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Civil-military relations in the United Kingdom and Italy at the turn of the First World War. A comparative perspective.

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ABSTRACT 3

INTRODUCTION 3

ABBREVIATION 5

PART ONE 6

CHAPTER I: 1900 TO 1910 6
1. GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES AND THE ORGANISATION OF THE ARMY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM 7
2. GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES AND ORGANISATION OF THE ARMY IN THE KINGDOM OF ITALY 12
3. EVENTS IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY 16
CHAPTER II: EVENTS FROM 1911-1914 28
1. KINGDOM OF ITALY 28
2. GREAT BRITAIN 30
3. MILITARY INTELLIGENCE IN THE ITALIAN KINGDOM AND UNITED KINGDOM BEFORE 1915 35

PART TWO 39

CHAPTER III: 1914 "THIS MEANS WAR" 39
1. THE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT AND THE JULY CRISIS 39
2. THE JULY CRISIS: THE BRITISH EMPIRE 41
3. EARLY STAGES OF THE WAR UP TO CHRISTMAS 1914 46
4. BRITISH ARMY STRUCTURE IN 1914 51
5. MILITARY DOCTRINES AND CONSIDERATIONS 53
6. CULTURAL MOBILISATION AND PROPAGANDA 58
7. THE JULY CRISIS: THE KINGDOM OF ITALY AND NEUTRALITY 63
CHAPTER IV: 1915 "THE WAR CONTINUES AND CONFIDENCE IN THE SHORT WAR WAS SLOW TO DIE" 74
1. GREAT BRITAIN DURING THE FIRST MONTHS OF THE CONFLICT 74
2. ITALY BETWEEN INTERVENTIONISTS AND NEUTRALISTS 85
3. ITALY AND THE DECISION TO ENTER THE WAR 86
4. THE ITALIAN ARMY IN 1915 94
CHAPTER V. THE YEAR OF THE GREAT OFFENSIVES: 1916 99
1. GREAT BRITAIN, THE OFFENSIVES OF 1916, AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH ALLIED HEADS OF STATE 99

2. THE GREAT OFFENSIVES IN ITALY AND THE TURMOIL BETWEEN POLITICIANS AND THE MILITARY 106
CHAPTER VI: 1917, THE CRITICAL YEAR OF THE WAR **115**
1. GREAT BRITAIN 115
2. ITALY 119
3. THE FIRST STEPS OF ALLIED COOPERATION: ITALIAN FRONT 128
4. THE SUPREME WAR COUNCIL 133
CHAPTER VII: 1918, "PEACE WITHOUT VICTORY" **141**
1. GREAT BRITAIN 141
2. THE KINGDOM OF ITALY 146

PART THREE **155**

CHAPTER VIII: 1919, ALL REUNITED AT VERSAILLES **155**
1. THE PEACE CONFERENCE 155
2. VERSAILLES FOR ITALY 157
3. VERSAILLES FOR GREAT BRITAIN 158
4. ITALIAN MILITARY ATTACHÉS ABROAD 159
CHAPTER IX: POST-WAR ITALY **162**
1. DEMOBILISATION AND THE ARMY 162
2. GOVERNMENT CHANGE 173
CHAPTER X: POST-WAR BRITAIN **176**
1. DEMOBILISATION OF THE BRITISH ARMY 176
2. CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT AND RELATIONS WITH IRELAND 179

CONCLUSION **183**

ANNEXES **185**

BIBLIOGRAPHY **193**

ABSTRACT

All'inizio del ventesimo secolo, il Regno Unito e il Regno d'Italia sono due paesi tradizionalmente molto diversi. Il primo detiene la supremazia navale, mentre il secondo concentra i propri fondi per il miglioramento dell'esercito. A livello continentale, la Gran Bretagna fu una grande potenza a livello internazionale ma geograficamente circondata dall'acqua, mentre l'Italia confina con due paesi, Francia e Austria, con i quali non ha mai stretto uno stabile rapporto. A livello interno, per gli stati liberali vige la separazione dei poteri civile e militare. L'approccio comparativo dei rapporti civile-militare a cavallo della Prima Guerra mondiale, permette un'analisi della struttura di decision-making nel Regno Unito e nel Regno d'Italia. L'obiettivo della ricerca storica è comprendere l'intrecciarsi dei diversi livelli di conduzione politico e militare della Grande Guerra per poter rispondere alle domande fondamento della ricerca: chi decise di fare la guerra, chi la condusse e in che modo, ed infine chi firmò i trattati di pace.

INTRODUCTION

The separation between civil and military power is characteristic of liberal states. In the 19th century it was traditional for military power to be subordinate to civil power. The First World War represented a watershed in the history of the relationship between civil and military power. The revolutions that the Great War brought about in the European countries were so great that they upset the structure of the countries involved. This research presents the history of two belligerent countries: the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Italy. The comparative study of the history of the two countries allows the analysis of the responses given to cope with a war that was first industrial and then total. The latter led to similar responses to the problems posed by the conflict. The new form of warfare, no longer confined to individual countries, made it imperative to establish forms of coalition and cooperation between allies. The form of cooperation was no longer confined to the battlefield but included the establishment of supranational structures to manage a stream of shared economic and material problems. The common response, however, came from two countries with traditionally very different civil-military structures. Unlike the British experience, where there was a political monopoly over the work of the armed forces, the Italian military enjoyed autonomy in the management of internal politics.

The period of examination covers an interval between the beginning of 1900 and 1923. The reason for the choice of time is to allow the reader to compare the government and military structures of the two countries before, during and after the war. The underlying research question is who decided to go to war, who conducted the war and how they made decisions, and who signed the peace treaties.

The kingdoms examined found themselves, due to various circumstances, fighting on the same side of the alliance. Structural differences meant that the war was conducted on different fronts until 1917, the decisive year for the victory of the Entente.

The historical research under examination has been divided into three sections: pre-war, war and post-war. Each section is divided into chapters following a chronological order. The historical events presented will be the red thread that will lead the analysis of the diplomatic action between the warring countries and the military decisions taken on the battlefield. Through the pages of the thesis, the reader will be provided with the necessary information for a critical look at the conflict. Firstly, the structures of governments and military commands will be presented, which intertwine with historical events and explain the changes in the apparatus and the establishment of a relationship between them. A third actor that positioned itself between the two centres of power was the activities of military intelligence. Indeed, from 1914 onwards, the war widened its fronts to include information on enemy operations, which became central to the conduct of the war.

Parallel to the relationship between governors and the military, the influence that the populations had on the decisions taken was considered within civil power. For the first time in history, civilians took on a decisive role in the conduct of the war, not only in the composition of the mass armies at the front, but for the moral support of the home front. Morale will be one of the new objectives of the belligerents to defeat the enemy. Moreover, the military doctrines of the 19th century taught in the important Italian and European military schools were introduced, doctrines on which the first decisions for action on the battlefield were based.

There was an upheaval in traditional roles. On the one hand, the military adopted, especially in Italy, measures to control civilians, and once the war was over, it was difficult to limit the military's gains in power over civilians. On the other hand, the government environment witnessed clashes between the most influential figures: the king, the prime minister, the foreign minister, and the war minister. To better coordinate decisions, war councils were set up in both countries, in which operations on the battlefronts were discussed.

ABBREVIATION

ADD Additional

B.D. *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914*, eds, G. P. Gooch and H. Temperley (11 vols in 13; London, 1926–38)

BEF British Expeditionary Force

BT Board of Trade

C in C Commander in Chief

CAB Cabinet Office Papers

CGS Chief of General Staff

CID Committe of Imperial Defence

CIGS Chief of the Imperial General Staff

DDI Documenti Diplomatici Italiani

FO Foreign Office Papers, Public Record Office

GHQ General Headquarter

GQG Grand Quarter General

ILM Imperial Maritime League

INF Infomration papers

ITO Informazioni Truppe Operanti

IWM Imperial War Museum

MP Member of Parliament

MSS Manuscripts

PA Parliamentary Archives

PB Press Bureau

PM Prime Minister

PRO Public Record Office

R.D. Regio Decreto

RAF Royal Air Force

RECO Ministry of Reconstruction

T Treasury paper

TNA The National Archives

WO War Office papers

PART ONE

The first part of this research examines the period from the beginning of the nineteenth century to mid-1914, when the British and Italian governments come to a decision, based on calculations made by internal and external factors, due to the outbreak of the First World War. The comparative analysis of the Kingdom of Italy and the United Kingdom is divided in chronological order, dealing with domestic and international events of relevance to the study concerning the relationship between civilians and the military straddling the Great War. In the first chapter the central events from 1900 to 1910 will be outlined, while the second chapter will examine the years from 1911 to 1914, period of military and civilian deployment in preparation for the World War.

Chapter I: 1900 to 1910

The historical period between the end of the nineteenth century and 1914 is known as the Belle Époque, an era of prosperity and technological and industrial development, which arose in France and exploded across Western Europe until it reached the United States. In the Kingdom of Italy, the Belle Époque coincides with the transition from the Umbertine to the Giolittian age, and in the United Kingdom from the Victorian to the Edwardian age. Both kingdoms experienced the death of monarchs at the beginning of the 20th century: in Italy, King Umberto I of Savoy was assassinated on 29th July 1900 in Monza, during an assassination attempt contrived by the anarchist Gaetano Bresci, while in Britain, Queen Victoria's death occurred on 22nd January 1901.

In the United Kingdom, the structure of government is a parliamentary monarchy, while in the Kingdom of Italy there has been a constitutional monarchy. In both monarchies, the king or queen is the head of state, while the Prime Minister leads the government. Regarding the question of who

oversaw the army, at the turn of the century, the two kingdoms reformed their decisional and organisational structures of the Army and Navy.

1. Government structures and the organisation of the army in the United Kingdom

> The government are acting without complete knowledge of what the military can do, while the military authorities on their side are equally without full knowledge of what the Government expects them to do; nor are they given authority to make such antecedent preparations as will enable them to act with the least possible delay[1].

In the United Kingdom, according to the Constitution, the Crown exercises its prerogatives in foreign policy through the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. The Foreign Secretary directs the foreign affairs of the United Kingdom and serves as a member of the Cabinet. As head of the Foreign Office, he runs his ministry in accordance with the directives laid down by the Cabinet[2]. The latter is the body that directs national policy and is accountable to Parliament. The relationship between the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister in the field of foreign policy is complementary[3]. But that was not systematically the case; the situation changed in the years leading up to the First World War, when the Foreign Secretary was excluded from the War Cabinet, set up by Lloyd George to run the country during the war. During the conflict, the foreign policy was reduced to merely calculations of war strategy, administered by the Prime Minister in the War Cabinet[4]. In some instances, the position of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary were adversarial[5]. This situation

[1] Churchill, 21 March 1922, quoted by Saliboury, Parliamentary Papers, 1924 xx, p.286.
[2] A. Corradini, *Governo e Parlamento nella condotta degli affari esteri in Inghilterra*, in "Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali", Vol. 19, N° 1/2, 1952, pp. 77.
[3] See Jennings, W. Ivor, *Cabinet Government*, Cambridge, 1951, p. 179.
[4] A. Corradini, *op. cit.,* p. 81
[5] H.J. Laski, *Parliamentary Government in England*, New York, 1938, p. 207

continued throughout the conduct of the war until the peace treaties of 1919 and 1920, which were handled by the Prime Minister rather than the Foreign Office. But in 1922, after the resignation of David Lloyd George, the Foreign Office resumed its functions.

In the United Kingdom, since 1660 the head of the British Army has been the Commander-in-Chief of the Forces, also called Commander-in-Chief, who was subordinate to the Secretary of State for War since 1870, the year of the Cardwell reforms[6]. The army was composed by the Militia, the fighting group, the Yeomanry, a formation of volunteer cavalry troops, and the Volunteer Forces. During the Edwardian period, the British Army underwent an upheaval and was reorganised until the outbreak of the Great War. By order of the Council of 4th November 1901, Sir William Nicholson, Director-General of Mobilization and Intelligence, under the monitoring of the Commander-in-Chief, drew up military plans of both an offensive and defensive nature. The following week Sir Nicholson informed Lord Roberts that «I have ordered a beginning to be made in preparing a scheme of offensive and defensive operations, the first, being to meet such a contingency as a war with France and Russia combined»[7].

