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Geoffrey Till

*The U.S. Naval War College*

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*Geoffrey Till holds the Dudley W. Knox Chair for Naval History and Strategy at the Naval War College. His Understanding Victory: Naval Operations from Trafalgar to the Falklands was published by ABC-Clio in 2014, and he recently completed a fourth edition of his Seapower: A Guide for the 21st Century.*

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## THE BRITISH AND THE LIMITATIONS OF MARITIME MANEUVER

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*Geoffrey Till*

These days, strategists, in effect, are turning their thoughts to the concept of *maritime maneuver* associated with Sir Julian Corbett as a means of achieving their ends in an era of intensifying great-power competition, not least across the western Pacific. Proponents assure others that this strategic approach offers a wider range of diplomatic and operational options in peace as well as in war, while limiting cost and liability, especially for countries that are more maritime in their outlook. But there are costs, challenges, and limitations that need to be addressed realistically if practice is to equal theory—if, indeed, it can. A review of the British experience should help identify some of the issues that must be resolved if maritime maneuver is to fulfill its strategic promise. Historically, that promise has disappointed—in realized cost, achieved effect, or both—so often that too much should not be expected of it.

But first, what are we talking about? What does *maritime maneuver* mean? *Maneuver* and the *maneuverist* approach denote the attempt to shape a conflict and attack an adversary's cohesion either by coming from unexpected directions or by employing a surprising and innovative manner of attack. The broad aim is to outsmart the adversary rather than simply to subdue him through direct, frontal attack, and thus to avoid the heavy costs that characterized the attritionalist approach to battle on the western front in the First World War, for example. Churchill's view was clear. In his account of the Dardanelles campaign, the future prime minister wrote, "Battles are won by slaughter and maneuver. The greater the general, the more he contributes in maneuver, the less he demands in slaughter."<sup>1</sup> This famous aphorism summons up the juxtaposition of the two. Yet while they often are treated as opposites, maneuver and attrition in fact are

complementary. Most military campaigns exhibit both, in varying relative mixtures and at varying times, depending on a range of circumstances and intentions. Alongside the maneuverist aspects of the Battle of Trafalgar, for example, there were some distinctly attritionalist ones as well, although Nelson's aim at that time was to ensure that the attrition was as one-sided as possible.<sup>2</sup>

The maneuver–attrition spectrum applies to all three of the levels of war: the strategic, which relates to the war as a whole; the operational, which deals with campaigns; and the tactical, which concerns the conduct of battle. The differences between these three levels of war are not clear-cut. As A. A. Svechin famously sought to explain, strategy provides the framework within which the campaign should be fought, while campaign planning does the same for the battles.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, failure at one level can rise up or cascade downward, adversely affecting outcomes at the other two levels of war.

Although none of these concepts or terms were around when Britain was conducting most of its military campaigns, this article contends that the default approach of the British to the conduct of their amphibious and shore-based conflicts was instinctively maneuverist in conception, but that a variety of adverse circumstances at all three levels of war meant it often was much more attritionalist in practice than they wished. At all three levels, though, the British were seeking maneuver while trying to avoid attrition. To the charge that all sensible militaries try to do this, the response is that the British were trying to do it more than most. This made sense for them because their control of the seas provided them far more strategic opportunities than their adversaries had, while the costs of maintaining that naval superiority meant they had a much smaller army than their main adversaries did, and thus one that was unsuited to an attritionalist style of war.

This brings us to the second part of the concept—its maritime nature. Corbett was at pains to emphasize that the destinies of nations were decided essentially on land, not at sea. Accordingly, navies were most strategically significant to the extent that they could influence the course of events ashore by what they did at and from the sea. But importantly, there were limits to the effects that navies could produce, especially when set against countries with great continental resources, or in peacetime, when the use of overt military force was more constrained. In such circumstances the other services and other economic, social, and political levers of national power had to be an important part of the effort as well. The naval contribution was an essential but usually insufficient element in a whole-of-government, if not whole-of-country, maritime approach to the advance and defense of national interests. As Corbett made clear, *maritime* simply referred to situations in which the sea was an important factor.<sup>4</sup> Corbett's colleague Charles Callwell underlines the point that for this approach to succeed, “the whole of

the machinery [of government] . . . [needs] to be set in motion [and] there must be harmony in the council chamber and in the theater of operations.”<sup>5</sup> For a peacetime example of this approach, we need look no further than China’s transnational development program, the Belt and Road Initiative, which, whatever its motivation, is built on a range of national efforts intended to combine to deliver strategic effects, and in which the sea and both the navy and commercial shipping are central to the outcome.

With that in mind, how have the British attempted over the years to put *maritime* and *maneuver* together? With what success, and what problems did they encounter? And finally, how salient is all this to today’s circumstances?

### EARLY INDICATIONS OF THE BRITISH SEARCH FOR MARITIME MANEUVER

Corbett emphasized that maritime maneuver characterized the British style of war in the eighteenth century. It combined naval, military, and economic power in a uniquely beneficial and cost-effective way. This allowed the British to “become a controlling force in the European system” and to maintain and extend their interests by manipulating the balance of power in continental Europe through the controlled and careful application of maritime power in peace and war.<sup>6</sup>

This approach had several components. First and foremost, it meant avoiding entangling military commitments on the Continent, and instead fighting wars to the last Prussian, Russian, or Frenchman, as the case might be. This preference is confirmed by Tobias Smollett, considering the Seven Years’ War in his *History of England*: “[M]any friends of their country exclaimed against the projected army of observation in Germany, as the commencement of a ruinous continental war, which it was neither the interest of the nation to undertake, nor in their power to maintain, without starving the operations by sea, and in America, founded on British principles.”<sup>7</sup> The reference to “British principles” is interesting, as it confirms an unspoken, typically national way of warfare.

Where the effort of supported surrogates was not enough to deliver the outcomes that Britain needed, command of the sea would allow its navy and an expeditionary army to range across the world to attack the opponent’s trade, seize his ports and colonies, and enrich Britain itself while securing strategic gains that could be traded against possible losses in Europe. Thus, Pitt in 1796: “While the violence of France has been over-running so great a part of Europe, and everywhere carrying desolation in its progress, your naval exertions have enabled you to counterbalance their successes, by acquisitions in different parts of the globe, and to pave the way for the restoration of peace to your allies, on terms which their own strength might have been unable to procure.”<sup>8</sup> This no doubt helps explain why he and others regarded the army as perhaps a necessary evil, whereas

the navy, as the source of such strategic freedom to maneuver, was “[t]hat great foundation of our strength, of our glory, and of our characteristic superiority over the rest of the nations of Europe.”<sup>9</sup> It also explains why, in the words of one speaker in the House of Commons on the eve of the War of Jenkins’s Ear, “[I]t would be one of the greatest Favours the French could do us to provoke us to a Sea War, and one of the greatest Injuries we can do ourselves, is to engage with-

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out Necessity in an expensive Land one.”<sup>10</sup> Others were anxious to show that sea- and land-based grand strategies (not that they had either the concepts or these words at the time) were complementary, not opposites, emphasizing

the importance of sustaining armies that could deliver the necessary effects on land and the requirement for a flourishing economy able to fund them.

At the operational and tactical levels, of course, things were not so simple, and the historical record does much to justify Sir Michael Howard’s conclusion concerning “virtually every British amphibious operation since the age of Elizabeth”: “[A]ll brilliant in conception, all lamentable in execution. The surprise and mobility which [Basil] Liddell Hart had seen as the essence of British maritime strategy, so far from ensuring success, had resulted over the centuries in an almost unbroken record of expensive and humiliating failure.”<sup>11</sup>

Such, for example, was the fate of the 1741 venture against Cartagena, which, though maneuverist in conception, turned out to be disastrously attritional in execution.<sup>12</sup> Some of the reasons for this were general ones that could apply to any military operation, while others were especially characteristic of amphibious operations. In the first category fall such deficiencies as the poor mobilization and preparation of the force, the lack of surprise, the effects of disease, and the unimaginative frontal tactics that led, for example, to the failure to take the fort of Saint Lazare by land assault. The difficulties special to the conduct of amphibious operations include such things as the failure of naval gunfire support, from which commanders took away the lesson that, to be effective, ships in the future must get within half a musket shot of a strong fort, dangerous though that might be. The navy also was distracted constantly by the need to guard against the sudden appearance of more Spanish or even French ships. Above all, the expedition showed the dangers of an almost complete absence of coordination between type commanders, at sea and on land, who necessarily had different, if complementary, priorities.<sup>13</sup>

These problems did not mean that for such operational and tactical reasons strategic maneuver of this sort always would fail. They did not, for example, in

the seizure of Quebec in 1759 or of Havana in 1762, and in support of Wellington's campaign in Spain against Napoléon. But they did underline the point that for the concept to succeed, extensive preparations had to be made; this demanded sufficient time and, above all, the establishment of a settled clarity of aim.

