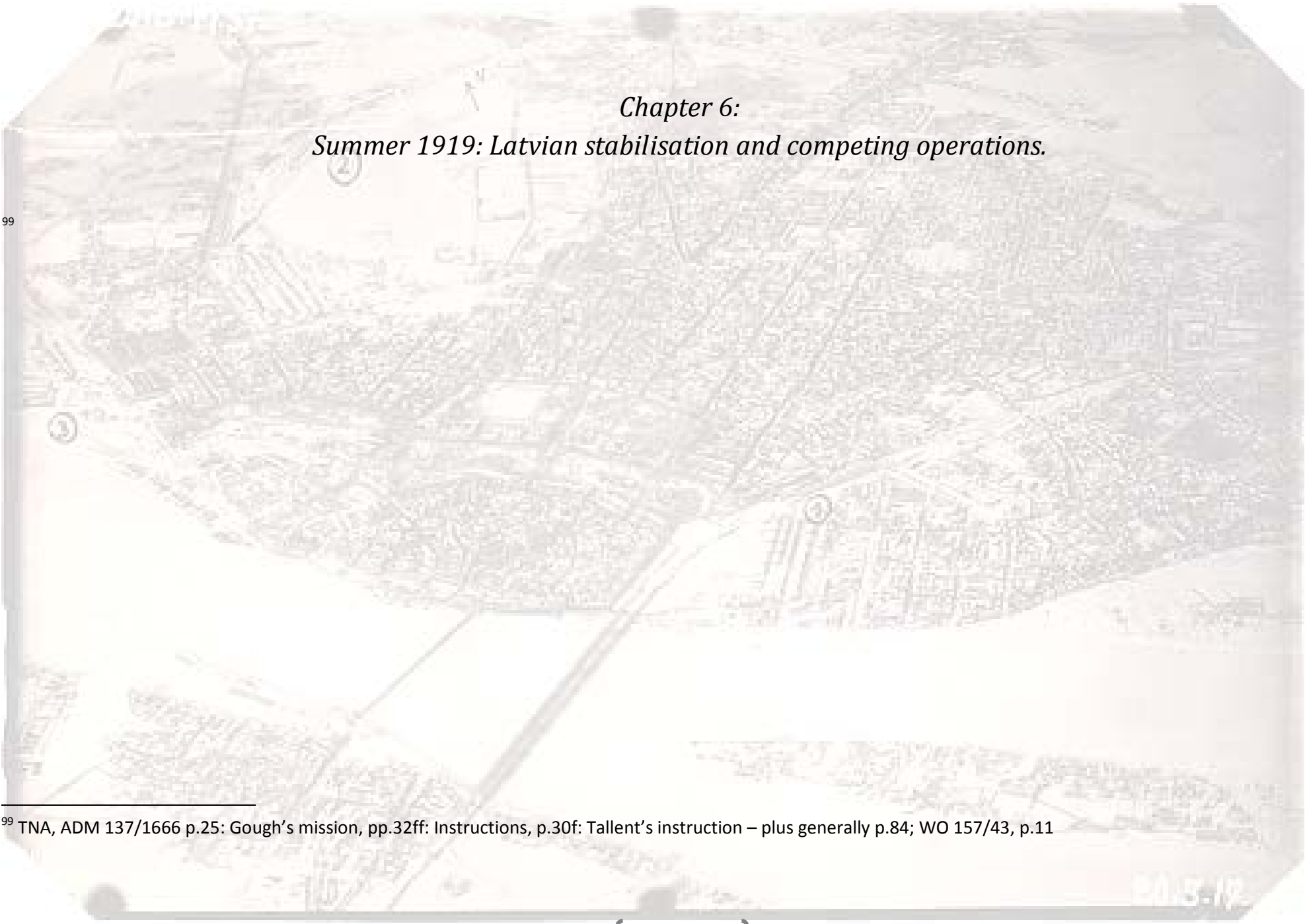
On 2 June Keenan reported to the accelerating military development after the German Baltic Landwehr had captured Riga with the support the German Iron Division on 22 May and followed by the Latvian force from Courland. His impressions were that Janis Balodis Latvian were to join up with Jorgis Zemitāns Latvian force under Estonian command at Wenden (Cēsis). In reality the force advancing from Riga towards Wenden early June was the German Baltic Landwehr. He thought that Goltz' VI Reserve Corps was advancing southeast along Dwina (Daugava) towards Kreuzburg (Krustpils-Jakobstadt, now Jēkabpils), probably because he had believed constantly that it was Goltz' intention.. He reported correctly that the Estonians had started an offensive on the southern front that would eventually reach Kreuzburg. The major knew that he was getting out of touch in Libau and wanted to go by destroyer to Riga to obtain better information.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>98</sup> TNA, FO 608/185, Keenan, No. 58 of 2-6-1919; Délégation D'Estonie No. 965 of 3-6-1919 to Balfour and "Supplies for the Russian Corps in Esthonia" of 3-6-1919; ADM 137/1666, H.M.S. CLEOPATRA, Reval (Cowan) Nr. 14/531 of 3-6-1919; WO 157/43, "BALTIC PROVINCES", "Proclamation to the people of Petrograd" (end May).