The years leading up to the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), the position of Commander-in-Chief was held by Field Marshal Prince George, who rejected all proposals for army reform, therefore reducing the efficiency of the British Army to a lower level than other European armies. This had a great impact during the Second Anglo-Boer War, which was ultimately won by the British Army thanks to the involvement of the new Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal Frederick Slelgh Roberts, and General Horatio Kitchener. As a consequence of the South African experience, public criticism as well as serious administrative and organisational problems in the defence establishment led Prime Minister Balfour to appoint two Royal Commissions in 1902 to investigate and assess the military decision-making

[6] "Army and Society in England 1870-1900: A Reassessment of the Cardwell Reforms", Albert V. Tucker, Journal of British Studies, Vol. 1, No. 2, May 1963, p. 110-141

[7] Roberts Papers. Nicholson to Roberts, 8 May 1901. Box X 20926, file N2.

structure and the efficiency of the army. The first Royal Commission, "Norfolk Commissions on Militia and Volunteers"[8], chaired by Duke of Norfolk, investigated the efficiency of the two branches of the army, the Militia, and the Volunteers, and decreed the requirement for additional training. This view was endorsed and supported by the National Service League[9]. The second Royal Commission, "Committee on the Reconstruction of the War Office"[10], chaired by Lord Reginald Esher, investigated military affairs at the level of national administration and policy-making[11]. At the end of the analysis, two reports were released, the former on 1st February 1904, the latter on 25th February 1904[12], containing proposed reforms. Firstly, the traditional office of Commander-in-Chief was abolished, despite the opposition of Field Marshal Lord Roberts. A permanent Committee of Imperial Defence[13] was set up in 1902, chaired by

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[8] R. T. Stearn, *The Last Glorious Campaign: Lord Roberts, the National Service League and Compulsory military training, 1902-1914,* in "Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research", Vol. 87, N° 352, Society for Army Hisotrical Research, 2009, pp. 314-315

[9] The National Service League (NSL), 1902-1914, was a political lobby organisation aimed at introducing conscription and compulsory military training. The organisation was based on the concepts expressed by Geroge R. F. Shee (1869-1939) in his famous book 'The Briton's First Duty: the Case for Conscription'. The central theme was that the Royal Navy alone could not guarantee an adequate level of defence against an invasion and for this reason it was essential to introduce compulsory universal military service. NLS failed in its objective, but it incited strong radical pressure in public opinion that contributed to the spread of Germanophobia and fear of invasion. This pressure led, unintentionally, to the improvement of naval rearmament and the introduction of voluntary wartime service; all of which led to victory in 1918.

[10] D. French, B. Holden Reid, *The British General Staff. Reform and Innovation 1890-1939*, Frank Cass, London, Portland, Or, 2002, p.8

[11] The improvements introduced to the War Office were designed to meet the principles of 'simplicity, unity, steadiness of system, and unity of command' (Sir Theodore Martin). The modernised structure was headed by the Secretary of State, with the Under Secretary of State, and Assistant Under Secretary of State and an Accountant General working under him. These positions were held by civilians, but their staffs were also composed of former non-commissioned officers qualified for the job. The Commander in Chief was responsible for the efficiency and discipline of the Army to the Secretary of State. Below the Commander in Chief were the Chiefs of the seven divisions of the army, who were responsible for the efficiency of their department to the Commander in Chief, who acted as supervisor. The General Staff would take over the command of the Intelligence Branch, itself supervised by the Commander-in-Chief, and would be responsible for the defence of the entire empire.
M. R. D. Foot, "Lord Esher on War Office Reform", Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, Autumn 2010, Vol. 88, No. 355 (Autumn 2010), pp. 244-247

[12] P. Smith, *Government and the Armed Forces in Britain, 1856-1990*, London, Hambledon, 1996, pp. 53-74.

[13] The initiative to set up the Committee of Imperial Defence dates back to 10 November 1902, when St. John Broadrick, a member of the War Office, and Lord Selbourne, a member of the

the Prime Minister, flanked by the Chiefs of naval and military forces, which became the defence policy making organisation. A further problem, made evident by the Boer experience, was the lack of a professional figure to lead the British army. Hence the post of Chief of Staff was established in 1905[14]. At last, in 1904, taking up the structure of the Board of Admiralty, the Army Council was set up and it was the supreme administrative body of the British Army until 1964, chaired by the Secretary of State for War, who held the same power as the First Sea Lord. Secretary of State for War, alongside four military and two civilian members of the Army Council, would analyse all military matters submitted to the Crown, which increased civilian and parliamentary control over military power.

Haldane forwarded a note to the Army Council in 1906 in which he wrote «as regards the purpose of the Army, what is obviously required is a highly organized and well-equipped force which can be transported with the least possible delay to any part of the world where it is required»[15]. In November 1906, Sir Douglas Haig, who had become a member of the War Office, studied a new training doctrine for the army, an element considered crucial by the Esher report wrote some years earlier. Therefore in 1907 the "Field Service Pocket Book" was published, in its provisional version, and implemented in the 1909 version and divided into two parts: "Field Service Regulation" and "Field Service Administration". The two publications bring together the training methods for all branches of the army and it insisted that «success in war can be attained only by the defeat of the enemy's mobile forces»[16].

Admiralty, presented the "Memorandum on the Improvement of the Intellectual Equipment of the Services". The memorandum demanded the establishment of a committee consisting of the Prime Minister, two ministers and their advisers, to discuss naval and military matters. Despite Balfour's reservations, he agreed. A further impetus for the creation of a committee, composed of a full-time civilian staff, came from the report of the Esher Commission in January 1904. The fully equipped Imperial Defence Committee was launched in May 1904.

[14] See D. French, B. Holden Reid, *The Biritsh General Staff. Reform and Innovation, 1890-1939*, London, 2002.

[15] Sir Frederick Maurice, *Haldane 1856-1915,* Faber and Faber, United Kingdom, 1937, p. 169

[16] General Staff, War Office, *Field Service Regulations Part II: Organization and Administration, 1909* (London, 1909-14), 24-5.

In 1907 an Imperial Conference of Colonial Premiers was convened, based on General Douglas Haig's proposal to establish an Imperial General Staff, and subsequent to the memorandum of the Chief of Staff, Sir William Nicholson, the Imperial General Staff was established in 1909, with the duty of conducting military preparations for the whole Commonwealth.

The reform that most shaped the events of the Great War was the army reform of 1st April 1908 by the Liberal Secretary of State for War, Richard Burdon Haldane: the establishment of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). At the core of the reform lay the organisation of the armed forces before they reached the battlefield. The earlier method of organising units into brigades, which was only planned once they had been deployed on the battlefield, had revealed structural deficiencies at the beginning of the 20th century and in the light of international obligations to France, which made reform inevitable. The reorganisation according to Haldane involved dividing the armed forces of the regular army into six infantry divisions and one cavalry division. Britain's army was separated into three categories: armed forces, militia and volunteers. The latter two were part-time local military units and created to respond to national security crises. With the reform of 1908, these two units were abolished and replaced with the Territorial Force, established by the Territorial and Reserves Forces Act 1907[17], recruiting and coordinating on a territorial basis, through the establishment of Country Territorial Associations, until 1916. The main objective of the Territorial Force was to ensure national defence, especially in coastal regions, when the regular army fought in a foreign theatre of war as an Expeditionary Force. There was the possibility for members of the Territorial Force, by signing an “Imperial Service Obligation”, to be deployed abroad. In conclusion, Haldane[18] revamped the structure of the army in order to prepare war plans for a possible conflict in Europe: the “continental

[17] F. W. Perry, *The Commonwealth armies. Manpower and organisation in two world wars,* Manchester University Press, 1988, p. 6

[18] “The *ad hoc* adjustment to cover the cracks [due to the Boer War], the Esher Committee and the Haldane reforms culminating in the establishment of a General Staff and a new army”.
Zara S. Steiner, K. Neilson, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, New York, 2003, p. 204

strategy" of 1906[19]. To ensure the efficiency of the forces both outside and inside British territory, the War Office, consisting of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS)[20], Directors of Military Operations (DMO), Staff Duties (DSD) and Military Training (DMT), was organised into three offices: Operations and Intelligence, Administration and Personnel and Supplies[21].

2. Government structures and organisation of the army in the Kingdom of Italy

In the Kingdom of Italy, the king was at the head of the military structure and held supreme command of the army on the battlefield. The king's military management began to lose ground in the 19th century, when the sciences applied to the military field for preparing for war and modernising the instrument of war required a professional figure in command. For this reason, the figure of the Chief of Staff of the Royal Army was introduced by Royal Decree No. 968 of 29th July 1882[22], according to which, in Article 1, the Chief of Staff had the task of studying and preparing for war in peacetime and was given moral and technical responsibility for the preparation of the army and defence in the event of war, limiting responsibility to the Minister of War. The decisions taken by the Chief of Staff are subject to control by the War Ministry, which is accountable for these decisions to Parliament. Additionally, the Government is the only body competent to determine whether a concrete situation determines the *casus foederis* before Parliament.

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[19] A. J. Anthony Morris, *Haldane's Army Reforms 1906-1908: The deception of the radicals,* in "History", Vol. 56, N°186, 1971, pp. 17-34

[20] On the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Douglas said: "It may be said that my proposal would tend to raise the position of the C.I.G.S. to that of a Commander-in-Chief. It should not have this result; he would not command (except at manoeuvres) but inspect, and action would be taken by the Army Council". Sir Douglas' aim was to re-establish the relationship between the fighting soldiers and the governing body of the army.
See Royal Archives. Memorandum, 19th April 1914, p. 3, RA Geo. V. F.809/2; J. Gooch, *The Plans of war. The General Staff and British Military Strategy c. 1900-1916,* Routledge, 2016, p.126

[21] M. Senior, *Victory on the Western Front. The development of the British Army, 1914-1918,* Pen&Sword, Great Britain, 2016, p. 72

[22] L. Ceva, *Capo di Stato Maggiore e politica estera al principio del Secolo*, in "Il Politico", 1987, n°1, pp. 123-135.

In peacetime, the other command of the army is managed by the King, the Minister of War and the Chief of Staff. The new structure of the General Staff was divided into: "Office of the Commander of the General Staff", which is entrusted with the task of coordination and secretarial functions, "War School" and two departments, named respectively "Departments I" (*Riparti I*), or "Intendancy Departments" and "Departments II" (*Reparti II*), or "Operations Departments"[23].

According to the Albertine Statute (*Statuto Albertino*), Article 5 states that only the King has executive power, and he is the Supreme Head of State, commanding all land and sea forces, declaring war, signing treaties of peace, alliance, and trade[24]. As in the English case, the king enjoys the principle of royal responsibility, or crown immunity, and the inability to incriminate the sovereign before a court. Renowned is the expression the king reigns but does not rule, attributed to Adolph Thiers. There are two types of acts in the military sphere: acts of high command and acts of high military administration. Respectively, the former are acts aimed at deciding who to attack, on which front and regulating liaison with the allies, and are entrusted to the responsible political integrators; the latter are acts aimed primarily at administering the structure of the army, such as budget and military force allocations. In peacetime, the Minister of War and the Minister of the Navy countersign acts of high command and acts of high military administration, as these are acts of political-military competence. In addition, the parliamentary system has as its cornerstone the control of Parliament over the work of the government, which in turn is responsible for the appointment, on the initiative of the Minister of War, of the Chief of Staff to whom it is bound.

The Ministry of War and the Ministry of the Navy constituted the high centre of power on which the Royal Army depended; in fact, the Ministry was the place where decisions were taken that the Chief of Staff would then

[23] L'Ufficio Difesa dello Stato (1903-1915), Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, V Reparto Affari Generali – Ufficio Storico, P. Formigoni (a cura di), p. 59

[24] *Re*, in *Enciclopedia giuridica*, Milano, Scoietà Editrice Libraria, 1900, vol. XIV, p. 249; Lucio Ceva, *Treatu di guerra*, Milano, Franco Angelo, pp. 41-64.

translate into operational orders. The relationship between the Ministry and the Chief of Staff was established in 1891 with the creation of the 'General Staff Division'. The structure and powers of the General Staff remained unchanged until 1900, when General Tancredi Saletta took over as Chief of Staff. From that moment on, the tasks of the Chief of Staff would be extended to the point of effectively commanding the entire structure, including at organisational level, leading to a reduction of the office of the Ministry of War to that of sole holder of the political conduct of the war. This extension of the Chief of Staff's powers at the expense of the Ministry led to a hierarchical disparity between the two bodies and a reorganisation of the structure of the General Staff. The 1902 order of the day stipulated that the staff of the General Staff were forbidden to divulge any kind of documentation and that the General Staff itself, including the Ministry of War, the Ministry of the Navy and the army commands, were not allowed to do so. The lack of communication between the military leadership and the political power lay at the root of the clashes that took place between the two centres of power.