Arguably, the absence of either was the problem in the Crimean War a century after Britain's defeat at Cartagena. Again, in essence it was a brilliant concept, especially when linked to an outflanking threat to the Russian position in the Baltic and to Saint Petersburg itself to pressure Russia's capacity and will to continue the war. However, it was a venture that proved much more costly than expected through lamentable failures of preparation; through continuous delays in execution, which gave an obdurate adversary time to construct his defenses; and through the crass failings of an army ill prepared to take on a determined and powerful major competitor at a distance as part of a campaign of maritime maneuver.<sup>14</sup>

#### THE GALLIPOLI CAMPAIGN

From 1914, Britain's conduct of the First World War was partly a result of its belief that Germany had a policy and clear strategic aim of turning itself into the powerhouse of Mitteleuropa, through a "linking up of Germany, and Austria-Hungary to Asia by means of the Balkans and Turkey," thereby maintaining a clear threat to Britain's imperial communications and constituting "a direct thrust at our Indian Empire."<sup>15</sup> The center, or the heartland, then would dominate the periphery, just as Halford Mackinder had prophesied.<sup>16</sup> In the early days of the war, such considerations led to concern about the future role of Turkey and to explorations of the policy Britain should adopt in regard to a conflict among Greece, Turkey, and Russia.<sup>17</sup> This was the culmination of over a century of worry about what might happen in this strategically crucial area.<sup>18</sup>

The immediate requirement, though, was to stabilize the western front in Europe. Once that had been achieved, and until the mass mobilization of British forces was completed in 1916, there was little more—the so-called Easterners argued—that Britain usefully could contribute to the situation there. This provided a maneuverist window of opportunity for the more-imaginative and cost-effective use of Britain's limited new reinforcements in a secondary theater of operations—such as Gallipoli—for an indirect assault on the country's enemies.<sup>19</sup> The possibility of a thrust against Turkey first was adumbrated clearly by Maurice Hankey, secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, in his Boxing Day memorandum of 1914.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Gallipoli: The Search for Strategic Maneuver*

Again, in true Corbettian style, Britain's command of the sea seemed to offer the opportunity to conduct a limited intervention to achieve strategic-level objectives in an unlimited war, thereby avoiding the costly, large-scale commitments required

of most of its continental counterparts. At the same time, the British hoped to create decisive effects through their ability to menace the exposed vulnerabilities of a land-bound adversary, either along the European coastline or in its colonial holdings. Nowadays this would be called the natural strategy of the “offshore balancer,” a country able, at minimum cost, to “become a controlling force in the European system” and to maintain and extend its interests by manipulating the balance of power in continental Europe.<sup>21</sup>

Julian Corbett (as so often was the case) summarized the strategic aspiration brilliantly in his history of the First World War:

[W]hen a war is sufficiently maritime in character for the sea to become an essential factor, secondary theatres may be decisive. It was in the Peninsula we had made our chief contribution to the overthrow of Napoleon; in the Crimea the Russian war had been won; and by the conquest of Havana we had brought the Seven Years’ War to its sudden and triumphant conclusion. In all three examples the result was due to the concentration of naval and military force where the enemy was weakest.<sup>22</sup>

General Sir Ian Hamilton, British army, commander in chief of the Mediterranean Force, also understood the advantages that British sea power had to confer in this respect. A convinced Easterner, he advocated for a defensive campaign in the west and an offensive in the east. Otherwise, it would be a case of “not exploiting our own special characteristics, mobility and sea power!”<sup>23</sup> Some Germans agreed. “Should the Dardanelles fall,” declared Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, State Secretary of the Imperial Naval Office, “the World-War has been decided against us.”<sup>24</sup>

Other Germans disagreed. Recent experience, thought General Colmar von der Goltz, “should put an end to the old times when a few thousand French or English troops escorted by a fleet were able to compel the governments of large and populous countries in Eastern Asia to comply with their will.” He concluded, “In highly civilized and thickly populated countries . . . landings never have any prospect of great success.”<sup>25</sup> Most in the British army thought so too. For them, the Gallipoli project was conditional and temporary. Once Britain had mobilized fully for war, the main effort would again need to be in France, as the seminal Committee of Imperial Defence meeting of 1911 had concluded. General Charles C. Monro put it forward with characteristic bluntness. “France,” he said, “is the only place Germany can be beaten. Every man not employed in killing Germans in France and Flanders is wasted.”<sup>26</sup> “Westerners” like him initially went along with a scheme in Turkey that they thought was a navy-centric forcing of the straits that would require only limited land support and would not divert too much effort from the western front.<sup>27</sup> The failure of the bold, navy-only scheme to force the straits on 19 March 1915 dashed those hopes and meant that the next stage, if there was one, would require a much greater maritime-maneuver enterprise.

From then on, a crucial mismatch between the demands of the objective and the size and quality of the resources allocated for the purpose seemed to confirm the Westerners' skepticism. It made the larger Gallipoli campaign seem "a dream of vain imaginings."<sup>28</sup> The mismatch violated the German philosopher Immanuel Kant's imperative that whoever wills the aim also must will the means.<sup>29</sup> In part, this was a consequence of the extremely short timeline between the initial failure of the naval campaign to force the Dardanelles in March and the start of what was in effect a full-fledged amphibious operation a bare five weeks later. Given the known complexities of amphibious operations (especially one that was in a theater a long way from home; that would take place in an environment that was challenging, climatically and topographically; and that would be opposed from the start), this was a level of ambition bordering on the reckless. It fully justified the conclusion of Admiral Rosslyn Wemyss, RN, who, in supervising the logistics base at Mudros, Greece, was in a good position to judge. "Never in the history of the world has such an expedition sailed, never has a big campaign been so hastily organized and got together, and never has such an undertaking had so little consideration been given from home."<sup>30</sup>

Uncertainty about how the strategic aim was to be achieved dramatically increased the scale of the mismatch between the objectives and the means provided. The problem was that the exact nature and status of the operation never really was hammered out in the highest strategy-making forum, the War Council—which itself was an essay in joined-up government, undermined by the amateur nature of its proceedings. The council's maladroitness included an absence of minutes, which allowed people to draw different conclusions from its "decisions," or indeed to question whether decisions had been made at all, and a tendency simply to paper over the cracks between divided opinions. Its composition was faulty, too, with the military professionals present only as constrained advisers.<sup>31</sup>

Right from the start, there was uncertainty about how the strategic goal of the campaign—knocking Turkey out of the war—was to be achieved, and therefore about the extent and nature of the resources to be provided for it. The absence of a clear-cut and agreed-upon vision for the operation was evident in the War Council's well-known order of 13 January 1915: "The Admiralty should also prepare for a naval expedition in February to bombard and take the Gallipoli Peninsula with Constantinople as its objective."<sup>32</sup> The last phrase was inherently ambiguous, and it was far from clear how the Admiralty could "take" the peninsula, since obviously this could be accomplished only by land forces.<sup>33</sup> Nor was the connection between the taking of the peninsula and the subsequent advance on Constantinople very clear to anyone.

Hamilton's account of the idiosyncratic manner in which Field Marshal H. H. Kitchener, British army, the secretary of state for war, apprised him of his mission

and the sparseness of his subsequent directives is equally familiar: “The Admiral [de Robeck] asked to see my instructions and Braithwaite read them out. When he stopped, Roger Keyes, the Commodore, inquired, ‘Is that all?’ And when Braithwaite confessed that it was, everyone looked a little blank.”<sup>34</sup> Was this a joint maritime operation, or was it essentially a naval operation with a degree of army support? Was it just a question of the fleet turning up off Constantinople, or would the army have to garrison the hinterland, or the peninsula, or both? Were the Russians to be involved, or were they not? These issues were nebulous

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in themselves and, worse still, they went through a constant shifting throughout the campaign.

The result was a continuing gap between the varying extent and nature of the commitment, on the one hand, and the level of resources

allocated toward it, on the other. The gap reflected fundamental differences of opinion about what exactly the project was designed to achieve and how. A navy-centered operation well might require fewer soldiers, and that indeed was the original intention, but the larger amphibious operation that became necessary later required far more land forces—but did not get them at the start of the campaign, when they were most needed for decisive effect. Thus, Walter E. Guinness, Lord Moyne, looking back on 8 November at the campaign so far, stated, “We heard this morning that Lord Kitchener is on his way out. It is difficult to see how we can withdraw from here without great losses. Never can a campaign have been worse managed. Although 17 Divisions have been sent out here, it has always been by dribblets which have not even sufficed to replace the wastage. If all the men who have been out here could have been available simultaneously, something might have been done.”<sup>35</sup> This meant that Hamilton rarely had sufficient resources to reinforce success or ameliorate failure. But if the military manpower going out was thought insufficient by the Easterners, the Westerners considered it excessive and likely to imperil the situation in France should the Germans launch another assault.