London situation estimate of 3 June 1919.  
 (The National Archives)



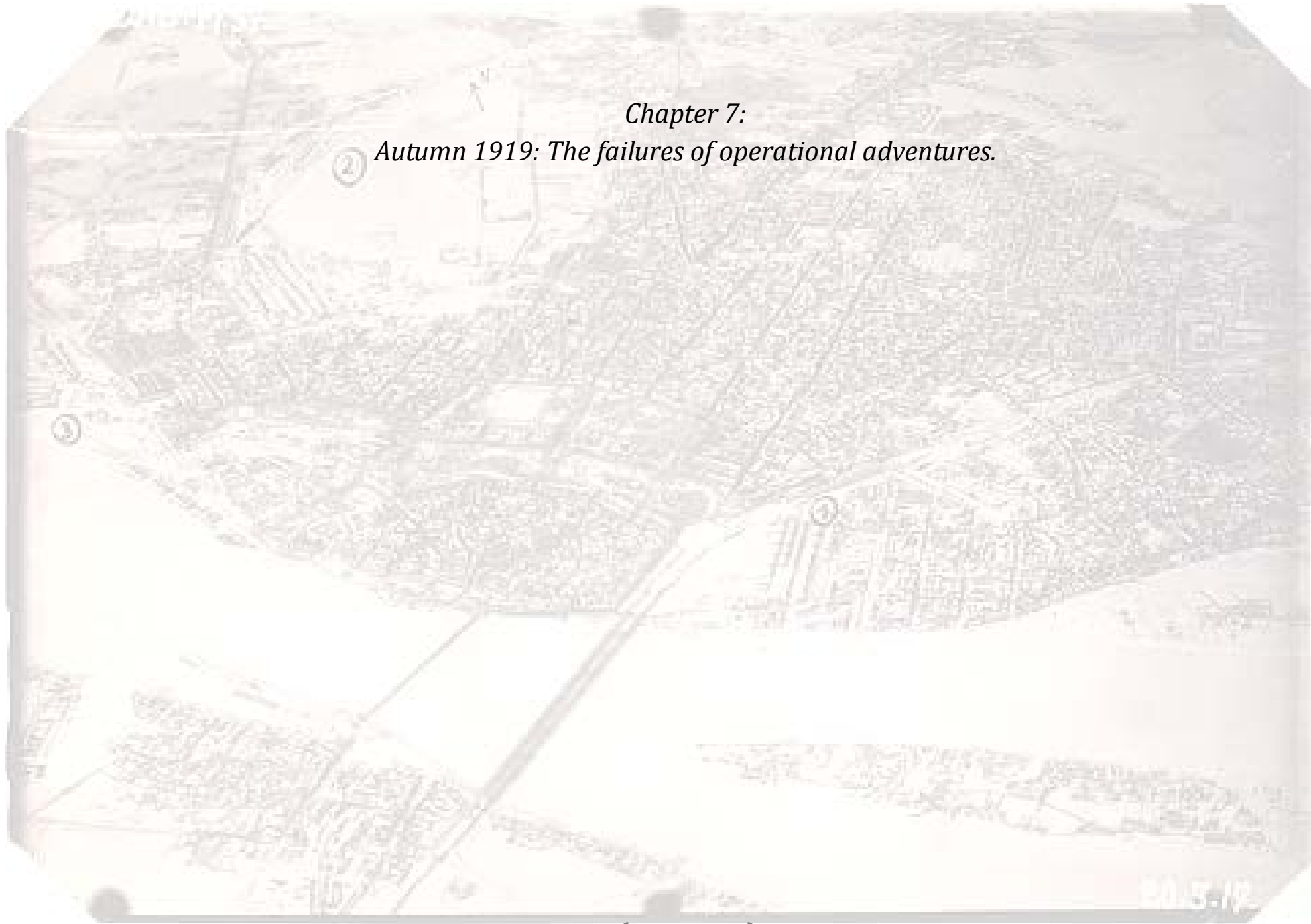
*Chapter 6:  
Summer 1919: Latvian stabilisation and competing operations.*