The 1903 order reformed the composition of the General Staff, accentuating the degree of independence of the Chief and extending his authority to cover powers hitherto reserved for the minister. The Office of the Chief of Staff of the Royal Army was divided into four sections: Intendency Department, Secretariat, State Defence Office and Operations Department. The Intendancy Department consisted of a secretariat and three offices, namely administration, services and transport. The Operations Department consisted of a secretariat, three checkerboard offices that were responsible for the study of the defence of three strategic areas, namely the Western, Eastern and Colonial checkerboard, and a Historical Office. In addition to this, in 1903, a "Defence Office" ("*Ufficio difesa*") was set up, which absorbed the tasks of the Southern Exchequer Office - replaced by the Colonial Exchequer Office - and the Technical Office of Artillery and Engineering, which dealt with defence and offensive arrangements. The Defence Office did not cover the whole of the national territory but was

responsible for preparing defence plans for the territories excluded from the Eastern and Western Exchequer Offices, i.e., the territories of peninsular and island Italy[25].

The duties and role of the Chief of Staff were further regulated by two royal decrees, the first Royal Decree No. 86 of 4th March 1906 and the second Royal Decree No. 77 of 5th March 1908. According to the article 4 of the Royal Decree of 1906, the Chief of General Staff «must be kept abreast of the political-military situation, as far as studies and preparations are concerned»[26]. In addition, the Chief of Staff was conferred an indirect competence in foreign policy: by royal decree, the full and exclusive competence of the Chief of Staff was conferred on decisions concerning mobilisation and the ability to enter into agreements with the staffs of the Allied powers. If the Royal Decree of 1906 extended the field of action of the Chief of Staff as never before, Royal Decree No. 77 of 5th March 1908 conferred, in a reductive way, the competences attributed to him by the Royal Decree of 1906. In fact, the Royal Decree places the Chief of Staff under the Minister of War and removes the part of the Royal Decree concerning relations with the other Chiefs of Staff of the Allied Powers. Unlike other European Chiefs of Staff, in the Italian case he remained a technical and not a political body.

In 1908, when General Tancredi Saletta took over as Chief of Staff, two royal decrees, numbers 35 and 36[27], respectively, established the "Mixed Supreme Commission for the Defence of the State", to ensure cooperation between the army and navy, and the Army Council, to present the Minister of War with the requirements of military regulations. Thanks to these advisory bodies, the Minister of War and the senior ranks of the Army could influence the military organisation of the state.

[25] L'Ufficio Difesa dello Stato (1903-1915), Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, V Reparto Affari Generali – Ufficio Storico, P. Formigoni (a cura di), pp. 66-68

[26] L. Ceva, *op. cit.*, p. 123

[27] L'Ufficio Difesa dello Stato (1903-1915), Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, V Reparto Affari Generali – Ufficio Storico, P. Formigoni (a cura di), p. 69

Later amendments to the Office of the Chief of Staff in 1910 included the introduction of three new offices: "Mobilisation", "Instructions and Manoeuvres" and "Operations". All offices were subordinate to the decisions of the Chief of Staff and were responsible respectively for the study of mobilisation plans, departmental training systems and the general organisation of the Army. To further extend the tasks of the General Staff Command, there was a provision which clearly stated that at the time of mobilisation, the General Staff Command would become *Supreme Command*, i.e., that the State would assume *de jure* command of operations in the event of war. In that case, the Chief of the General Staff would assume command of the armed forces of the Kingdom of Italy, supervised by the King alone.

3. Events in the early 19th century

The early years of the 19th century in both kingdoms, as already mentioned, brought about a transformation not only in the sovereigns, but also in the political and military organisation. In the United Kingdom, the coalition government was presided over by Lord Robert Salisbury, a Conservative and politician since 1853, who also held the position of Foreign Minister from 25th June 1895 to 1900, later entrusted to the Liberal Henry Lansdowne. At the head of the military command, we find the Conservative St. John Brodrick at the War Office, from 12th November 1900 to 12th October 1903, and the Conservative William Palmer Earl of Salborne at the Admiralty, from 1900 to 1905. Lord Salisbury's government focused mainly on foreign policy affairs: he signed pacts with Italy, Austria, and Germany on colonial matters, distancing his country from France. Salisbury, Selbone and Brodrick were more in favour of making peacekeeping agreements with Germany in the Far East to thwart Russian expansionist aims at the expense of Japan, which required support from Britain. Lansdowne was preparing an agreement for Anglo-German-Japanese cooperation in Manchuria, but in March 1901 Germany abandoned all interest in cooperation in the East. Meanwhile the troops of the British Empire were engaged on South African

soil in the fight against the Boer republics. Thanks to the intervention of Lord Kitchener, the fortunes of the war were in favour of the British army. The Second Boer War, fought from October 1899 to May 1902, shook the confidence of the British army. In conclusion, the British government's commitment to foreign policy denotes Britain's influential role in the world.

The Italian case is different. Between June 1898 and June 1900, the conservative General Luigi Pelloux led the government. He was the only general placed in charge of the government in Italian history. General Pelloux was appointed to lead the government directly by King Umberto I, at a time when the kingdom of Italy was experiencing internal revolutions, especially in the south. Bringing a soldier to head the government was a clear sign of the temporary failure of civilian politics. In addition, the Pellux government with a royal decree of 19th July 1899 established a new advisory body: the Supreme Commission for the Defence of the State. The post of Chief of Staff was held by General Tancredi Saletta, until 1908. The only theatre of war in which Italy participated in these years was in China following the Boxer revolution, from November 1899 to September 1901. The expedition to China highlighted the shortcomings of the army's planning phase, mainly attributable to two factors: the slow production of weapons and the lack of funds allocated to the army. In the early 1900s up to 1908, tensions within the army grew: firstly, due to the structural deficiencies of the officer corps, secondly, the moral collapse of military professionals caused by the continued use of the army to support civilian power. Adding to the discontent of the military was Parliament's continued refusal to approve funds for the reform of the military structure. Finally, compounding the tension between civil and military power was the ambiguity over who really had control over the conduct of any war. On the other hand, the Kingdom of Italy was experiencing a moment of expansion: thanks to German capital, two new credit institutions were founded in 1894: the *Banca Commerciale* and the *Credito Italiano*. The latter played a fundamental role in Italy's industrial development. The industrial take-off was also due to the improvement of relations with France and the signing in 1898 of a new

commercial treaty that put an end to the customs war. All these factors contributed to the Italian industrial launch[28]: the kingdom of Italy went from being a mainly agricultural country to industrial development in new sectors such as iron and steel, metallurgy, mechanics, chemistry and the electrical industry, spheres of production that would prove to be central during the preparation and conduct of the war. A clear example is FIAT, the mechanical industry founded by Giovanni Agnelli in 1899, which was to play a central role during the Great War. The Italian political situation altered when elections were called in June 1900, in which Giuseppe Saracco won, who also took over as Minister of Internal Affairs ad interim. The Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Saracco government was Emilio Visconti-Venosta, minister during the second Pelloux government. Minister Visconti-Venosta gave a 'rudder stroke' to Italian politics. He opened a dialogue both with Austria concerning an agreement on the Balkans and in the East, and with the new French ambassador, whom he met in Rome on 4th January 1901 following an exchange of notes on mutual disinterest in the Mediterranean: Italy with regard to Morocco and France with regard to Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. The new impetus in relations between Italy and France was due to a change in French policy, with the appointment of Camille Berrière as ambassador to Rome. A month before the elections, King Umberto I was assassinated in Monza and was succeeded by the new King of Italy, Vittorio Emanuele III. The Saracco government, although short-lived, represented a period of détente in Italian political life. In February of the following year, the parliamentary chambers approved the motion of mistrust against the Saracco government, which resigned on 6th February 1901. The leader of the liberal left, Giuseppe Zanardelli, was called to govern, with Giovanni Giolitti as Minister of Internal Affairs. This was the beginning of a period of

[28] Italy's industrial growth, between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, was also the result of structural change in the economy: internal factors, such as the expansion of the domestic market and the elasticity of labour supply, and external factors, such as the growth of agricultural production, migration flows, and exports abroad. Moreover, all the reforms introduced during the Giolittian age allowed for the modernisation of the administration and a social enlargement in the political sphere. As Valerio Castronovo wrote 'the war seemed to solve all problems'.

reform in Italy, also known as the *Giolittian age*, and of industrial expansion. With the advent of the Zanardelli government, the country's political direction changed from conservative to reformist. This change took military needs off the national political agenda. It resulted in an increasingly clear separation between politics and the military: a distancing of parliament and the government from the control and technical choices made by the military leadership, which, until the Libyan conflict of 1911, would limit itself to reducing appropriations for the army. The approval of the military budget became the instrument of control of civil power over military power. In addition, the Zanardelli government ensured that the king renounced the direct appointment of the most senior state posts, such as the Chief of Staff. The English decision-making structure is different. The heads of political and military power are civilian figures, supported by a military technical staff: the Minister of War and the Minister of the Navy are civilians. The decision-making support is evidenced in the creation of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1902, a committee with the task of coordinating the various military services to deal with defence issues in the national territory and the colonies. The Committee of Imperial Defence is led by the Prime Minister and its morphology allows for a broadening of the influence of military and naval professionals in final decisions. Its greatest strength is its ability to unite political and professional opinion around a table. The cooperation found in the British decision-making structure does not detract from the system of civilian control over military power: the British armed forces are subject to a system of dual control. The command of the forces is entrusted to officers answerable to the crown and the administration of the forces is controlled by ministers who are responsible to Parliament.

On 11 July 1902 Lord Salisbury resigned and the following day the Conservative Arthur James Balfour succeeded him as Prime Minister. Lord Balfour and Foreign Secretary Lansdowne distanced themselves from Germany, which in the meantime had begun a massive programme of naval rearmament. In addition, British military intelligence reported in 1901 that a

new German department had been set up to conduct a naval war against Britain. For the United Kingdom, the greatest threat to national security came from the huge expenditure of the German High Sea Fleet. The naval rivalry between Britain and Germany was always at the heart of relations between the two countries. Growing international tension alarmed the British government. The Japanese government, fearful of a conflict with Russia in the Far East, signed a bilateral agreement with the British government on 30th January 1902. The purpose of the agreement with Japan was twofold: to sign an alliance to safeguard the Far East and to counterbalance the Franco-Russian military alliance of 1894. Since Lord Salisbury's rule, Russia had been a threat to Britain, both because of its expansion in the Far East and the power of the Russian fleet. The latter was severely damaged following the Russo-Japanese war that broke out in Manchuria on 8th February 1904. Crucially, the event of the Japanese victory at Tsushima: with the destruction of the Russian fleet the balance of world naval power was altered. With the Russian defeat, one of the greatest dangers to British security disappeared. The new balance of international tensions led the British government to draw closer to France, which until then had been a great rival in the race for colonial supremacy. The Entente Cordiale was signed on 8th April 1904, resolving colonial rivalries in North Africa and the Mediterranean. The Anglo-French Entente did not represent an alliance directly against Germany but responded to the British need to reduce colonial tensions. Moreover, by signing the alliance, France was emerging from diplomatic isolation. If the alliances made soothed British international relations, the same cannot be said of the relationship between the Kaiser and the King. The continued threat from the German fleet led the First Sea Lord, Admiral Fisher, to reform the fleet in October 1904. From then on, the British fleet adopted a revolutionary model of armoured ship: the Dreadnought. The First Sea Lord, Sir John Fisher, responded to the German threats by progressively recalling most of the units protecting national waters and establishing defence bases on the coast. Relations with Germany became even more strained after the first Moroccan crisis in

March 1905, while relations between France and Britain strengthened. Between summer and autumn 1905, international tension led Britain to improve its strategic organisation. In January 1906, the Director of Military Operation, Major General James Grierson, presented a memorandum in which he considered the option of a war against Germany on the side of France, especially in the event of a German invasion of Belgium. As the international situation began to show the first signs of a future war, Balfour's Conservative government fell, and a Liberal majority government headed by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman rose. The Liberal Party implemented a less aggressive policy in the colonial field, decreasing defence spending, and focusing its efforts on a policy of social reform. As part of the new government, Sir Edward Grey became foreign minister. Sir Grey as head of the Foreign Office changed British international policy, ending the so-called 'splendid isolation' of earlier years, and embarking on military alliances that would isolate Germany diplomatically. Support for Grey's policy was fostered by the memorandum presented by Sir Eyre Alexander Crowe, a member of the Foreign Office, in January 1907. Sir Crowe drafted a memorandum – "Memorandum on the present state of British relations with France and Germany"[29] - reviewing relations between Britain, France and Germany, pointing out that the German government's behaviour was a threat to British security. In conclusion, he argued that a war between Germany and Britain could not be avoided for long. First, Grey strengthened ties with France and then concentrated on reaching an understanding with Russia. Grey was a great supporter of an Anglo-Russian understanding so that Russia would not slide towards Germany and in the event of conflict would not have to fight with two fleets. Hence on 31st July 1907 the Anglo-Russian understanding was concluded, defining the areas of influence in Persia, Afghanistan, and Tibet.