The rate at which the nature of the operation changed, and the rapidity of the switch from a navy-only operation to the conduct of a contested landing, greatly exceeded the ability of Admiral Wemyss and all the other logisticians to deliver what the expeditionary force required. For example, the whole of the Royal Naval Division, when it arrived at Mudros in March, had to be sent back to Alexandria and Port Said in Egypt for reorganization and restowing of its gear after the unit’s

chaotic loading before departing Britain. The loading failures reflected uncertainty about the contemplated nature of the task.<sup>36</sup> Given these grotesque failures in planning for maneuver at the strategic level, it seems hardly less than a miracle that Hamilton and his colleagues managed to get ashore and consolidate their position. All the same, these command failures inevitably had grave consequences at the operational and tactical levels.

### *Gallipoli: The Search for Operational Maneuver*

In terms of operational planning, the campaign was maneuverist also—at least as far as intentions went. The notion of the navy bypassing Turkey’s western army and storming through the Narrows to reduce Constantinople and paralyze Turkey in one fell swoop was certainly bold, and, according to at least some reputable historians, perhaps the best idea of the First World War.<sup>37</sup> When this failed, the Allies had to resort to joint and combined action in an amphibious assault against Turkey’s defenses in the straits so the navy could try again later. The campaign’s official historian thought that this, too, could have worked.<sup>38</sup> The basic intention was clear: to use a bit of imagination, to avoid the enemy’s strength, to shatter his will and coherence, to push him off balance, and to prevent his being able to stop the Allies from doing what they wanted.

As Hamilton was perfectly aware, “the operation of landing in face of an enemy is the most complicated and difficult in war.”<sup>39</sup> Things could go wrong easily, and they usually did; the pursuit of operational maneuver from the sea brings risks as well as opportunities. Thus, Hamilton adopted a decidedly maneuverist approach that was designed to maximize the Turks’ defensive problem by posing to them a number of threats, from Bulair all the way south to the Asian shore, that would force them to spread their forces out against all contingencies and increase the prospects of operational and tactical surprise at the decisive point, just as Corbett said the British had been able to do against the coast of France in the Seven Years’ War. In forty-eight hours, the Allies intended to get ashore, consolidate, and establish sustainable bridgeheads before the Turks had time to react effectively.<sup>40</sup> Hamilton planned that “the first and foremost step towards a victorious landing was to upset the equilibrium of Liman von Sanders. . . . I must try to move so that he should be unable to concentrate either his mind or his men against us. . . . I have to separate my forces[,] and the effect of momentum, which cannot be produced by cohesion, must be reproduced by the simultaneous nature of the movement.”<sup>41</sup>

Although admirable in theory, the plan failed on practical grounds. The basic problem was that none of the possible landing sites was thought large enough to accommodate the follow-on forces that first would consolidate the position, then crucially expand it into a launching area for an assault on the broader peninsula; only a combination of landing sites could do this. Such a broad-front advance was

unfortunate but seemed unavoidable. The diversionary feint against the Bulair lines in the north and the landings on the Asiatic shore helped to dissipate Turkish responses, but not enough. As a result, the Allies' offensive force was spread too thinly, and the Turkish defenders had time to respond, thereby confining the invaders to much narrower bridgeheads than the hoped-for breakout required. In part, this reflected a grievous underestimation of the resistance to be expected from the initially quite modest level of Turkish defenses.

Later, Hamilton tried again with the Suvla landings of 6 August. As he allegedly wrote in his diary at the time:

K[itchner] sees in a flash what the rest of the world does not seem to see so clearly; viz., that the piling up of increased forces opposite entrenched positions is a spendthrift, unscientific proceeding. He wishes to know if I mean to do this. To draw me out he assumes if I get the troops, I *would* at once commit them to trench warfare by crowding them in behind the lines of Helles or Anzac. Actually I intend to keep the bulk of them on the islands, so as to throw them unexpectedly against some key position which is *not* prepared for defence.<sup>42</sup>

The Suvla operation was clearly an innovative, imaginative, and maneuverist approach at the operational level. Its aims were threefold: (1) to break out from Anzac Cove and cut off the bulk of the Turkish army from land communication with Constantinople; (2) to gain such a command for British artillery as to cut off the bulk of the Turkish army from sea communication with both Constantinople and Asia; and (3) to secure Suvla Bay as a winter base for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) and all the troops operating in the northern theater.<sup>43</sup> None of these objectives were realized. The forces of Lieutenant General Sir Frederick W. Stopford did not go deep enough to create the necessary diversionary effect, and the force based at Anzac Cove failed again to break out. The result was another dead-end commitment that both sides had to service for the remainder of the year.

Hamilton's conception of operational maneuver depended for its effect on the coordinated activity of units acting autonomously in mutual support and achieving surprise and momentum against a static and bewildered adversary. But the Turks were neither static nor bewildered, and the two Allied forces at Anzac Cove and Suvla were insufficiently coordinated and were unclear about the exact purpose their respective parts in the operation served. Hamilton was clear that a maneuverist approach demanded delegation of command and subordinates' use of their initiative in line with his intent as commander; but in this campaign it was confusion, rather than command, that was delegated.<sup>44</sup>

The Suvla part of the operation demonstrated this particularly well. Stopford's unexpected decision not to go ashore until the evening of 8 August further aggravated the confusion, since it deprived him of an opportunity to sort out matters there; moreover, his command ship, the tiny sloop HMS *Jonquil*, simply was not

equipped to deal with the large number of signals that command-and-control functions required.

To a greater extent than often is realized, however, the indecision and inactivity at Suvla was not entirely Stopford's fault, and it is worth pausing on this point. A good deal of uncertainty derived from inherent ambiguities about what Stopford was supposed to do. Latter-day critics often seem to assume that he was expected to lead a large-scale flanking operation through open country to undermine Turkish resistance to the Allied position at Anzac Cove from the rear. But this was not the case. Hamilton's orders certainly were ambiguous (perhaps especially *after* he and Stopford had sought to clarify them), but the main effort was to be made from Anzac Cove, not toward it; Suvla was to provide first a secure port, and only then a degree of support for the expected breakout from the cove. In this case, the "commander's intent" was misinterpreted more by Stopford's critics than by Stopford himself.<sup>45</sup>

Nonetheless, the command system in place for the Suvla-Anzac operation was at fault in that it did not encourage subordinates (particularly Stopford) to use their own initiative to make the most of unexpected operational and tactical opportunities. If they had prosecuted their opportunities more aggressively, the British could have reached the hills that dominated the landing site more quickly, thereby helping to facilitate the Anzac breakout. Finally, as far as Hamilton was concerned, poor communications from Suvla obscured the extent to which things were going wrong and required his intervention. Hamilton's delegation-heavy "negative command" system proved inappropriate for the practical circumstances at Suvla.

The Turks, on the other hand, seemed to suffer much less from this command-and-control deficiency and were able to mass effectively for large-scale defensive and offensive actions. They also were clearer about what was happening on the ground. The Allies' difficulties were compounded by what these days would be called "failures of situational awareness" about details of the ground (such as the uncharted reefs off Suvla) and of the numbers, positions, and quality of the Turkish defenders. The British thought, wrongly, that Hill 971 above the ANZAC position was undefended. As a result, the operation violated some of the basic principles of war—unity of command, mass, economy of force, and simplicity.<sup>46</sup> Still, the Suvla landing went much better than had the earlier landings in April, and had it been prosecuted more aggressively it might have helped to deliver the maneuverist benefits for which Hamilton had hoped.

#### *Gallipoli: The Search for Tactical Maneuver*

The operational failure to dissipate the Turkish defenders' strength put even greater stress on the tactical ability of the Allied forces both to overcome those defenses and to deliver tactical maneuver. Their best chance for doing this was

upon the initial landings and very soon thereafter. But this was exactly the time when all the well-known problems of defective landing procedures and equipment, of compressed and inhospitable landing sites, of inadequate numbers and situational awareness, and of the unexpected fighting proficiency of the Turkish defenders were at their height.<sup>47</sup> Once the situation had stabilized, all the other factors—heat, flies, and the impact of disease; adverse ground conditions; and the strength of the tactical defensive achieved with entrenched firepower and barbed wire—came into play as well, making an Allied advance much more difficult.

Already, at the third battle of Krithia, attritionalist western-front patterns of battle seemed unavoidable—a lengthy and hopefully suppressing artillery bombardment followed by a frontal assault. Many of these constraints applied to the Turkish defenders too, when it came to executing set-piece counteroffensives. Even after the withdrawal from the ANZAC position in December, a well-thought-out final assault by the 12th Turkish Division on the British 13th Division, with an effective preliminary mining campaign and heavy artillery support, was beaten back barely twenty-four hours before the final departure from Helles on 8 and 9 January 1916.<sup>48</sup> The Turks proved incapable of the Clausewitzian “pursuit” of the defeated that the retreating British had dreaded.