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<sup>99</sup> TNA, ADM 137/1666 p.25: Gough's mission, pp.32ff: Instructions, p.30f: Tallent's instruction – plus generally p.84; WO 157/43, p.11

*Chapter 7:*

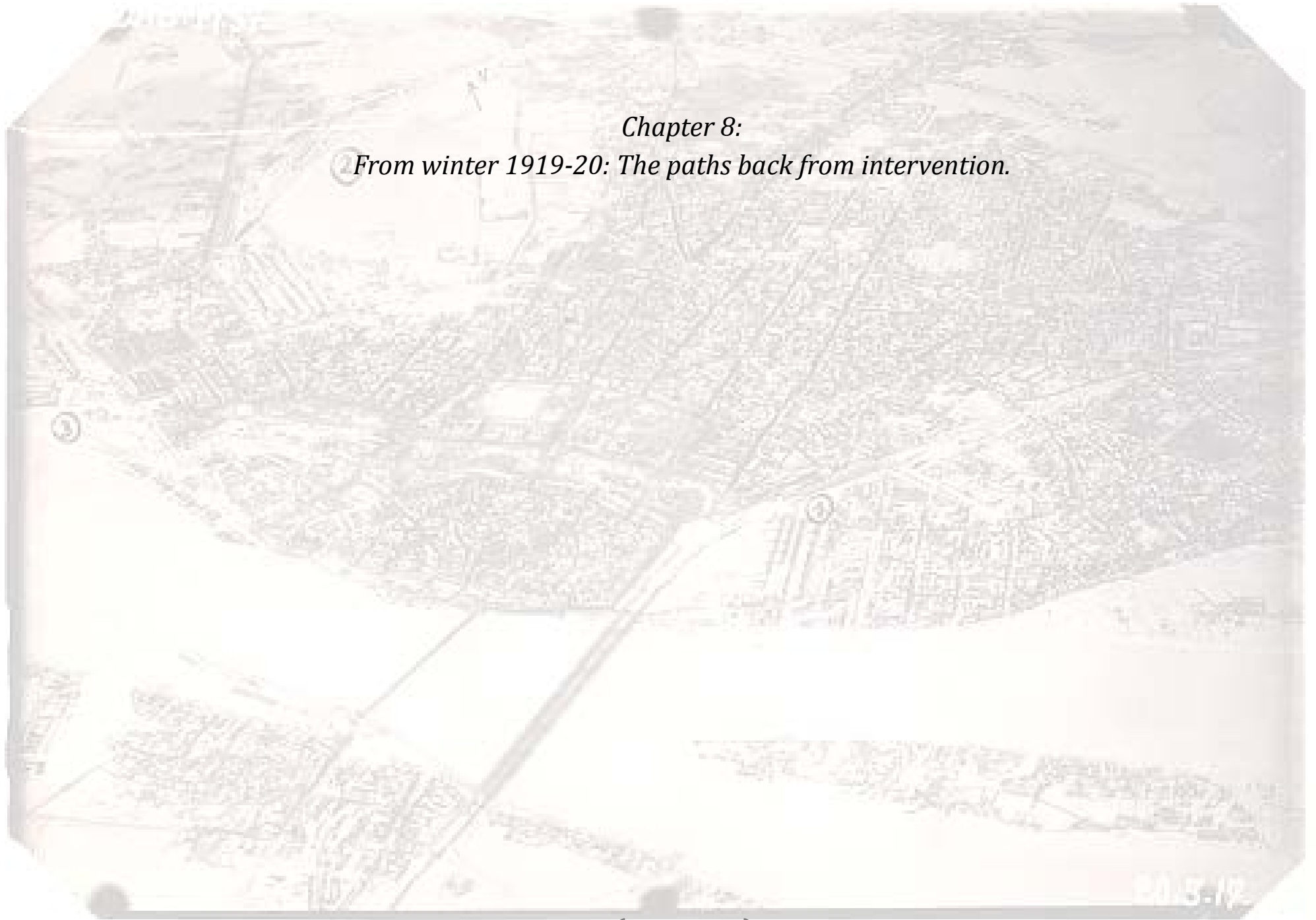
*Autumn 1919: The failures of operational adventures.*