At the same time the Italian government focused on improving relations with the European powers. During the government of Giuseppe Zanardelli, the

[29] E. Crowe, *Memorandum on the Present State of British Relations with France and Germany*, Good Press, 2021

post of Foreign Minister was entrusted to Giulio Prinetti, who undertook to get closer to France, signing on 30th June 1902 the "Prinetti-Barrère" agreements[30], a counter-insurance treaty that provided for Italian neutrality both in the event France was attacked directly or indirectly by one or more powers, and also in the event that France attacked in response to a serious provocation. It also committed Italy not to sign any protocol or military arrangement with any other power that disagreed with the counter-assurance treaty. The collapse of relations between Italy and Germany and Austria-Hungary, with whom he signed the Triple Alliance, a secret defensive pact on 20th May 1882, renewed just two days before the agreement with France, upset the Austrian Konrad, who proposed an offensive against Italy, but the German Chancellor absolved the Italian behaviour in the famous phrase: "a husband should not give in to trouble if his wife indulges in a waltz with another knight"[31]. Prinetti, exploiting the quality of secrecy of diplomacy - which would only become officially public at the end of the Great War - to manoeuvre between agreements and alliances with European powers, within the limits of double-dealing. The reason for the change of direction in Italian politics can be understood from the nature of the Triple Alliance, a treaty for Italy of a defensive nature.

Zanardelli resigned and Giovanni Giolitti took over the government from November 1903 to March 1905, entrusting the post of foreign minister to Tommaso Tittoni. From the second Giolitti administration until the outbreak of the First World War, Italy experienced a period of industrial expansion, thanks to monetary and banking stabilisation.

A further project initiated by the Giolitti government, which was to turn out to be vital for the conduct of the war, was the nationalisation of the Italian railways. However, due to Giolitti's ban on the right to strike, the government collapsed, and Alessandro Fortis took over, thanks to whom the law of 22nd

[30] G. Mammarella, P. Cacace, *La politica estera dell'Italia. Dallo Stato unitario ai giorni nostri*, in "L'Italia e la Prima Guerra mondiale", Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2012

[31] F. Cognasso, *Osservazioni sulla politica estera del Ministro Prinetti secondo le recenti pubblicazioni (Atti della Regia Accademia delle scienze di Torino, vol. 71*, in "Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali", 1937, p. 195.

April 1905 No. 137[32], known as the Fortis Law, was passed. Thanks to this law, Italy's numerous railway lines were incorporated into the autonomous company *Ferrovie dello Stato*. Through successive integrations during the third Giolitti government, the last of which was the law of 7th July 1907 n°429, the Italian state was provided with a railway network capable of satisfying the needs of growing industrialisation. In the same years, the Chief of Staff, General Tancredi Saletta, at the request of the Minister of War, Lieutenant General Luigi Majnoni d'Intignano, prepared the first draft of a mobilisation plan for a war on the north-eastern front. The Italian government's growing concern about Austria was fuelled by military and political information from Vienna. In the face of growing international tension, on 3rd May 1907, Giovanni Giolitti proposed setting up a parliamentary commission of enquiry to investigate all aspects of military organisation. The "Commission of seventeen", as it was called, was set up on 6th June and consisted of four generals, an admiral and twelve civilians, six of whom were elected by the Senate, six by the Chamber of Deputies and five by Royal Decree. The focus of this investigation was a detailed analysis of the needs of the Italian army and to provide an assessment of the needs of the individual services dependent on the Ministry of War. Italy's military corps, which was mainly deployed domestically, was proportionately smaller than those of the great European powers. The commission was supposed to draw up an enquiry report and submitted it to Parliament within a year of its creation but following some delays the deadline was extended until 30th June 1909, with the approval of the law of 28th June 1908. The conclusion of the Commission of Enquiry presented on 4th June 1908 a first bill for a financing of 223 million lire to be added to the 60 million lire granted by the law n° 496 of 14th July 1907 - a law that provided for the allocation of 60 million lire for extraordinary expenses until 1910-. In the end, the extraordinary financing for the reorganisation of the army was provided by Minister Spingardi, who gave a final settlement to the war budget with Law 404 of 30th June 1909. On 14th June 1908, General Alberto Pollio, a pro-German and supporter of

[32] Gazzetta Ufficiale, 22nd April 1905, on official Archive website.

strengthening the army, succeeded Saletta as General Staff Commander. In October, the international situation was shaken by the occupation of Austria-Hungary at the expense of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The government in Vienna, taking advantage of the Young Turk revolution in Constantinople, annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, triggering the Bosnian crisis, which lasted until March 1909. With the Bosnian crisis, relations between Italy and the Triple Alliance deteriorated and the Adriatic became the new focus of Italian military and diplomatic concerns. The relationship between Rome and Vienna was reduced to its lowest terms: the Austrian invasion highlighted the inferiority of Italy within the Triple Alliance and a climate of national redeeming and claiming Trentino and Venezia Giulia began to spread. The irrident lands represented the territorial compensation that, according to Article VIII of the 1891 version of the Triple Alliance, was to be paid to Italy if Austria expanded its interests in the Balkan area. On 31st March 1909, Serbia agreed to the annexation of Austria-Hungary. In order to safeguard the Balkan area, Italy signed the Racconigi Agreement with Russia on 24th October 1909, which provided for the preservation of the status quo in the Balkan area and Italian disinterest in the Straits question in compensation for Russian lack of interest in Cyrenaica-Tripolitania.

On 4th October 1909, the Minister of War, Senator Severino Casana - the first civilian to head the Ministry of War in the history of Italy, which remained the only one until 1920 - resigned when Giolitti rejected the request for more funds for the army and General Paolo Spingardi took over. He inherited a fractured officer corps, so General Spingardi enacted a reform of the country's military organisation: on a technical level he reformulated the mobile defence system, defined the composition of the army and the peacetime force and administered the permanent defence system; on a moral level he improved the methods of military advancement; finally, on a financial level he redefined the expenditure budget. The improvements made represented a minimum programme to deal with some of the problems of arming, maintaining the forces, organising, and defending the national territory. In particular, the defence of the north-eastern frontier was

strengthened by the construction of armoured forces. In addition, in 1908, improvements were made to the railway and merchant marine networks. In 1909, the Supreme Command of the General Staff, following an analysis of the territory, ruled out the possibility of an invasion of Italy in the area between the Stelvio and the Carnic Pre-Alps in the event of a conflict, so General Pollio decided to give an offensive character to the operations in Trentino and Cadore, maintaining a defensive position in Friuli. From 1909 to 1913 the Minister of War, General Spingardi, and the Chief of Staff, General Pollio, studied programmes for the revision and improvement of the Royal Army. The latter consisted of the Royal Carabinieri Corps, the Royal Guard, the Royal Navy and the Air Force. In December 1909, Giolitti strategically resigned as head of government and in the two years between his third and fourth governments, therefore first Sonnino and then Luzzatti were appointed. In Italy, the “Futurist Manifesto” was published in early 1910. Futurism was a cultural, literary, and political movement, which exalted the dynamism of modern life by breaking away from the culture of the previous century. Members of Futurism, along with members of the literary movement with Gabriele D'Annunzio, took part in interventionist demonstrations at the outbreak of the First World War.

While the main Italian concerns were land-based, especially on the north-eastern front, in Britain in 1908 two schools of thought clashed over British naval armament. On the one hand there was the Imperial Maritime League, founded on 27th January 1908 in London by Harold F. Wyatt and Lionel Horton-Smith. Wyatt and Lionel Horton-Smith, from a split in the Imperial Navy League. IML was a British pressure group, which demanded more action in the preparation of the British navy, through an increase in the production of dreadnoughts, and a more aggressive attitude towards Germany. In early 1908, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George told the German ambassador that "every Englishman would spend his last penny to preserve his country's naval supremacy"[33]. On the

[33] Massie, Dreadnought 1991, p. 698, “Arms Race priori to 1914, Armament Policy”, Eric Brose, 8 October 2014

other side was the 'Reduction of armaments committee', which drew up a memorial to the Prime Minister signed by 136 members of parliament, liberals, and radicals, calling for a reduction in armaments. The British cabinet found itself divided between these two factions, in a situation of naval rivalry with Germany in which they could not agree on a sea power budget. Not even War Minister Richard Burdon Haldane, on a diplomatic mission to Germany, was able to conclude an agreement to slow down naval spending. After another failure of an Anglo-German agreement on the navy, British Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith commented on the situation: «Nothing, I believe, will meet [Germany's] purpose which falls short of a promise on our side of neutrality, a promise we cannot give»[34]. In the absence of a stabilisation of relations with Germany and with rumours of a further German acceleration in preparation for a surprise attack on Britain, in 1909 the Admiralty demanded an increase in dreadnoughts. The British Cabinet was once again divided into two opposing positions, but thanks to Prime Minister Asquith a compromise was reached, known as Asquith's compromise, which was accepted by the radicals in the Cabinet and passed in the House of Commons, and provided for an additional £3 million for the production of dreadnoughts. The British supremacy of naval power, as Haldane had pointed out, had always been the British symbol of power and security. When the naval question reached the public, frightened by the German naval race, the government had to smooth over the conflicting oppositions, putting the safety of the nation as the first objective. In 1908 a naval conference was convened in London, at which the London Declaration, an international code of maritime law in time of war, was signed: important was the extension of the rights of neutral powers in the event of war. The Declaration was signed by Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States; however, it never came into force because no state ratified it. In 1909, Norman Angell published his book 'Europe's optical illusion'. In his book,

[34] Massie, Dreadnought 1991, p.817, "Arms Race priori to 1914, Armament Policy", Eric Brose, 8 October 2014

Angell argued that war was economically a waste of money and that no rational man or nation would accept an expensive war without any profit. The argument appealed to radicals and businessmen. The current of Angelism was a solid force in the pre-war period, but it remained a doctrine without translating into any plan of action. The Labour Party organised a national campaign against the ever-increasing burden of arms spending. This opposition led to the convening of a conference on disarmament and the international situation in January 1911. The pressure for an improvement in Anglo-German dialogue continued, the main motivation being the difficulty in raising enough funds to finance both a programme of social reform and the development of a naval programme.

On 6th May 1910 King Edward VII died and George V came to power. The Liberal government consisting of Asquith, Lloyd George, Barrell and Crowe and the opposition consisting of Balfour, Lansdowne, Chamberlain and Cowdor met to reach an agreement, without having to consult the new king. On this occasion Lloyd George made the first proposal for a coalition government committed to social reform, territorial defence and national unity. Although the agreement met with the principles of action of both parties, the deeply divided nature of the two parties led to the dissolution of Parliament on 28th November 1910.

Chapter II: Events from 1911-1914

1. Kingdom of Italy

On 4th May 1911, General Dallolio took over as Director General of Artillery and Engineers. On 4th June 1911, Law No. 487 - the Daneo-Credaro Law - was passed, a school reform law that established the "Regimental Schools", a two-year school education programme for troops to learn to read and write.