However hard the British tried to be maneuverist at the tactical level, events devolved into attrition. The fate of the fresh-faced country boys of the 5th Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment, which was part of the 40th Brigade of the British 13th Division, illustrates this all too well.<sup>49</sup> The 13th Division was among the three reinforcement divisions designated for Gallipoli in June. The 5th Wiltshires were one of the first of Kitchener’s “New Army” formations of recently trained volunteers. They arrived in Lemnos for a brief period of acclimatization in July, and first were introduced into the conditions of conflict by being tasked to defend the Hampshire Cut and Essex Knoll fire trenches of the extraordinarily complicated trench system to the northeast of the Helles front.

Duly “blooded,” they then were pulled back to Lemnos and, in an attempt to avoid the replication of the attritional outcomes elsewhere and restore movement, were dispatched next to the ANZAC sector to reinforce the Australian and New Zealand troops in their attempted breakout against Chunuk Bair and Sari Bair, concurrent with the Suvla landings. For the reasons discussed already, the experiences of the 5th Wiltshires in the gruesome, late, breakout battle on 10 August illustrate all the difficulties that had to be faced in achieving tactical maneuver in those conditions. They found themselves operating alongside Australian, New Zealand, Gurkha, Sikh, and other British forces that were entirely new to them. The topographical conditions were extremely difficult, especially at night. Early encounters deprived them of many of their officers. The supply system failed, and for four days and nights they lacked sleep, food, and water. And then, to cap it all

off, they found themselves directly in the path of Mustafa Kemal's newly arrived 7th and 12th Divisions sweeping down on them from above. Not surprisingly, in this, their first real battle, their casualties were high and morale afterward was low.

However, they recovered and were reinforced by additional draftees from home. Toward the end of the campaign, they were taken back to the safety of Lemnos in the evacuation from Anzac Cove in December 1915. But then the 5th Wiltshires, as part of the 13th Division, were sent back to the peninsula almost immediately to hold the line for the final evacuation of Helles in January 1916. Their role was to foil an expected last-minute Turkish attack aiming to destroy the British as they tried to leave. The attack, the last major operation of the campaign, did indeed come, was repulsed with heavy losses, and served to show yet again how difficult it was for either side to restore movement to the battle in the conditions that had become the norm in the Gallipoli campaign. After their success in this encounter, the 5th Wiltshires were among the last of the "bravest and steadiest" to leave the peninsula.

The "lessons" of Gallipoli have been sought widely ever since, first by the British military in some exhaustive studies and later by the U.S. Marine Corps, and then of course by legions of veterans, practitioners, and historians. It is indeed important not to be seduced by the advantages of hindsight into failing to recognize the scale of the administrative achievement in improvising so large and difficult an amphibious undertaking at such short notice.<sup>50</sup> The tendency to focus on the problems of the campaign should not blind observers to the fact of its successes. Getting the army ashore in such numbers and keeping them there for so long remains an impressive achievement. The Suvla landing and even more the final evacuation showed how much had been learned during the course of the campaign by both services, separately and jointly. As so often, Corbett put the point particularly well: "In that marvelous evacuation we see the national genius for amphibious warfare raised to its highest manifestation. In hard experience and successive disappointments the weapon had been brought to a perfect temper, and when the hour of fruition came to show of what great things it was capable, it was used only to effect a retreat."<sup>51</sup>

Far from being depressed by the Gallipoli experience, the British, having absorbed its lessons (they thought) were prepared to try again the following year, this time against the coast of Belgium—arguably the most heavily fortified stretch of coastline in the world. This was to be part of an ambitious scheme at the high operational level to restore movement to the western front, partly by an advance along the Belgian coast, supplemented by a direct landing behind the German lines by the 1st Division of the Fourth Army to outflank the right of the whole of the German position in northern France.<sup>52</sup>

The British fully recognized the challenge presented by this putative exercise in operational maneuver on a grand scale. On the one hand, after the experiences of Gallipoli, this realism resulted in investment in amphibious equipment ranging from floating unloading pontoons to primitive amphibious tanks, and in an acceptance that the operation would be possible only if a major diversionary push was made farther down the line to draw the Germans away from the critical coastal sector. The failure of the Passchendaele campaign in 1917 did not deliver these prerequisite conditions, so Field Marshal Douglas Haig postponed the landing in August 1917, and then it never took place.<sup>53</sup> It remains one of the great what-ifs of the First World War. But otherwise, it shows that the British still were searching for maneuver, and had not lost faith in the capacity of maritime power projection to help deliver it.<sup>54</sup>

The exploits of the 5th Wiltshires after Gallipoli confirm this point. Far from coming home to their green and pleasant land, as they had expected after the horrors at Gallipoli, the 5th Wiltshires instead were transported straight through Egypt to participate in the ultimately successful Mesopotamian campaign, playing their part in the captures of Al Kut and Baghdad, and then surging northwest for five hundred miles—once again en route to their old objective, Constantinople, in a major outflanking campaign, but this time from a different direction.

#### MARITIME MANEUVER IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

Britain's grueling experience on the western front reinforced a preference for a smarter, less attritional way of war, and found obvious expression in the writings of Basil Liddell Hart and his conception in 1932 of a "British way in warfare" and the notion of "limited liability," and later of the "indirect approach."<sup>55</sup> But this did not result in a high priority being attached to preparations for the conduct of amphibious operations. Instead, in straitened postwar years, Britain's focus was on the battle to retain command of the sea, partly through habit and sentiment, and partly from the entirely logical position that if this battle were lost then amphibious operations and other such forms of sea-based maneuver would be impossible anyway.

Until the mid-1930s, the campaign to maintain the deterrent effect of naval dominance (another form of maneuver, if a bloodless one) was fought in the conference chamber, where diplomacy—to upend Clausewitz—became the continuation of war by other means; in conditions of a peace of a sort, diplomacy naturally moved to the fore in Britain's campaign. The result was a series of essays in naval arms control that broadly suited Britain's strategic aims. The British also were generally successful in consolidating legal limits on cruiser warfare while preserving belligerent rights and their options to blockade.<sup>56</sup> This same proclivity for seeking to secure valuable strategic objectives by methods other than the overt use of military force continued into the Second World War, most notably

through Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill's assiduous courtship of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the military-industrial might of the United States.<sup>57</sup> Since this would dramatically shift the correlation of forces between Britain and its enemies, for Churchill nothing was more important.

### THE NORMANDY INVASION

Inevitably, once the war started, this continuing diplomatic campaign was accompanied by considerable debate about the form that British military action should take, with Churchill once again demonstrating his preference for what some have called the indirect and "peripheral" approach.<sup>58</sup> Somewhat skeptical about the efficacy of blockade even before Germany insulated itself against some of its worst effects by taking over the resources of much of mainland Europe, Churchill's personal search for maneuver led him to a number of options. These included such schemes as Operation CATHERINE in the Baltic, possibly in conjunction with an attack on the Scandinavian sources of much of Germany's iron ore, until he allowed himself to be dissuaded from it by his military advisers.<sup>59</sup> He also encouraged insurgencies across occupied Europe and the launching of amphibious raids on its coastline. More ambitiously still, fighting campaigns (or looking to start them) in North and East Africa, the Balkans, the Aegean, and the eastern Mediterranean—far away from the main center of German military strength—illustrated the same impulse. Nowhere was this more evident than in the contentions over the timing and nature of the amphibious landings in Normandy in 1944.