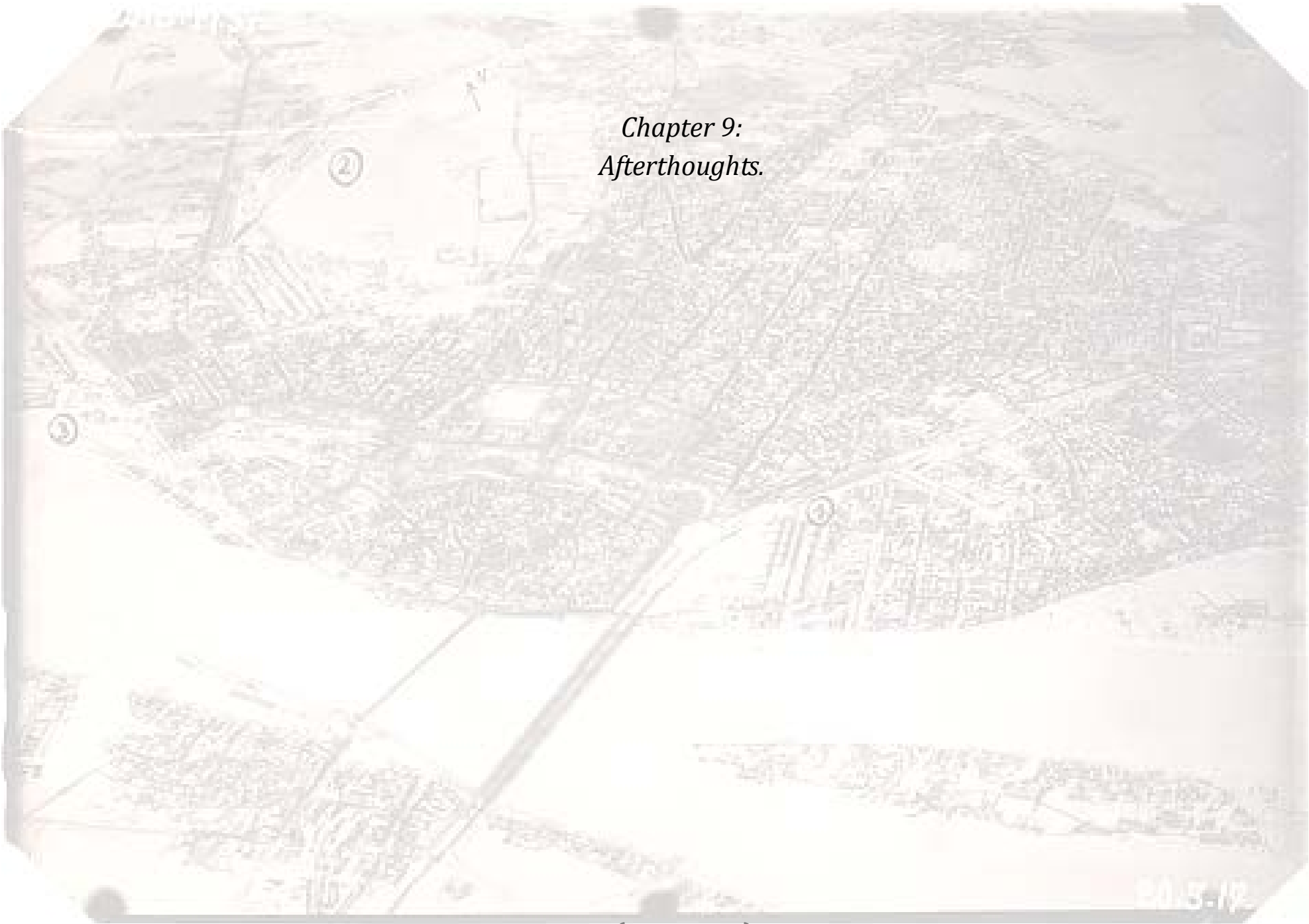




*Chapter 8:*

*From winter 1919-20: The paths back from intervention.*





*Chapter 9:  
Afterthoughts.*

*Comments on literature and sources.*