In the spring of 1911, Colonel Marro, military attaché in Constantinople, referred to the weakening of the Turkish army due to an internal crisis. So Giolitti, who had taken over the government for the fourth time, commissioned General Pollio, Chief of Staff, to examine a war against Libya from a military point of view. During the summer the second Moroccan crisis, or Agadir crisis, broke out when the German gunboat, the Panther, entered the Moroccan bay on 1st July 1911 to protect its interests there. The crisis ended with the signature of the Franco-German agreement of 4th November, in which Germany renounced all claims to Morocco, which later became a French protectorate. Italy, on the other hand, wanted to collect territorial rights in Libya, in accordance with the Italo-French agreement of 1902. On 28th July, the Italian Foreign Minister, San Giuliano, expressed his views on the North African question to the king and Giolitti. He declared that «from the complex of the international situation and the local situation in Tripolitania, I am led to believe today that it is probable that, in a few months' time, Italy may be forced to undertake a military expedition to Tripolitania»[35]. Giolitti and San Giuliano did not want to fight a long and tough war, which would have involved a large deployment of troops, but an extension of diplomatic action dictated by the actions of the other European powers. On 24th September 1911, Giolitti asked the King for permission to send an ultimatum to Turkey to accept Italian political rule over Tripolitania-Cyrenaica. At the end of the twenty-fourth hour when the ultimatum was

[35] From the writings of Giovanni Giolitti. Quarant'anni di politica italiana: dai prodroni della Grande Guerra al fascismo. 1910-1928, C. Pavone (ed.), Milan, Feltrinelli, 1962, p. 52.

sent, the order to mobilise the Special Corps for the occupation of Tripoli was issued[36]. The Italian fleet was mobilised and a contingent of 35,000 men was sent to the Libyan coast. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Antonino San Giuliano, sent a letter to Giolitti and the King in which he expressed his fear of provoking a new Turkish crisis and offering Austria a pretext for a new intervention in the Balkans. The decision to send Italian troops to Libya was taken by King Victor Emmanuel III and Giolitti in secret during a conversation in Racconigi Castle on 17th September 1911. During the Italo-Turkish war, the Italian army found itself in serious difficulty facing Turkish guerrilla defensive operations and an expeditionary force of 400,000 men was sent. On 23rd October they organised a general attack against the eastern Italian defence sector, attacking the Italian army at Sciara Sciat. The attack ended after several hours with the victory of the Italian army. The Italian-Turkish war ended with the signing of the peace of Lausanne on 18th October 1912. The war of 1911-1912 underlined the unpreparedness and lack of efficiency of the Italian army. However, the Libyan expedition contributed to a warlike atmosphere in Italy.

In conjunction with the Libyan war, on 16th January 1912 the Agorat, a cruiser of the Regia Marina, intercepted the French ship Chartage, which had departed from Marseilles with Tunis as its final destination. Two days later, another French steamer, the Manouba, was stopped and hijacked. Both ships were stopped on suspicion of smuggling for the Turks. France brought Italy before the Hague Court, which sanctioned Italy by ruling in favour of France. This episode worsened Italian-French relations, but a worsening of relations with France led to an improvement in relations with Germany, a supporter of Italian action in Libya. The Triple Alliance treaty was renewed - two years in advance - for the fifth time in Vienna on 5th December 1912, and a protocol was added, proposed by the Italian Foreign Minister San Giuliano, through which Germany and Austria recognised Italian sovereignty over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. The Chief of Staff,

[36] A. Assenza, *Il generale Alfredo Dallolio, la mobilitazione industriale dal 1915 al 1939*, Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, p. 37

General Pollio, was kept in the dark about the renewal. During this period, civil-military relations reached an acute point where Italian diplomacy made decisions without a military analysis of the situation.

Relations with France improved as the resentment over the Chartage and Manouba incident faded. The Franco-Italian dialogue resumed but was interrupted in June 1913 with the signing of a naval agreement between the Kingdom of Italy and Austria-Hungary, which provided for the establishment of a joint command for the fleets in the event of war against France.

In 1913, General Pollio amended the "*Regolamento d'istruzione*". He added that «military instruction, if it is to have a secure foundation, must be continually accompanied by sound moral preparation». The basic principle is offensive action, the only manoeuvre that allows freedom of action and initiative - in fact, in the early years of the Great War, all operational plans designed for attack were of an offensive nature; only later were the methods of attack in trench warfare discovered. Italian pre-war military doctrine employed three tactically interdependent masses: one exploring, one protecting and one striking. The idea of combat consisted of movement and speed. The Rules of Instruction, drafted by Pollio and Spingardi, reflected the cultural and doctrinal renewal of the army.

In 1914, Giolitti resigned and suggested the Liberal Antonio Salandra as his successor to the King. Salandra governed until the middle of the Great War. Salandra's second government consisted of Sidney Sonnino at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Salandra ad interim at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Vittorio Zuppelli at the Ministry of War until April 1916, which then passed under the command of Paolo Morrone. On the sudden death of General Pollio on 1 July 1914, Cadorna took over as Chief of Staff until 1917 following the defeat at Caporetto. These were the people who decided Italy's fate in the run-up to the Great War.

2. Great Britain

While the Kingdom of Italy, in the years leading up to the war, was unable to define a clear line of government action towards European states, the

United Kingdom was very clear about its priorities. Firstly, there were many attempts to approach Germany with a view to concluding a naval agreement to deal with the naval rivalry that dominated the relationship between the two countries. In July 1909, the new German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg sought a rapprochement with Britain on naval armaments. But due to Tirpitz's opposition the attempt to conclude an agreement fell through. This had such a strong impact on public opinion and the British government so that Lloyd Gorge rejected the idea of negotiating with Berlin in 1911. After the Agadir crisis, Sir Grey was criticised by radical members of the Liberal Party for his diplomatic choices and called for his resignation with the "*Grey must go*" campaign. In addition to his resignation, the radicals called for the establishment of a Liberal Foreign Affairs Committee, which was dissolved in April 1911, comprising figures such as Asquith, Grey, Crowe, Morley, Runciman and Lloyd George. To quell criticism and public opinion of the government, Sir Grey sought to find a means of reducing any likelihood of conflict between the two countries. After the second Moroccan crisis, the CID met to discuss naval strategy. The day after the meeting on 23rd August 1911, Maurice Hankey wrote an account of the meeting to First Sea Lord J. Fisher: «the great point is that no decision was arrived at»[37]. British strategy focused on naval strategy rather than the BEF[38]. At the meeting on 23rd August, the Prime Minister gave Winston Churchill the leadership of the Admiralty with the specific task of reforming the naval staff. Churchill's first step was to issue a memorandum for the new staff. On 8th January 1912, the Admiralty War Staff[39] (Naval Staff since May

[37] Keith Wilson, 'Hankey's Appendix: Some Admiralty Manoeuvres During and After the Agadir Crisis', *War in history*, Vol. 1 (1994), pp. 81-97.

[38] Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 242–3, 291–309: d'Ombrain takes the line that the CID was increasingly preoccupied with technical questions only.

[39] The first project that led to the creation of the Admiralty War Staff was the Naval Intelligence Department, established in 1887 and composed of two departments: Mobilisation and Foreign Intelligence. Later, in 1905, two more departments were introduced: War Cost Defences and Trade. In August 1909, the structure was reformed and divided into two different offices: the first, "Naval Mobilisation Department", composed of Mobilisation and War, and the second, "Naval Intelligence Department". In 1912, Wilson established the Admiralty War Staff, headed by the Chief of War Staff (COS) and composed of three offices: Operations Division (DOD), Intelligence Division

1917), a strategic planning organisation of the Naval Staff, a war council - structured by officers and civilians - that would develop war plans, headed by the First Sea Lord directly. It was composed of three divisions: Mobilisation, Intelligence (ID) and Operations (OD). Above the three divisions was the Chief of Staff (COS) and his Deputy: they would act as a liaison between the Staff and the Board of Admiralty. The composition of the War Staff would be modified over the years, changing its composition and structure. A problem that has arisen since the foundation of the War Staff is the sphere of competence in naval warfare between the latter and the Commander-In-Chief.

After the Agadir crisis, the first sign of a thaw in Anglo-German relations was the diplomatic mission of the British Minister of War, Lord Haldane, to Berlin in February 1912. Lord Haldane sought to conclude an agreement to limit naval armaments while preserving his own supremacy at sea, while the German objective was the conclusion of a political understanding that would provide for British neutrality in the event of a continental war. Before his departure Haldane comforted the French ambassador in London, Paul Cambon, that he would not enter into any agreement that might undermine Anglo-French ties. The Anglo-German diplomatic meeting ended without signing an agreement: Britain would not remain neutral in a war against France and Germany would not accept any naval limitations without assurances of British neutrality. In April, the Berlin government announced the launch of a new naval programme. Following the failure to reach agreement, Britain and Germany sought a more favourable sphere for improved cooperation. The area that proved most logical, because neither power had any interest, was the Balkans. Thus, on 2nd May 1912, Grey expressed to the German Foreign Minister Kiderlen-Wächter the British efforts to stay in touch on eastern issues. The issue became more favourable at the end of the First Balkan War, when the Turkish presence

(DID), Mobilisation Division (DMD). The reforms during the Great War and at its end will be analysed below.

Annex 1

was eliminated from European territory. Thus, the London Conference, or Ambassadors' Conference, was convened in December 1912, attended by Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary and Russia. The aim of the conference was to define the boundaries of the territory of the Albanian state, which, with the signing of the Treaty of London on 30th May 1913, became a sovereign principality independent of the Ottoman Empire. Subsequent events improved Anglo-German relations such as the Portuguese colonies, or the railway in Baghdad. Controversy over the naval question seems to have died down, and this was rarely discussed after Lord Haldane's failure in 1912. In 1913, Eyre Crowe wrote «that one of the main reasons why Anglo-German relations are now much more cordiale is that we have entirely ceased to discuss the question of a limitation of armaments. I feel equally certain that any resumption of that discussion will have the inevitable effect of making relations worse again»[40]. Furthermore, Bethmann-Hollweg was determined to expand the German army, but without drawing attention to the ongoing shipbuilding programme that would have increased the chances of British neutrality in the event of a continental war, he achieved his goal without committing himself to any agreement. Détente between London and Berlin continued until the July 1914 crisis. The inability to negotiate on the naval question highlights the static nature of relations from 1912 until the outbreak of war. Sir Grey shared the radical view that Britain, by both its history and its position, had a role to play in safeguarding European peace, and for this reason the primary objective of its foreign policy was to improve relations with other countries rather than resort to war. Britain's task was clear to all: to preserve the present status quo.

On the subject of British foreign policy, following the Agadir crisis, the radicals worked with Grey, Asquith and Haldane to prepare a war plan. Secret military conversations were discussed for the first time in the

[40] Langhorne, "Great Britain and Germany, 1911-1914," pp. 306-307; and Winston S. Churchill, The World Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), Vol. 1, pp. 111-112. Churchill at that time was First Lord of the Admiralty.

Cabinet. During the crisis of autumn 1911, the British Cabinet reasserted its power to decide on matters of peace and war but accepted a compromise that allowed military conversations to continue in preparation for war. Furthermore, the Cabinet could express opinions towards Grey's foreign policy, but the inflexibility of the Foreign Office meant that foreign policy was managed behind closed doors.

Secondly, the UK strengthened its internal structure and international role. In 1910 Henry Wilson became the Director of Military Operations, a position he held until 1914. On 10th August 1911, Parliament passed the Parliament Act, an act by which the House of Lords was stripped of its absolute power of veto over bills. The idea of the Parliament Act arose after the 1909 incident when the Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George included in the People's Budget the tax of the "unearned increment" of land. The House of Lords rejected the land tax, because in the opinion of the Lord the tax did not belong in a finance bill. This act represented an important step towards the democratisation of the British Constitution.

A topic of pre-war discussion in Britain is Germany and the relationship between the two countries. In 1911, Grey's private secretary wrote «It's depressing to find that after six years' experience of Germany the inclination here is still to believe that she can be placed by small concessions». He continued «what she wants is the hegemony of Europe». Sir Grey was convinced that German intentions were to dominate the European continent. The British fear of losing their position of supremacy, especially naval supremacy, in Europe and on the continent alarmed the government. In 1912, Sir Grey wrote to the Canadian Prime Minister: 'There are practically no limits to the ambitions which might be indulged by Germany, or to the brilliant prospects open to her in every quarter of the globe, if the British navy were out of the way. The combination of the strongest Navy with that of the strongest Army would afford wider possibilities of influence and action than have yet been possessed by any Empire in Modern Times". In the first decade of the 20th century, Sir Grey lost confidence in the German government: Bülow and Tirptiz favoured a more aggressive international

policy during a period of British weakness. Grey's suspicions were confirmed during his meeting with the Kaiser in Tangier. The calculus of alliances lit the way for France, which, in the absence of external support, would come to terms with Germany and risk isolating Britain. In January 1911, Paul Cambon and Sir Grey, met and the French ambassador asked for a formalisation of the alliance supported by the use of force, but Grey did not make himself clear, but allowed unofficial meetings between the military of both countries[41]. Eyre Crowe's 1907 memorandum also described German policy towards Britain as «disregard for the elementary rules of straightforward and honourable dealing», adding «consciously aiming at the establishment of a German hegemony at first in Europe, and eventually in the world»[42]. Thomas Sanderson also described Germany as «a world power, brazen and undisciplined, seeking recognition as a world influence»[43]. The difference between Sanderson and Grey, together Foreign Office, was that the former did not fear German power, unlike the latter.