#### *Normandy: The Strategic-Level Debate*

British "peripheralism" increasingly was resisted by President Roosevelt and the bulk of the U.S. political and military staffs, although it never was simply a question of the British versus the Americans; some of Churchill's own military advisers concluded that the strategic benefit of such "eccentric" campaigns was outweighed by the risks and the costs, while some of Roosevelt's thought they were not. For example, William C. Bullitt, a former U.S. ambassador to Russia and a confidant of the president, was strongly in favor of opening a Balkan campaign, while Field Marshal Alanbrooke, British army, frequently dissented from Churchill's approach, as is immediately obvious from reading his unexpurgated diaries.<sup>60</sup>

Neither was it a question of "doing" Normandy or not doing it, as some observers have gotten close to saying.<sup>61</sup> In fact, Churchill was clear that sooner or later the invasion would need to be done. He appointed Louis Mountbatten to reinvigorate Combined Operations Headquarters in late 1941, telling him that his command should move on from minor raids and that his "*main object must be the reinvasion of France. You must create the machine which will make it possible*

for us to beat Hitler on land. You must devise the appurtenances and appliances which will make the invasion possible.”<sup>62</sup> Indeed, initially Churchill himself supported the idea of invading France in 1943, but was dissuaded by Alanbrooke and the other British service chiefs.<sup>63</sup>

Later, the real issue was the appropriate circumstances and timing for launching the operation. Churchill did all he could to resist the American view that “a straight line is the shortest distance between two points,” if that meant either attempting the invasion before sufficient operational experience and battle-hardened forces had been accumulated, or completely missing the opportunity to exploit additional strategic possibilities should they arise. Preparations needed to

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be made and options needed to be maintained.<sup>64</sup>

In either case, Churchill counseled, there was much to be said for delay and keeping all options open. For the Americans, though, there was much to be said for closing

them down and getting on with it. In the First World War, they had insisted that their only contribution would be to the conduct of war on the western front against the main enemy, Germany. That also was their preference in the Second World War in Europe, reinforced in this case by a dislike of getting involved in anything that smacked of reconstituting the British Empire. More particularly, the demands of the Pacific War were urgent and powerfully underlined by the likes of General Douglas MacArthur, USA, and Admiral Ernest J. King, USN. The Americans’ growing strength in both manpower and matériel made them increasingly confident of ultimate victory even in a frontal assault, and, of course, also better able to prevail in contentious Allied councils with the “slippery” British.<sup>65</sup>

The broad result of all this is well known, even if some of the detail is being fought over still. Most historians concede that Churchill and the British chiefs were right to resist the hankering of Roosevelt and many U.S. senior military leaders for a direct assault on France in 1942 or 1943.<sup>66</sup> Churchill and his service chiefs were able to get their way on this because at that time the bulk of the invasion forces were likely to be British. In the event, Roosevelt too was easily persuaded that delay was the wisest course of action, especially when the difficulties of a frontal amphibious assault were made savagely clear at Dieppe in 1942 and the deficiencies of inexperienced U.S. forces were underlined in the 1943 battle of Kasserine Pass.<sup>67</sup> Neither meant that Normandy should not be done, but both suggested it should not be done before the circumstances were right and the necessary forces, equipment, and skills had been accumulated.

But this was the crux of the issue. On the one hand, both sides agreed that Operation OVERLORD, as a frontal assault on Germany at one of its strongest positions, would be extremely demanding operationally, and so required careful and extensive preparation. This meant that the invasion should not be launched until the early part of 1944. Both sides agreed, also, that in the meantime some of those forces would be available for, and should professionally profit from, other operations. Hopefully those interim operations would take some strategic pressure off the Russians on the eastern front, thereby solidifying the alliance. This argument also could help keep Admiral King and the U.S. Pacific-first school at bay.

On this basis, Churchill was able to persuade his colleagues to focus on the Mediterranean, first for the Operation TORCH landings, next for the seizure of Sicily, and then for an invasion of peninsular Italy.<sup>68</sup> Alanbrooke justified this as a distracting, diversionary prerequisite for a successful landing and campaign in France, not a substitute for it.<sup>69</sup> Up Churchill's sleeve, and to some extent Alanbrooke's as well, were plans for operations in the Aegean, especially against Rhodes, all with the aim of bringing Turkey into the war and opening up a new Balkan front.<sup>70</sup> To its skeptics, this scheme seemed to be fighting the Gallipoli campaign all over again. Operation JUPITER, the concept for a major campaign against Norway, was seen as yet another of Churchill's "reckless and impracticable schemes."<sup>71</sup>

It was at this point that Churchill's peripheralist propensities ran into the sand. The date for Operation OVERLORD had been agreed at the Quebec conference in August 1943; it was to be 1 May 1944. At the later Cairo (SEXTANT) and Tehran conferences of 1943, however, Churchill encountered decisive resistance to his proposals for further indirect attempts to weaken the German position in the strategic center by multiple threats from its edges. He and Alanbrooke did, however, win a month's delay, pushing the invasion back to 1 June 1944.<sup>72</sup> The battle at Kasserine and other problems in the North African campaign, the later stages of the Sicily operation, the extreme dangers faced in the Salerno landings, the slow progress of the march on Rome, and the disastrous British campaign against the Dodecanese islands all showed that Churchill and Britain's preferred indirect approach commonly required more and stronger forces than were readily available without a yet-longer delay to the launch of Operation OVERLORD. And against that, Roosevelt and the American chiefs were adamant.

Churchill's last victory in the Italian campaign was the agreement to invest in the Anzio landing as a means of hastening the seizure of Rome. But this too proved less effective than hoped. As Churchill confided to his doctor, "Anzio was my worst moment in the war. I had most to do with it. I didn't want two Suvla Bays in one lifetime."<sup>73</sup> What he meant by this was that, once again, the promise of rapid maneuver after a successful landing had been thrown away. It seemed that the operational indecision of its commander, Major General John P. Lucas,

USA, produced delays that allowed the enemy to concentrate forces against the beachhead.<sup>74</sup> Thereafter the ground favored the defense and progress was slow; later still, the political prize of taking Rome outweighed, at least in the eyes of Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark, USA, the possibility instead of cutting off and destroying Field Marshal Albert Kesselring's main forces in Italy as they retreated north. This would have forced the Germans either to abandon the country or to reinforce it with yet more troops that otherwise would have been able to go to France or the eastern front.

Thereafter, Roosevelt, his military men, and Stalin were adamant; the strategic effect of such eccentric operations, even if successful, did not warrant the enormous risks that would follow delaying OVERLORD further, especially if this pushed it back into 1945 or later. For the same reason, and even though it was launched weeks after OVERLORD, they insisted on using the landing craft released from that operation on a supplementary supporting invasion of southern France rather than a further attempt at outflanking the German defenses by an amphibious assault north of Rome. The strategic weight of the Russians and the Americans, with their hundreds of divisions, eclipsed the British effort, and Churchill found that imagination and eloquence made little headway against such military realities.<sup>75</sup>

Nor was Churchill alone in his disappointment. Like most of his colleagues, Alanbrooke, who unlike Churchill was focused chiefly on the distracting effect of the Italian campaign rather than treating northern Italy as a launchpad for offensives somewhere else, lamented the loss of a strategic opportunity that he thought the U.S. fixation on a specific and artificial date for OVERLORD had caused. "I despair," he said, "of ever getting our American friends to have any sort of strategic vision."<sup>76</sup> This—doubtless written in the heat of the moment—was unfair; it was just that the Americans had a different kind of strategic vision, one framed by the confidence that derived from large numbers, huge industrial power, and the urgent strategic and political demands of the Pacific theater. Lacking much of this, the British hoped to gain their objectives by what they thought more subtle means.

### *Normandy: The Operational Level*

Unlike Gallipoli, the Normandy campaign was from the outset conceived of as a *joint* exercise in maneuver, with naval forces taking a particularly crucial role at the beginning. Indeed, without their winning sufficient sea control to ensure the transport of troops and military and economic supplies across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom, and then to deliver the invading forces across the Channel safely, the operation would not have been possible at all. Given the German army's recognized fighting proficiency, it was especially important that the Allies win the race to build up logistic support in theater, and this was thought to require the transport of the two Mulberry harbors across to Normandy.<sup>77</sup> This

extraordinary feat demanded near-total command of the sea and perfectly illustrates the enabling function of sea power in a campaign of maritime maneuver. The whole campaign in fact does much to justify the Royal Navy's policy preoccupation throughout the interwar period on the requirements of the campaign to win and retain sea control.

It was certainly true that both Churchill and Alanbrooke were concerned that, even so, OVERLORD could go horribly wrong.<sup>78</sup> The risks made them both anxious. A catastrophic failure certainly would have lengthened the war and even might have imperiled ultimate victory. On the day of the landings, and subsequently, naval forces delivered the invading troops to the beaches, sought to suppress the defenders' powers of resistance, stood by to reembark troops if required, and kept the necessary supplies coming. Inevitably, as the campaign progressed, its naval element became less prominent as the baton passed instead to the land and air forces.