3. Military intelligence in the Italian Kingdom and United Kingdom before 1915

«The ability to predict is not a gift from the gods. It is obtained through men who inform us of the enemy's situation». Sun Tzu, The Art of War.

In the 19th century the Kingdom of Italy was born. Prior to unification, several intelligence and security structures existed, but it was only in September 1900 that it was decided to unite all the pre-existing structures and divide them into two departments: intelligence and counterespionage. The counter-espionage department was headed by Arturo Cittadini. The intelligence department, headed by Colonel Felice Eusebio De Chaurand de Saint Eustache, was nicknamed: Office I of the Army Staff Corps, or I

[41] Z. S. Steiner, K. Neilson, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2003, New York, pp. 46-47

[42] G. P. Gooch and H. Temperley, *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914*, eds, Vol. III, Appendix A.

[43] *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914*, eds, G. P. Gooch and H. Temperley, Vol. III, Appendix B

Office of the Army Staff Corps. Under the command of Colonel De Chaurand, a new cipher was adopted and at the same time the cryptographic study of foreign ciphers began. With the advent of the telegraph as a means of communication, the new head of Office I, Bersagliere Vincenzo Garioni, adopted the first telegraph cipher. The Consulta cipher office was established, with the task of reading and drafting dispatches of a diplomatic nature. The last novelty introduced was a plan for postal and press censorship in the event of war. An event that led to an initial improvement in the new intelligence organisation was the Italo-Turkish War, thanks to which Italy adopted topographical maps of the territory, General Staff monographs and a military map office. But once again, with the outbreak of the Great War, the structure fragmented between the military service focused on the events of the troops at the front, and the police engaged in the control of domestic national affairs.

One of the major problems in the field of Italian military espionage was the overlapping of tasks between the I Office and the civilian investigation offices, and often the relevant information arrived directly at the Supreme Command without passing through the I Office. Nobody was set up to direct military intelligence, and the lack of centralisation of the apparatus meant that communication between the two offices was limited and consequently work was less effective. The second problem, also a reason for the reduced effectiveness of the work, was the lack of funds for the military espionage structure.

At the same time as setting up the new military espionage structure, the *Regia Marina* also focused on improving information activity, establishing the Information Office, which in 1906 became a department: il *Primo dell'Ufficio dello Stato Maggiore*, headed by a captain. Already in 1907, the *Ufficio di Stato Maggiore Marina* was expanded and improved.

Britain is regarded as «one of the early pioneers of intelligence and espionage». but the history of today's intelligence services dates back to the early 19th century. Following the Boer War and the report written by Fraser T. Davies, former Military Commissioner of Police in Johannesburg, the

Defence Committee (CID), on 24 July 1909, decided to implement the first experiments in espionage and establish a national intelligence service. The recommendation sent to Cabinet by the former Director of Naval Intelligence (DNI), Sir Charles Ottley, who had become Secretary of CID, contained a proposal to establish a single intelligence body, divided into two sections: one for national security at home, and one abroad. When the Cabinet approved the proposal, Sir Ottley was instructed to appoint those who would head the two military intelligence bureaus. Home Security, or MI5, was headed by Army Commander Vernon Kell, codenamed 'K'[44], while the Secret Service, or MI6, was headed by Royal Navy Commander Mansfield Cumming, alias 'C'[45]. With the advent of the First World War, the departments of Military Intelligence (MI) were subdivided by number, in all 19 directorates, giving rise to the well-known departments: MI5, Security Service, and MI6, Secret Intelligence Service. The departments that make up the structure of the Security Service are six and are named with the letters of the alphabet: A, Administration, B, Counterintelligence, C, Security, D, Military Liaison, E, Aliens, and finally F, Overseas Control[46]. Along with the departments, we find the Director-General, a role held by Major General Sir Vernon Kell (1909-1940), Deputy Director-General, Sir Eric Holt-Wilson (1917-1940) and the Secretariat. MI5 deals with counterespionage within the home territory: the greatest threat in the run-up to the First World War was German spies on British soil. In 1908 a memorandum was drafted by the DMO and subsequently sent to the Chief of General Staff regarding the lack of a staff to investigate suspected cases of espionage. Like the case for MI6, the lack of co-operation with other government departments was an obstacle to investigative work. During the years before the outbreak of the Great War, a spy fever spread, especially towards the covert activities of German spies, as William Le Queux's 1909

[44] See A. Christopher, *The defence of the Realm*. *The Authorized History of MI5*, London, 2009
[45] See J. Keith, *The Secret History of MI6*, London, 2010
[46] See Nigel West, "The Divison on MI5" in *Mi5 British Secutiry Service operations 1909-1945. The true story of the most secret counter-espionage organization in the world*, Frontline Books, Yorkshire, 2019

book “Spies for the Kaiser. Plotting the downfall of England”. In August 1911, in an atmosphere of hysteria and fear of spies in the country, the Official Secret Act was passed, providing for criminal sanctions against those who posed a threat to public safety. Subsequently, in August 1914, the Aliens Restriction Act was passed. MI6 is concerned with security outside the country, more specifically the collection and analysis of agents in foreign territory. MI6's first task was to gather information on German military plans, especially those relating to the navy. Cumming's intelligence networks provided detailed information on the German Navy. Despite Cumming's efforts to obtain as much information as possible, the Foreign Office, jealous of its control of political intelligence, denied contact between MI6 and members of the Consular Service.
The new agency was to work with the Admiralty, the War Secretary and the Home Office. Subsequent to the establishment of the Secret Service Bureau, the General Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) was also set up to monitor electrical communications.

In conclusion, the decision-making structures of the Kingdom of Italy and the United Kingdom changed in the early years of the 20th century in response to the demands of internal security and international crises. The two kingdoms acted differently according to their roles: the United Kingdom was more interested in maintaining the European status quo, while the Kingdom of Italy would seek to gain an international foothold by seeking new allies in view of an invasion following a conflict. The different priorities of the two kingdoms characterised the decisions taken in the years leading up to the Great War, despite their convergence on the most sensitive issues, such as national security and a military intelligence system.

PART TWO

CHAPTER III: 1914 “This means war”[47]

According to the military historian, Sir John Keegan, the First World War could have been avoided - he argues that the sequence of events in July 1914 could have been interrupted - and it was tragic - 10 million dead and the ruin of the optimistic culture of the Belle Époque. The consequences of the Great War will be the roots of the Second World War. It resulted in the spread of totalitarianism in Europe, a continent that had always guaranteed the principle of constitutionalism and respect for the law. This will not happen in the post-war period. «Totalitarianism is the continuation of war by other means»[48], J. Keegan.

1. The assassination attempt and the July crisis

On the morning of 28th June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand[49], heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and his wife Sophie, drove through the streets of Sarajevo, Serbia. The procession in honour of the heir starts at 10 a.m. surrounded by a tense atmosphere. The irredentist organisations, which worked for the independence of the Slavic components of the empire, had planned an attack on the archduke. At 10.45 a.m., Serbian nationalist student Gavrilo Princip fired two shots, wounding and subsequently killing the two royals. «*Bombings are the extreme form of political struggle in which pieces of the state are always compromised*» declared Italian historian Luciano Canfora during an interview on the events of June 1914. That summer morning was not only an attack on the Austrian royal house, but also profoundly altered the structure of Europe, decreeing the end of the

[47] On 26 July 1914, Kitchener, upon hearing that Serbia had rejected the Austrian ultimatum, said: “this means war”.
G. H. Cassar, *Kitchener’s War: British Strategy from 1914-1916*, University of Michigan, Michigan, 2004, p.19

[48] J. Keegan, *The First World War,* The New York Times archives, 1999.

[49] G. Sabbatucci, V. Vidotto, *Il mondo contemporaneo: dal 1848 a oggi*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2017, pp. 248-251

Belle Époque and the beginning the modern era. The tensions between European empires had been clear since the years before 1914, but no government could have imagined the terrible consequences.

The Austrian government believes that Gavrilo Prinicip acted with the complicity of the Serbian government. The Austrian Chief of Staff is in favour of an invasion of Serbia, but King Franz Joseph places categorical conditions on Conrad's plan: without German support, Austria does not act militarily. The risk of war with Russia, a member of the Entente, paralysed Austrian aspirations. Europe was divided into two alliances: the first long-standing, between the German and Austro-Hungarian empires - and Italy - and the second, more recently formed, between France, the Russian empire, and Great Britain.

On 5th July the meetings between Bechtold and Zimmermann began: they discussed about war. The Kaiser supported the proposal for war, if it was implemented in a short time, to catch the Russian government and army unprepared. The German Empire, aware of the alliance between Russia and France, prepares for a war on two fronts but fought at two different times. The famous Schlieffen Plan, named after the German Chief of Staff, who invented it, envisaged in a first act to attack France with all its forces, and at the end to move the entire army to the opposite front to attack Russia.

On 7th July, the Council of Common Ministers met in Vienna and decided to attack Serbia. The decision was communicated only to Germany, but not to the third ally of the Triple Alliance, Italy.

On 23rd July 1914, the Austrian ambassador in Belgrade handed over Austria's ultimatum to the Serbian government, which had to be answered within 48 hours. The clauses were very harsh and in order to avoid war, the Serbian government would have to sign all of them. Within the ultimatum there were clauses that, if accepted by the Sarajevo government, openly violated its sovereignty, such as clause 5, which provided for Austrian control over the territory, limiting Serbian territorial sovereignty. The government in Belgrade was only willing to accept Austrian demands in part, so at dawn on 28th July a telegram left Vienna for Belgrade: Austria-Hungary

officially declared war on Serbia[50]. Events precipitated and alliances on the European chessboard came into play.

Russia, in support of Serbia, mobilised its armed forces the following day towards the western fronts. Frightened by the Russian advance, the German government sent an ultimatum to St. Petersburg on 31st July, demanding that the mobilisation be ceased. In the absence of a Russian response, Germany declared war on Russia on 1st August 1914[51]. At the same time France, a long-time German rival and ally of Russia, aware of the German declaration, mobilised its armed forces. The German Empire responded with an ultimatum and subsequent declaration of war to France on 3rd August[52]. In order to catch the government in Paris unprepared, German Chief of Staff Helmuth von Moltke modified the original plan of his predecessor Schlieffen[53] and opted to cross into neutral Belgium to attack France on the north-eastern border. This German invasion triggered the British government's decision to enter the war: on 5th August 1914, the London government declared war on the German Empire.

And so, the First World War began.

2. The July Crisis: The British Empire

The governments of London and Rome expressed an order of preference for action, favouring international negotiation and in the event of this not happening, they would welcome the possibility of a short local war with reservation[54]. During the July crisis, governments and staffs were unprepared for the many burdens of total war: war plans were biased towards meeting the needs of a war of movement and short engagement. It did not take long for the war forecasts to be proved wrong.

Generally speaking, the preparation of the war by the political-military structure had three main defects: firstly, the staffs were excluded from the

[50] M. Isneghi, G. Rochat, *La Grande Guerra 1914-1918*, Il Mulino, Firenze, 2017, pp. 63-64

[51] British Documents on the Origins of the War, Vol. xi, n°458.

[52] *Ibidem.*

[53] "Schlieffen plan" in Paret, Peter Makers of Modern Strategy, in Nicola Labanca (ed.), Guerra e strategia nell'età contemporanea, Genoa, 2014, pp. 144-152

[54] Gian Enrico Rusconi, *L'azzardo del 1915: Come l'Italia decide la sua guerra*, Bologna, 2005, p. 18

political structure of the state, there was a lack of cooperation between civilians and the military in the strategic process. Secondly, in the preparation of war operations, the staffs were inclined to consider only the tactical aspects, excluding the political consequences from the calculation. This calculation did not meet the real needs of total war, such as economic mobilisation, relations with the allies and coordination between different theatres of war. In the absence of dialogue between the government and the general staff, the latter operated with ever greater margins for manoeuvre.