However, after the initial success of the British and Canadian landings, it rapidly became clear that once again the fates had conspired against any British attempt at operational-level maneuver in the land campaign. The British and Canadians were allocated the eastern landing beaches, JUNE, SWORD, and GOLD—for almost accidental reasons. Because they were slated to be later arrivals at Normandy, they largely staged from the west of England. It only made sense logistically for the Americans to be allocated the western beaches; this would provide the easiest access for shipping coming across the Atlantic and would avoid crossing the British and Canadian supply lines from central and eastern England.<sup>79</sup>

The result was that the British and Canadian forces were squeezed into the comparatively narrow area between the potentially flooded area south of Dives to the north and the American force to the south. They were landed directly before the city of Caen, which initially was seen as a high priority because it seemed the natural site from which to launch the rapid advance on Paris that General Bernard L. Montgomery, British army, in his more intemperate moments, had promised. Their totally unsurprising failure to take the city on the first day doomed them to a slow and grinding battle of attrition, partly because of the topography but mainly because it was the obvious place for German reinforcements to gather, as it was nearest to their forces guarding the Calais area.<sup>80</sup>

Criticized for the slowness of the British Commonwealth advance by Marshal Aleksandr Vassilievsky, who was visiting from the Soviet army, one British officer explained the basic problem. While in his six-hundred-mile sector of the eastern front Vassilievsky had faced nine German divisions, the British on a front just sixty-two miles wide before Caen were fighting significant elements of ten German divisions, six of which were panzer formations; and

if anything, this was an underestimation of their opposition's strength. In the EPSOM operation, 26 June–1 July, the British faced elements of eight panzer divisions, five of which were of the Waffen-SS. In such circumstances, action hardly could be anything but attritional and grindingly slow.<sup>81</sup>

Both at the time and since, Montgomery's reputation has suffered also from ambiguities about what he conceived his operational mission to be. On occasions, the impression he gave was of an intention to take Caen rapidly, then strike out on

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a dazzling march on Paris. On other occasions he purported to be "fixing" the bulk of German defenders on the Caen front, holding them down so that Allied forces to the south could loop around, smash through thinner defenses, and head toward Germany. If ma-

neuver by movement against German forces at Caen proved impossible, it would need to be replaced by controlled attrition; the hope was that fixing these German units at Caen would increase the prospects for maneuver by movement in the American sector to the south.<sup>82</sup> This version of Montgomery's argument was exactly the same as Churchill's for extra investment in the failing Norwegian campaign of 1940 and in Italy in 1944. In both cases, critics of this approach argued that the tactical realities on the ground and the actual correlation of forces in the theater raised doubts about the approach's ability to create an effective diversion. Accordingly, the question of who would be tying down whom was moot.<sup>83</sup>

As a result of all this, it paradoxically was the Americans who, once they had conquered the problem of the *bocage*, were able eventually to engage in a much faster campaign of movement and maneuver, eventually swinging around to head for Paris from the southwest, as arguably had been planned from the start.<sup>84</sup> It was one of the supreme ironies of the Normandy campaign that the maneuverist British ended up fighting an attritionalist war there, while the apparently attritionalist Americans were able to fight a sometimes heavy but faster-moving war to the south.

Admittedly, at various stages in subsequent campaigns in western Europe, both were required to revert to what was supposed to be their respective "form" of campaigning. The September 1944 assault on Arnhem in the Netherlands indeed represented a "bridge too far" in British leaders' attempt to restore their concept of movement; afterward, on the northern flank of the Allied campaign, Montgomery's forces were more successful, if slower than anticipated. As for the Americans, compared with the rapid advance that had preceded it, nothing could

have been more attritionalist than the December 1944–January 1945 Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes region. The experiences of these partners confirm that the relationship between the two apparent styles of war is complementary rather than one of polarized opposites.

With the Allies having consolidated their position in France, the last flicker of the dynamic between maneuver and attrition may be seen in the debate about the conduct of the final phase in the war, specifically about whether they should advance on Germany across a broad front, as General Dwight D. Eisenhower, USA, advocated, or with a narrower, more concentrated thrust in the north, led, inevitably, by Montgomery. This resulted in vituperative exchanges between British and American leaders, particularly during and after the conduct of the Battle of the Bulge. As General Omar N. Bradley, USA, put it, “[T]he British came at us like sharks at a shipwreck,” with Montgomery being the “most vicious and ravenous” leader of the pack. It is hard not to conclude that mixed in with this apparent debate about the best way to seek operational maneuver was more than a dash of competing national interests, different interpretations about the likely future of a liberated Europe, sensitivity to press impressions, and the vanities and professional jealousies of senior military men who by this time were getting very tired. Both Bradley and Lieutenant General George S. Patton Jr., USA, also urged, and then conducted, narrow and concentrated thrusts in which the Allies were competing with each other (in a nonlethal manner) almost as much as they were with the Germans. By this stage of the war, in fact, the state of the German defenses made maneuver much easier for everyone, even if in American eyes the British were overly cautious in taking advantage of it.<sup>85</sup>

#### *Normandy: The Tactical Level*

The British were acutely aware of the scale of risk the Normandy landings posed at the tactical level. Experience had demonstrated that amphibious operations were uniquely complex and demanding, and their German adversaries time and again had shown themselves to be formidable, even with the odds stacked against them. Tactical maneuver in the landing phase was designed to reduce the level of risk as much as possible, and was to be supplied partly by the imaginative use of airborne forces to divert and mystify the German defenders, and partly through mechanical means such as “Hobart’s funnies,” which were to help the invaders get ashore and consolidate with a minimum expenditure of life.<sup>86</sup> Both were successful, at least in the early stages; later, things did not go as planned.

This was in part a tribute to the tactical performance of the German defenders. Such was the resisting power of the German army—particularly its impressive capacity for effective counterattack at every level of war—that the resulting campaign was mainly attritional for all concerned, and so yielded much the same

casualty figures, as a proportion of those engaged, as was suffered on the western front in the First World War.<sup>87</sup> The battle for France resulted in roughly seven thousand killed or wounded Allied and German soldiers every week—much the same figure as from the Somme, Passchendaele, and Verdun.<sup>88</sup> The combination of determined and skilled soldiery, modern weaponry, and physical obstacles (hedged, hills, woods, and rivers and defended farmsteads, villages, and towns) made battle seem distinctly attritional to everyone engaged in it.

In practical terms, just as in the Gallipoli campaign, however hard they tried in their search for maneuver, the British still seemed often to end up in attritional conflict—certainly at the tactical level.

### *And after Normandy?*

Probably the last flicker of strategic peripheralism was the notion put forward by Field Marshal Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander, British army, and Churchill for an advance from northern Italy through the so-called Ljubljana Gap and on to Vienna, a project shaped more by the political attractions of getting there before Stalin than any deep appreciation of such a campaign's military feasibility.<sup>89</sup> Against their collective opposition, however, Operation ANVIL, a landing in southern France—portrayed as much more directly supportive of the Normandy campaign—went ahead anyway.<sup>90</sup>

Further afield, Churchill's peripheralist proclivities again were on display in Southeast Asia and the Far East, where initially the prime minister was reluctant to sanction major operations against Rangoon and Singapore, or even smaller-scale and more-dubious operations such as the reconquest of the Andaman Islands. He was long averse to the "laborious reconquest of Burma, swamp by swamp."<sup>91</sup> Instead he sought Operation CULVERIN, the seizure of the western tip of Sumatra as a base from which to prosecute the war against the Japanese, perhaps from the soft underbelly of Southeast Asia, and as a possible means of strategically linking up with Australia and General MacArthur's campaign along the Dutch East Indies to the Philippines.

Initially, the British and American service chiefs were able quickly to show that the means for such a bold and demanding operation simply were not available. In the longer term, Alanbrooke and his colleagues pressed for a policy focused on directly joining the Americans in the final assault on Japan in the Pacific, rather than on the eventual reconquest of British and Dutch possessions in Southeast Asia, which remained Churchill's preference (more in service to imperial interests than in the cause of strategic maneuver).<sup>92</sup> For all Churchill's enthusiasm for the imaginative style of war practiced by Major General Orde Wingate, British army, and the Chindits, the dominating feature of the final, successful imperial Burma campaign, the spring 1944 battle of Kohima-Imphal, and arguably the biggest defeat of the Japanese army in the whole war, hardly could have been more attritional.<sup>93</sup> However, the final, rushed campaign (Operation EXTENDED

CAPITAL, from December 1944 to February 1945) of Lieutenant General William J. Slim, British army, to cross the Irrawaddy River, outflank Mandalay, seize Meiktila and Maymyo, and open the way to Rangoon and the final destruction of the Japanese army in Burma, all before the monsoon broke, was one of the most successful maneuverist operations of the war. It provided a land-based example of the British aspiration for maneuver, ultimately deriving success from the sea-based capacity to move into and accumulate in theater the necessary forces and sustain them until the conditions for victory were achieved.<sup>94</sup>

### SO WHY THE BRITISH SEARCH FOR MANEUVER?

Obviously, all military forces will prefer to “fight smart” and to avoid the common costs of frontal assaults if they can, but British strategic culture does seem to be particularly inclined that way. The following possible reasons for this are tentative and conjectural in the extreme, but may help to explain the phenomenon.