On 27th June 1914, three days after the attack on Sarajevo, the British ambassador in Paris, Sir Francis Bertie, sent a memorandum to the Foreign Secretary, Sir Grey, hoping that Berlin would discourage Vienna's aspirations towards Serbia. Until the end of July, Sir Grey hoped for German intervention to ease the crisis: «*his (Grey) policy was to try to get Germany to put pressure on Austria: he had been criticised for not approaching Austria-direct*»[55]. Unfortunately, Sir Grey's policy was based on flawed calculations[56]: firstly, the German government was deliberately misleading the British government by not revealing its true intentions; secondly, Prince Karl Marx Lichnowsky had exaggerated the German good intentions to the ambassador in London; finally, the wishful thinking of the British government[57]. The Foreign Minister recalls in his memoirs the difficulty in negotiating with the Germans: «*The Germans are very difficult people: one never knows with whom one is dealing, sometimes one mind and sometimes another one they tolerate or encourage mischief makers in their service*»[58]. From the outbreak of the July 1914 crisis until the British declaration of war, Sir Grey opted for a *wait and see policy* towards Germany. The British government's initial inattention to the Balkan question

[55] M. B. Spencer, MSS ADD.53686.
[56] Harry F. Young, The Misunderstanding of August 1, 1914, The Journal of Modern History, Vol. 48, No.4 (Dec. 1976), pp. 644-665
[57] Micheal Ekstein, *Some Notes on Sir Edward Grey's Policy in July 1914,* The Historical Journal, London, June 1972, p. 324
[58] Grey to Goshen, March 4th, 1909, BD, VI, 150.

was due to the domestic situation. In May 1914 a vote was taken on the Home Role project, under which Ireland would gain autonomous status while remaining tied to the British crown. The draft voted on in the spring was not implemented due to the outbreak of the Great War. This created internal unrest and the risk of civil war.

The Public Record Office, an institution founded in 1838, today's British National Archives, reported the letter addressed to Sir Grey and written by Churchill on the evening of 2nd July[59], in which the latter sensed the possibility of a general European war as a consequence of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

Due to England's geographical position and conformation, the Royal Navy became over the years the primary instrument for national defence, assisted by the British Army declined, in view of the landing on the continent, into the British Expeditionary Force. On 26th July, Britain took its first steps towards mobilisation when the First Sea Lord, Lord Fisher, prevented the fleet from being dispersed at the end of the exercise. The decision was taken without Cabinet approval. The day after the Austrian declaration of war on Serbia, on 29th July, in the light of international developments, the Cabinet gave its approval to the First Sea Lord's request for precautionary mobilisation. During the discussion in the Cabinet, Prime Minister Gladston's speech of 1880 was recalled: «*England had several times given her guarantee for the benefit of other countries. After the Peace of Paris, and before that, we should make pledges to secure the independence and integrity of Turkey, and in other circumstances make pledges to secure the integrity and independence of Belgium*»[60]. On 30th July 1914, Parliament declared almost unanimously that Britain should remain neutral. Leading government figures such as Grey, Asquith, Haldane, Churchill, and the old liberal imperialists were in favour of Britain entering the war. The following day the Foreign Affairs Committee met twice without reaching any conclusions about the British position on international developments. At the end of the meeting, J.

[59] W. S. Churchill, The World Crisis, 6 vols., 1923-1931, 1, 193.
[60] Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia del 2 gennaio 1880.

A. Pease, the chairman of the Board of Education to the Policy said: «*British opinion would not now enable us to support France, a violation of Belgium might alter public opinion, but we could say nothing to commit ourselves*»[61]. The French ambassador, Paul Cambon, raised the issue of British naval intervention in support of France during a meeting with Foreign Secretary Sir Grey on 1st August 1914. Sir Grey did not give a binding answer, justifying the action by the lack of any agreement formally committing Britain to France. In the event of intervention, the British government and population were more inclined to accept a naval commitment in the face of continental warfare than sending the British Expeditionary Force. On 1st August, the British government refused to undertake any immediate BEF expeditionary force on the Continent and forbade full naval mobilisation; but the First Sea Lord, with only the tacit consent of Prime Minister Asquith, mobilised the Royal Navy.

On 24th July, Prime Minister Herbert H. Asquith expressed his hesitation about the possible decision to intervene: «*no reason why Britain should be more than spectacles*»[62]. Indeed, Britain suffered no attack or direct threat from any power, and in the years leading up to 1914 did not sign any agreement committing it to support France. The reason for Britain's entry into the war was a matter of principle towards Belgium dating back to the signing of the Treaty of London in April 1839: respect for neutrality[63]. The invasion of Belgium was fundamental to the radical conscience of the British people: a *raison d'être*[64] was needed. Moreover, the proximity of the Belgian and English coasts should not be underestimated. As the historian Giovanni Sabbatucci said, Britain's general line of action was «not to meddle so much in the internal quarrels of continental Europe, but to intervene whenever an aggressive preponderant power emerged in Europe that would break the

[61] Pease, Diary, 31 July 1914

[62] Cassar, George H, *Asquith as a War Leader,* London, 1994, p.12

[63] "Au Traite signé à Londres le 19 Avril 1839, entre la Grande Bretagne, l'Autriche, la France, la Prusse, et la Russie, d'une part, et la Belgique, de l'autre part".
Annexe to the Treaty of London, signed on 19th April 1839; and Article VII of the Treaty of London. FO 93/14/4

[64] Z. Steiner, K. Neilson, *Britain and the origins of the First World War*, New York, 2003, p.252

balance and threaten Britain's very position». On 2nd August the British Cabinet met, and Foreign Secretary Sir Grey expressed concern over the question of the northern French coast. Germany was becoming a potential threat to the *balance of power*. For this reason, Sir Grey reassured the French ambassador that should the German fleet enter the English Channel Strait or the North Sea for hostile action towards the French coast or fleet, the Royal Navy would intervene. John Murley, Lord President of the Council, and John Burns[65], British Labour leader, resigned. The Foreign Secretary never hid his suspicions of the German Empire, but the British tradition in foreign affairs was dictated by an imperial, not a continental, vision of maintaining naval supremacy. Before the July Crisis, the British had been paying attention to German naval development: between 1907 and 1914, Cumming had extended his network of intermediaries on the continent, setting up a spy centre in Brussels to monitor German rearmament and the strengthening of its fleet.

On 3rd August 1914, the day the Berlin government declared war on France, Sir Grey in a speech to the House of Commons expressed the possibility of entering the war following the violation by German troops of Belgium's neutrality. Moreover, in the event of France's defeat, British political status would be at risk not only on the European continent. This meant that in case of German attack on France, British interests would be affected. The missing piece, the *casus belli*, was provided by the unrestricted passage through Belgium[66]. A few hours later, the British Parliament voted to enter the war on the side of France. Afterwards, Sir Grey said to his secretary the words that will go down in history: *«The lamps are going out all over Europe, and we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime*»[67]. On 4th August, Sir Edward Grey sent instruction to Sir Edward Goshen to say again to German

[65] John Burns, chairman of the Board of Trade, had been appointed by the Prime Minister a few months before the outbreak of the First World War to chair a sub-committee to examine the food supplies needed for London in the event of a sea blockade. The enquiry, incomplete in August 1914, was then abandoned.
Lord Hankey, *The Supreme Command: 1914-1918: Volume I*, New York 2014, p. 174

[66] CAB 41/35/25, Crewe to George V, 3 Aug. 1914.

[67] Quote attributed to Sir Edward Grey by Alfred Spender in his book "Life, Journalism and Politics", chapter 20, pp. 14-15

government to assure Belgium neutrality: «by 12 o'clock tonicht. If not, you are instructed to ask for your passports and to say that His Majesty's Government feel bound to take all steps in their power to uphold the neutrality of Belgium and the observance of a Treaty to which Germany is as much a party as ourselves»[68]. On the same day, King George V was reassured by ministers of the constitutionality of declaring war if the Berlin government did not respond to the ultimatum. The declaration of war received full support from Parliament, with the exception of a small section of the Labour Party, but without a vote in the House of Commons. Later that day the British mobilisation officially began.

3. Early stages of the war up to Christmas 1914

In Great Britain, the decision to enter the war in August 1914 was taken by the civilian government, with the support of the House of Commons, and not by the generals.

Maurice Hankey, Chief Secretary to the Cabinet Office, drew up the War Book[69], which listed all the necessary actions to be taken by the member departments of the government. Subsequent to Parliament's meeting on 5th August, an essential meeting took place in the afternoon of the same day. Asquith, on the outbreak of war, retained the composition of his Peace Cabinet, but established a restricted Council of War[70], whose military and

[68] FO 371/2161, file 30342, paper 35798.

[69] The first section of the War Book, the 'precautionary phase', included operations of a defensive, preparatory, non-confrontational and non-intrusive nature, outlined only for the purpose of safeguarding the country. This phase was in full activity in Britain.
Ivi, p.153

[70] In the years leading up to the Great War, Lord Hankey, now Naval Assistant Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence, expressed to the Committee his concern about the preparation of defence plans for a continental conflict. It was for this reason that a sub-committee was set up in 1908, at the instigation of Lord Roberts, to consider in detail the conditions under which an invasion by an enemy such as Germany might take place and the strategies necessary to repel it. The *'Invasion Inquiry'* exposed to naval and military authorities' problems that had never been considered, such as the deployment and defensive function of the Territorial Force. The enquiry raised the need to study a plan for the landing of an expeditionary force on the European continent alongside France in case of need. To this end, it was Hankey who proposed the establishment of a sub-committee to analyse the defence of the empire, including both civilians and military personnel. Hankey's proposal was subsequently included in the report of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1912, with Hankey appointed as secretary.

naval decisions were communicated to the Government by Asquith himself. The powers of the Council of War were never precisely defined, but the decisions taken were directly implemented and only reported to the Cabinet by the Prime Minister. The Imperial Defence Committee, an advisory body to the government, was different. The conclusions of the Council of War were forwarded to the political heads of the departments concerned, rather than to the secretaries of the departments, as was the case with the Committee's decisions. The King and the Cabinet received updates on the work of the Council from Asquith or Kitchener. The Prime Minister convened the Council whenever a discussion of the political and military nature of the war was necessary. It emerged as a complementary tool to the Cabinet to inspect certain political matters, rather than a command tool for the conduct of the war. Prime Minister Asquith decided to convene the Council of War on 5th August 1914 in the Cabinet Room at 10 Downing Street. Invited were the leading representatives of the government, Sir Grey, Haldane, and Churchill, of the navy, Prince Louis, of the Army Council and the military members, Douglas, Sclater, Cowans, von Donop and Henry Wilson. Other military figures invited were Roberts, Kitchener, French, Grierson, Ian Hamilton, and Archibald Murray[71]. The focus of the discussion was on where to concentrate the British Expeditionary Force once it had landed on the continent. The Prime Minister informed the Council that following a meeting with the Dutch Minister, the announced violation of the Dutch province of Limburg was not confirmed and that the Dutch government intended to maintain a neutral position. This removed Antwerp from the possible landing destinations. Henry Wilson, with considerable foresight, had instructed British officers to discuss with the French General Staff an alternative landing plan. Subsequent the meeting in France, it was decided that the French town of Amiens would be the place to concentrate the Allied troops. But due to a delay in the timetable for sending the BEF to the continent, the Council discussed the Amiens decision. Haig and other

Ibid, pp. 68-69

[71] Lord Hankey, *op. cit.*, p. 169

officers, who had not taken part in the previous wartime discussions in the Imperial Defence Committee, raised the question of the consequences for French troops if there was a further postponement in sending British troops to allow a reorganisation of the British Expeditionary Force. The main consequence of a delay in planning would have been the delay of the Expeditionary Force in reaching its point of concentration, eighteen or nineteen days after the French mobilisation, i.e., five days later than the day of arrival agreed with the French. As Wellington said in 1800: "*In military operations, time is everything*"[72]. This case was no exception. An important factor to consider, which would compensate for a slight delay, was Belgian resistance. The last topic discussed on the afternoon of 5th August was the number of British divisions to be sent to the continent. The Admiralty, given the circumstances at the time, agreed to send five divisions. On 5th August, the army was mobilised[73].