In the first place, British manpower (as opposed to voluntary Empire and Commonwealth manpower) was limited in comparison with that of Britain’s adversaries. From the time of the first Queen Elizabeth, the country’s population size relative to that of its major adversaries had to be a major consideration. At the end of the seventeenth century, the population of France was more than twice England’s. In the Second World War, Britain could not field anything like the number of divisions in the European theater that Germany, Russia, or the United States could. At its peak, the British army in the First World War had mustered seventy-three divisions, but the British had no chance of reaching that total in the second war because of the personnel demands from a huge air force and a navy twice as big as it had been in the first war. The demands of a greatly expanded war industry were severe too.<sup>95</sup> In the summer of 1941, the British army comprised just thirty-seven divisions, dubiously trained and equipped, while Hitler controlled 250. It pained Churchill that the U.S. Army so greatly outnumbered that of Britain, but he accepted it as a consequence of the simple fact that the U.S. population was three times larger than Britain’s.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, one of Alanbrooke’s special problems was to persuade Churchill that army manpower had to be reduced significantly rather than increased, well before the end of the war, if there was to be any hope of economic recovery afterward. Hence there was an inbuilt military and economic need to husband human resources rather than fritter them away in costly direct attacks on strongly held positions.

Allied to this, arguably, was the standard refrain, echoed by Correlli Barnett and countless others, that Britain had mixed feelings about the maintenance of large standing armies anyway.<sup>97</sup> In part this is said to be attributable to the threat that Cromwell’s army had posed to civil liberties in the seventeenth century and to the costs of keeping such an army, which could be met only by the

trading classes, whose interests apparently were served much better by naval investments.

This all tracked well with a Corbettian sense that sea power was the central component that enabled strategies of maritime maneuver that intrinsically were more cost-effective than the more land-centric and potentially attritionalist alternatives. In comparison with battles on land, the “butcher’s bill” at sea generally was lower. Sea power, Mackinder claimed, “expended men with . . . singular economy.”<sup>98</sup> Moreover, by making use of the sea as the world’s greatest maneuver space (until the advent of today’s space and cyber domains, that is), mastery of the sea provided many more opportunities for the indirect attack of a land-bound adversary, and for the British to shape the future of the world in the way they wanted.

In consequence of all this, as Duff Cooper famously proclaimed before an American audience, the British and their allies thought they had “found a new way to make war—without sacrificing human lives.”<sup>99</sup> The tragedy was that, in all too many circumstances, they had not.

British experience is worth remembering in today’s ferment of ideas about how a new campaign in the Pacific might be conducted. That experience seems to underline the point that even in the most maneuverist of campaigns there will be attritionalist moments in which mass still matters. Declines in population size and industrial might relative to adversaries (and allies) made it increasingly difficult for Britain to accumulate the military mass necessary for decisive diplomatic effect. Success, when it came, depended on the targeted use of transformational technology, superior training, and seamless cooperation among the military services, each of which needed to succeed in their supporting aims at all levels of war. Clarity about both aim and method was essential. Success required an absolute nurturing of, and reliance on, supportive allies. Above all, “naval action,” said Corbett, had to “be nicely coordinated with military and diplomatic pressure.”<sup>100</sup> In today’s terminology, it needs to be part of a well-integrated, whole-of-government approach. Whatever their strategic attractions, campaigns of maritime maneuver, in short, are inherently demanding—especially when up against serious opposition—and cannot be improvised or economized safely.

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#### NOTES

1. Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1915* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1923), p. 21. I am grateful to one of my reviewers for reminding me of this aphorism, and indeed to them all for their helpful comments.
2. The British maneuver divided the enemy fleet into three sections, which reduced the odds in their favor, and in most ship-to-ship encounters their superior tactical mobility gave them similar advantages; but in their initial and inevitably slow approach the odds were very much against them, and they suffered accordingly.
3. Aleksandr A. Svechin, *Strategiia* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1926).

4. Julian S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (London: Longman, 1911), p. 15.
5. Charles E. Callwell, *Military Operations and Maritime Preponderance: Their Relations and Interdependence*, ed. Colin S. Gray (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996), pp. 433–34.
6. Julian S. Corbett, *Drake and the Tudor Navy* (London: Longman, 1957), vol. 1, p. 6.
7. Tobias Smollett, *The History of England: From the Revolution to the Death of George the Second*, new ed. (London: 1800), vol. 4, p. 39.
8. William Pitt, “His Majesty’s Speech on Opening the Session” (6 October 1796), in *The Speeches of the Right Honourable William Pitt in the House of Commons*, 2nd ed. (London: 1808), vol. 2, p. 193.
9. William Pitt, “Mr. Pitt’s Motion Relative to Fortifying the Dockyards” (27 February 1786), in *Speeches of the Right Honourable William Pitt*, vol. 1, p. 199.
10. John Bance, “Speech of 27 July 1743,” in “Journal of the Proceedings and Debates of the Political Club,” in *London Magazine*, September 1743, p. 438.
11. Michael Howard, *The Causes of Wars, and Other Essays* (London: Unwin, 1983), p. 206.
12. Although the fortifications that now can be seen in Cartagena are much more formidable than those the British faced in 1741, a failed frontal assault and disease together accounted for some ten thousand British losses.
13. The classic account is Herbert Richmond, *The Navy in the War of 1739–48* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1920).
14. For further discussion see Andrew Lambert, *The Crimean War: British Grand Strategy against Russia, 1853–56* (London: Ashgate, 2013). Howard J. Fuller, *Empire, Technology and Seapower* (London: Routledge, 2013) provides an alternative perspective.
15. Lord Wester-Wemyss [Adm. of the Fleet, RN], *The Navy in the Dardanelles Campaign* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1924), p. 248.
16. Halford Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” *Geographical Journal* 23, no. 4 (April 1904), pp. 421–37. The best guide to this is still W. H. Parker, *Mackinder: Geography as an Aid to Statecraft* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982).
17. This section derives in part from my earlier work: Geoffrey Till, “In Search of Manoeuvre: The British and Gallipoli,” in *The First World War in the Mediterranean and the Role of Lemnos*, ed. Zisis Fotakis (Athens: Univ. Herodotos Press, 2018).
18. Yildiz Gultekin, “How to Defend the Turkish Straits against the Russians: A Century-Long ‘Eastern Question’ in British Defence Planning,” *Mariner’s Mirror* 105, no. 1 (February 2019).
19. Edward J. Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command under Fire* (Oxford, U.K.: Osprey, 2015), p. 176.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
21. Corbett, *Drake and the Tudor Navy*, vol. 1, p. 6.
22. Julian S. Corbett, *Naval Operations, History of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1920–31), vol. 2, pp. 290–91.
23. Sir Ian Hamilton [Gen., British army], *Gallipoli Diary* (London: Edward Arnold, 1920), vol. 2, pp. 141–42, 183. The title of this book is in some respects misleading; its contents plainly were written well after the events described.
24. Tirpitz, quoted in C. F. Aspinall-Oglander [Brig. Gen., British army], *Military Operations Gallipoli*, vol. 2, *May 1915 to the Evacuation* (London: William Heinemann, 1932), p. 376.
25. Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz, *The Conduct of War* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1899), pp. 281–83.
26. Quoted in Alan Moorehead, *Gallipoli* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1956), p. 329.
27. For background on “Westerner” support for the operation, Victor Rudenno, *Gallipoli, Attack from the Sea* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2008). Robin Prior, *Gallipoli: The End of the Myth* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2009) provides a skeptical perspective.
28. Aspinall-Oglander, *May 1915 to the Evacuation*, p. 368.
29. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, rev. ed., ed. Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), pp. 27–29.
30. Wester-Wemyss, *The Navy in the Dardanelles*, p. 10.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 272.

32. Conclusions of War Council Meeting 13 Jan 1915, CAB 42/1/6, The National Archives, Kew, London.
33. Wester-Wemyss, *The Navy in the Dardanelles*, pp. 259–260.
34. Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, vol. 1, pp. 1–3. See also p. 23 for the meeting of 17 March 1915.
35. Entry for 5 November 1915 in Brian Bond and Simon Robbins, eds., *Staff Officer: The Diaries of Walter Guinness (First Lord Moyné), 1914–1918* (London: Leo Cooper, 1987), p. 49.
36. T. H. E. Travers, “Command and Leadership Styles in the British Army: The 1915 Gallipoli Model,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 3 (July 1994).
37. Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dardanelles to Oran* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 1.
38. C. F. Aspinall-Oglander [Brig. Gen., British army], *Military Operations Gallipoli*, vol. 1, *Inception of the Campaign to May 1915* (London: William Heinemann, 1929), p. 479.
39. Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, vol. 1, p. 46.
40. Erickson, *Gallipoli*, p. 111.
41. Quoted in Geoffrey Penn, *Fisher, Churchill and the Dardanelles* (London: Leo Cooper, 1999), p. 166. Otto Liman von Sanders was a German general who served as an adviser to and military commander of the Ottomans.
42. There is some evidence of post hoc rationalization in some of Hamilton’s diary entries. Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, vol. 1, p. 267.
43. Wester-Wemyss, *The Navy in the Dardanelles*, p. 151.
44. Travers, “Command and Leadership Styles,” pp. 423–25; Aspinall-Oglander, *Inception of the Campaign to May 1915*, p. 233.
45. This is strongly argued in Prior, *Gallipoli*.
46. Erickson, *Gallipoli*, pp. 189, 194, 217.
47. As far as situational awareness is concerned, however, a recent study suggests that the maps the British used were much more accurate than commonly believed. Peter Chasseaud and Peter Doyle, *Grasping Gallipoli* (London: Spellmount, 2015).
48. Erickson, *Gallipoli*, p. 228.
49. Paula Perry, *A History of the 5th (Service) Battalion, Wiltshire Regiment, 1914–1919* (Salisbury, U.K.: Rifles Wardrobe and Museum Trust, 2007).
50. Peter Liddle, *Men of Gallipoli* (London: Allen Lane, 1976), p. 98.
51. Corbett, *Drake and the Tudor Navy*, vol. 2, p. 245.
52. See Geoffrey Till, “Passchendaele: The Maritime Dimension,” in *Passchendaele in Perspective: The Third Battle of Ypres*, ed. Peter H. Liddle (London: Leo Cooper, 1997), and Andrew A. Wiest, *Passchendaele and the Royal Navy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1995).
53. Nick Lloyd, *Passchendaele: A New History* (London: Viking, 2017), p. 156.
54. Wiest, *Passchendaele and the Royal Navy*; Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Passchendaele: The Untold Story* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1996).
55. Liddell Hart’s concepts from his two books *The British Way in Warfare* (1932) and *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (1954) are reviewed authoritatively in Brian Holden Reid, “The British Way in Warfare,” *RUSI Journal* 156, no. 6 (December 2011), pp. 70–76.
56. *Belligerent rights* refers to the legal entitlement of a country at war to inspect the cargo of neutral shipping, to verify its intended destination, and to ensure that it is not contraband or likely to assist its adversary in the prosecution of the war.
57. Jon Meacham, *Franklin and Winston: An Intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship* (New York: Random House, 2003).
58. Nigel Hamilton, *Commander in Chief: FDR’s Battle with Churchill, 1943* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), p. 285.
59. Christopher M. Bell, *Churchill and Sea Power* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), pp. 168–69, 174.
60. Hamilton, *Commander in Chief*, pp. 24–51, 212–16, 234–36, 333. On Alanbrooke’s dissents, see Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke, *War Diaries 1939–45*, ed. Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2001); for example, entries for 26 June 1942, p. 278; 17 July 1942, pp. 281–82; 6 August 1942, pp. 293–94; 3 September 1942, pp. 317–18; 29 October 1942, pp. 335–36; and 30 November 1942, pp. 344–45. On naming conventions, Field Marshal Alan

- Brooke was made a peer after the war with the title name Alanbrooke, by which he now more commonly is referred, and I do so here, including for periods that precede his elevation.
61. Hamilton, *Commander in Chief*, pp. 150–56, 222–23. Andrew Roberts, *Churchill: Walking with Destiny* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), pp. 745–46 addresses the skepticism of Admiral King and Gen. Albert C. Wedemeyer, USA, on this point.
  62. Quoted in Bell, *Churchill and Sea Power*, pp. 214–15. Emphasis in original.
  63. Alanbrooke, *War Diaries*, entries 3–16 December 1942, pp. 345–49.
  64. Max Hastings, *Finest Years: Churchill as War Lord* (London: HarperCollins, 2005); Roberts, *Churchill*.
  65. On British strategic preferences and American perceptions, see Alanbrooke, *War Diaries*, and Hastings, *Finest Years*.
  66. Hamilton, *Commander in Chief*, p. 35. There are exceptions, however. An early example was John Grigg, *1943: The Victory That Never Was* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980).
  67. This particularly applied to the direct assault on the town beaches, rather than the flanking attacks that had been a feature of the first plan for Operations RUTTER and JUBILEE.
  68. Hamilton, *Commander in Chief*, pp. 295–96.
  69. Alanbrooke, *War Diaries*, entries for late October 1943, pp. 463–64.
  70. Alanbrooke's ideas on this were interestingly nuanced. Although not unsympathetic to the notion of taking Rhodes as a prelude to helping Turkey enter the war, he would not support this if it meant holding up operations in Italy, which he saw as facilitating a successful operation in Normandy. *Ibid.*, pp. 416, 458–59, but also entry, pp. 465–66; entries for 7–8 October 1943, 2 June 1943, and 1 November 1943.
  71. Bell, *Churchill and Sea Power*, pp. 336–37.
  72. Alanbrooke, *War Diaries*, entries for 30 November 1943 and 20 December 1943, pp. 403, 486.
  73. Nigel Hamilton, *War and Peace: FDR's Final Odyssey, D-day to Yalta* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019), pp. 205–206.
  74. Clearly Churchill would not have been sympathetic to the revisionist view of Stopford's performance at Gallipoli.
  75. For background on Churchill's preferences and the Anglo-American strategic debate, again see Alanbrooke, *War Diaries*, and Hastings, *Finest Years*.
  76. Hamilton, *War and Peace*, pp. 82–118.
  77. One of Churchill's ideas, these two artificial harbors were floated across the Channel in massive sections. Once assembled, each approximated the port capacity of Dover. After storms wrecked the one in the American sector, it was found that unloading directly onto the beach was more practical than previously envisaged.
  78. Alanbrooke, *War Diaries*, entry for 5 June 1944, p. 554.
  79. See Max Hastings, *OVERLORD, D-day and the Battle for Normandy 1944* (London: Pan, 2015); and for a U.S. view, see James Jay Carafano, *After D-day: Operation COBRA and the Normandy Breakout* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000).
  80. Hastings, *OVERLORD, D-day and the Battle for Normandy*; Carafano, *After D-day*.
  81. Antony Beevor, *D-day: The Battle for Normandy* (London: Viking, 2009), p. 240.
  82. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
  83. See, for example, the exchange on 19 May 1943 between Alanbrooke and Gen. George C. Marshall, USA, and Hamilton's scathing conclusion, in Hamilton, *Commander in Chief*, pp. 240–41, 328–29.
  84. Normandy's *bocage* country was dominated by thick field hedges that impeded rapid movement and lent themselves to unexpected ambushes. Alanbrooke, *War Diaries*, entry for 27 July 1944, p. 575.
  85. Omar Bradley and Clay Blair, *A General's Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), pp. 326–436; Dennis Showalter, *Patton and Rommel: Men of War in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Berkley, 2005), pp. 383–425.
  86. Alanbrooke, *War Diaries*, entry of 27 January 1944, pp. 516–17.
  87. See General der Panzer Leo, Freiherr von Schweppenburg, "Faulty Tactics of the German Command," in *Fighting in Normandy: The German Army from D-day to*

- Villers-Bocage, ed. David C. Isby (London: Military Book Club, 2001), pp. 137–38, and Heinz Guderian, “Panzer Tactics in Normandy,” in Isby, *Fighting in Normandy*, pp. 204–17.
88. James Holland, *Normandy '44: D-day and the Battle for France* (London: Bantam, 2019).
89. Alanbrooke, *War Diaries*, entries for 21 and 28 June and 23 August 1944, pp. 561, 564, 584.
90. Roberts, *Churchill*, pp. 827–29.
91. Bell, *Churchill and Sea Power*, pp. 299–301.
92. Roberts, *Churchill*, p. 838.
93. The so-called Chindits were elite British Empire forces that engaged in deep-penetration operations behind Japanese lines in the Burma campaign of 1943–44. Intended to attack Japanese supply lines and disrupt and confuse Japanese dispositions, the Chindits’ operational success was and remains a matter of controversy among soldiers and scholars. See David Rooney, *Wingate and the Chindits: Redressing the Balance* (New York: Sterling, 1994).
94. For British thinking, see H. P. Willmott, *Grave of a Dozen Schemes: British Naval Planning and the War against Japan, 1943–1945* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996). For a discussion of CAPITAL and EXTENDED CAPITAL, see Jon Latimer, *Burma: The Forgotten War* (London: John Murray, 2004).
95. Alanbrooke, *War Diaries*, entries for 21 July 1942 and 9 July 1943, pp. 283, 427–28.
96. Roberts, *Churchill*, p. 870.
97. This prejudice against a standing army was very evident in the House of Commons debate in July 1743; see Bance, “Speech of 27 July 1743.”
98. Parker, *Mackinder*, p. 65.
99. Quoted in Eleanor P. Gates, *The End of the Affair: The Collapse of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1939–40* (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1981), p. 26.
100. Julian S. Corbett, *England in the Seven Years’ War* (London: Longman, 1907), vol. 1, p. 5.