The following day, the War Council met again. The same members appeared as on the previous day, but on this occasion, Kitchener presided as Secretary of State for War. During the meeting the final details for the expedition to France were discussed: the Council decided that the immediate expeditionary force should consist of five divisions[74], including one cavalry division, and the destination was changed from Amiens to Maubeuge[75]. On this occasion, Kitchener did not fail to express his doubts about the capabilities of the French and Russian armies. The Cabinet is the political body responsible to Parliament, especially the House of Commons, and it is the only body with the power to vote on funds. This allows the government to hold the fundamental power of control over military preparedness. Cabinet ministers were reluctant to delegate control to the military leadership, about whom there was some suspicion. Another stumbling block to government action was the increasing weight of the War Cabinet. Responsibility for British military preparedness fell to Field Marshal

[72] *MD*, Wellesley to Close, Camp at Kanny Bednore, 30 June 1800, p. 108.
[73] *Ivi,* p. 157
[74] *Ivi,* pp. 171-172
[75] *Ivi*, pp. 187-188

Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War appointed by Prime Minister Asquith on 5th August 1914. Lord Kitchener embodied the national symbol of strength and rivalry, and thanks to his propaganda campaign "*your country needs you*", 761,000 men joined the army voluntarily. It is important to note that the British army of 1914, in the absence of compulsory conscription, was composed of volunteers. In the first months of the war the influx was such that it created two types of problems for the government: training and replacing the men in their posts. On 12th August the BEF landed on the northern French coast and consisted of six infantry divisions, one cavalry division, totalling just over 100,000 men. The British crossed the Belgian border on 20th August and on 22nd August reached the town of Mons, where they encountered German troops. It was only then that the Germans became aware of the presence of British troops at the front. There is no explanation why the Germans ignored the news of the arrival of the British troops, despite the articles published in the French press about their arrival, in spite of the fact that Britain was operating in complete secrecy. The first official news of the landing on the continent was published in England on 18th August, eleven days after the landing of the vanguard units. On 23rd August 1914 came the first clash between the Germans and the British, who fell back after the news of the French retreat. This was followed by the Battle of the Marne, in which the German troops, unable to break through the Anglo-French line, fell back and entrenched themselves on 11th September 1914. On 3rd September the first British ship, the Panther, was sunk by the German submarine U-21. The Battle of the Marne, which took place between 5th and 12th September, was the watershed between war of movement and war of attrition.

The idea of war of movement is based on the offensive strategy of rapidly moving a considerable number of soldiers in view of short field battles. Stalemate warfare is different, driven by defensive tactics, resulting from the occurrence of factors such as the relative balance of forces, the power of artillery, the superiority of defensive weapons, such as automatic weapons - machine guns - all of which caused the war to become static. In early

October, First Lord Admiralty W. Churchill landed on the continent. In October 1914, Lieutenant Colonel Ernest Swinton, who had witnessed trench warfare during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, first presented the need for armoured support on the Western Front. But it was Hankey who raised the need for an armoured vehicle to ensure a tactical breakthrough in a stalemate war. In December 1914 he presented the famous *Boxing Day Memorandum* to overcome the obstacles of trench warfare. According to the Memorandum, the concentration of British troops should not be on the stalled Western Front, but open to other fronts such as the Balkans or the Middle East. As a consequence, the Allies prepared the - poorly organised - Dardanelles's expedition[76]. As events evolved in the first months of the war, the British Cabinet also had to adapt to managing a different way than the armies and staffs were used to. In November a restricted War Council[77], composed of both civilian ministers and Chiefs of Staff, was established to determine war policy and direct strategy in field operations. Although there was a desire to bring the two powers under one umbrella, there was no lack of disagreement. The War Council was composed of H. H. Asquith, David Lloyd George, Sir Edward Grey, Sir Winston Churchill and Lord John Arbuthnot Fisher, Field Marshal Herbert Kitchener, Lieutenant-General Sir James Wolfe Murray, Arthur James Balfour, and Lord Maurice Hankey[78]. In the final weeks of 1914, the War Council found itself debating loan requests from both the Allies and third countries. The case of Romania, which in the name of neutrality had refused a German loan, asked Britain for financial aid to enable it to arm itself and subsequently enter the war on the side of the Entente. The War Council agreed to provide economic loans for the present and future allies.

The night of 23rd December 1914 is remembered as a natural truce: a famous episode of "*fraternization of civilians in uniform*" - as described by Carlo Lucarelli - between the opposing sides, especially on the Western

[76] B. H. Liddel Hart, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-243

[77] This should not be confused with the Council of War established for the discussions of 5th and 6th August 1914.

[78] Lord Hankey, *The Supreme Command, 1914-1918: Volume I,* Routledge, New York, 1961, p. 237

Front. This event was a secret kept in the trenches because it was considered a threat to the discipline of public opinion: the figure of the enemy in popular propaganda was portrayed as a monster and if the idea that your enemy was a monster fell the principle on which popular mobilisation for war was based.

4. British army structure in 1914

"*I am put here to conduct a great war and I have no army*"[79]. Kitchener

The British Army at the start of the First World War was composed of the Regular Army (235000), Reservists, Territorial Army (268000) and 6 Infantry Divisions. The BEF, led on the continent by the Field-marshal Sir John French, was structured as a small field army, equating the French and German armies. Thanks to the figure of Kitchener, in the first months of the war, the BEF had almost doubled in size. Consequently, on 26th December it was divided into two armies: the First Army led by Sir Douglas Haig, and the Second Army by Sir Horace Smith-Dorrein. Due to the increasing number of volunteers, every 15th new infantry division joined the new British army. Already in the first half of 1915, 18 July, a third army was created.
In addition to the BEF, Britain developed and improved both its naval and air powers. The First Lord of Admiralty Churchill adapted the Royal Navy in anticipation of a war against Germany, including defensive aspects, a strategy of which he was well aware. A reorganisation of the fleet, greater coordination between army and navy and the planning of detailed war plans were necessary. These were to be drawn up in accordance with the plans of the War Office. In 1912, the First Sea Lord divided the Naval War Staff into three sections: Intelligence, Operations and Mobilisations. Improving the performance of the fleet was the decision to change the fuel from coal to oil power. This allowed more power during navigation and, above all,

[79] Cassar, George H., *Kitchener's War: British strategy from 1914-1916*, p. 27

during maritime combat. For this reason, Britain's naval oil policy[80] was passed in July 1913. Furthermore, in the same month, a section of the Royal Flying Corps assigned to support naval operations was detached and the Royal Naval Air Service was established. The air service at the disposal of the mighty British Navy played a central role in the protection of both naval ships and civilian transport vessels. In the summer of 1913, the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) was equipped with 39 airplanes, 52 seaplanes, airships and 120 pilots. As for the navy, Britain possessed sea supremacy and in the 20th century did everything in its power to remain the leading naval power in Europe and the world. At the beginning of the conflict, it consisted of 18 modern dreadnoughts (6 more under construction), 10 battlecruisers, 20 town cruisers, 15 scout cruisers, 200 destroyers, 29 battleships (pre-dreadnought design) and 150 cruisers built before 1907. Naval forces, namely cruisers, destroyers, submarines, and light forces were deployed to protect the British coast. In September 1914, the navy suffered an attack by German U-boats. The British lost three cruisers - Cressy, Aboukir, and the Hogue - 60 officers and 1400 men.

As for the Royal Flying Corps, Sir William Nicholson in 1910 expressed distrust of military aircraft in the War Office: "*a useless and expensive fad, advocated by a few individuals whose ideas are unworthy of attention*"[81]. The relevance of aeronautics was clear even before the Great War and from 1904 to 1910, government appropriations for building British aeronautics increased to an average expenditure of £18,000. In November 1911, Prime Minister Asquith set up a Technical Sub-Committee for Imperial Defence (TSID) to analyse further developments in both naval and civil aviation. At the end of the study a memorandum was drafted by Captain Bertram Dickson which concluded that "*this flight for the supremacy of the air in future wars will be of the first and greatest importance*"[82]. An Air Committee

[80] Cfr. N. A. Lambert, *British Naval Policy, 1913-1914: Financial Limitation and Strategic Revolution*, in The Journal of modern History, University of Chicago Press, September 1995, Vol. 67, n°3, pp. 595-626

[81] Ian Mackrsey, *No Empty Chair*, 2012, p.9.

[82] A. Sutton, A. C. Wood, *The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, the dominions and empire,* in "Military Aviation of the First World War", England, 2016

was set up within the CID to coordinate the Flying Corps and a Central Flying School, which launched its first flying course on 12th August 1912. The pivotal role played by the British Air Force during the war led the government to allocate extensive funds so that the number of Royal Air Force personnel at the end of the war exceeded the number of the entire British Expeditionary Force personnel in 1914. No military statesman could calculate the enormous value of the Royal Air Corps in trench warfare. As early as 22nd August 1914 the Air Corps was being used for area reconnaissance to photograph enemy trench lines. In fact, the information gathered during reconnaissance, being more accurate than the information derived from front-line studies, was of incalculable value in the strategic preparation of the war. In fact, the RFC sent to France in the summer of 1914 was composed of four squadrons and 63 aircrafts; in 1918, the number increased to 99 squadrons and 1800 British aircrafts on French territory.

5. Military doctrines and considerations

In the 19th century, military doctrines were divided according to the area of combat: land, naval and air strategy. At that time, the military doctrines of theorists such as Carl von Clausewitz, Antoine Henry Jomini, the navalist Alfred Thayer Mahan, Julius Douhet and Liddle Hart prevailed.

The most influential was certainly Clausewitz, author of the 1832 theoretical work "*Vom Kiege*". The work does not focus on a specific military doctrine between land, naval or air, but encompasses the study of the fundamental elements in battle. According to Clausewitz, "*tactics forms the theory of the use, or threat of use, of armed forces in battle, and strategy forms the theory of the use of battle for the purposes of war*"[83].As well, Clausewitz criticised Bülow's earlier theories because he excluded fundamental elements of warfare: the morale of the soldiers and the psychology of the commander[84]. In "*Vom Kriege*", he describes two fundamental forms of war:

[83] Paret, Peter *Makers of Modern Strategy,* in Nicola Labanca (a cura di), *Guerra e strategia nell'età contemporanea,* Genova, 2014, p. 105.

[84] Von Clausewitz, Carl, *Bemerkungen über die reine und angewadte Strategie des Herrn von Bülow*, in "Neue Bellona", IX, 1805, n°3, 276.

> In the first form, the aim of war is to crush the adversary, either by destroying him politically or by simply making it impossible for him to defend himself and thus imposing on him the peace that is desired. In the second form, the purpose of war is limited to the purpose of making some conquest along the frontiers of the state, whether one intends to preserve it or exploit it as an advantageous means of exchange in peace negotiations. War is merely the continuation of politics by other means[85].

According to the German military theorist, war is always influenced by external forces, such as the intrinsic characteristics of the states occupied in the conflict and the general characteristics of the time, such as political, economic, technological, and social elements. The external element is what determined the cascade of European mobilisations. Indeed, war is never an isolated act, but a sum of events that give rise to tensions and conflicts. But the elements that decree war are mainly internal: the people, the commander, and the military forces and finally the government[86]. *Vom Kriege* placed the psychology of the combatants and the society for which the soldiers served at the centre of the theory of war. The people were the structure of the war and its morale the engine. This was what drove all the states involved to the preponderant use of propaganda, as analysed below. The basic error, which the political and military leadership fails to consider, is that, as Clausewitz wrote, the military objective depends on the political aim, but also on the political and military aim of the enemy and his resources. And if war consists in the application of force, then this must be proportionate to the military objective and the political aim[87].

Also belonging to the same school of German military doctrine are the two German Chiefs of Staff: Alfred von Schlieffen and Helmut von Moltke. The

[85] Von Clausewitz, Carl, *Vom Kiege,* Berlin, 1831 (tr. It. *Dalla Guerra*, Roma 1942, ried. Milano 1970, p.9, *Avvertenza del 10 luglio 1827*).
[86] See, *Della guerra*, cit., I, 1, p.40
[87] *Ivi*, Libro VIII, 3b.

two theorists of strategic outflanking and respectively its creator, after whom the strategic plan to attack France was named, and the one who carried out the operation in August 1914. History teaches us how the Schlieffen plan failed in its political and military consequences, not only for the German Empire but for the entire European continent.

Unlike Clausewitz, who perceived war in its complex totality, Jomini perceived it in individual terms under the control of the skilful commander[88]. In his book, "*The Art of War*", he defines war as consisting of five main parts: strategy, tactics, logistics, tactics of detail and the art of the engineer. According to Jomini, when an army is called upon to go to war, the army Chief of Staff must define together with the government what kind of war is to be fought, then he must study the theatre of war and then, in consultation with the government, choose the base of operation. The army must proceed along two lines of operation: the operational front (offensive) and the strategic front (defensive)[89]. Jomini's military concepts that could not be disregarded were: the concentration of forces, the massed attack, the superiority of the offensive over the defensive (for moral and psychological aspects) and finally the superiority of internal lines over external lines. The circumvention of these principles by the military leaders of armies engaged in battle results in the defeat or weakening of troops. Moreover, Jomini divided the lines of action into "*political and military*" and "*tactical*": of these, the only aspect of warfare susceptible of analysis is strategy[90]. The latter suited all levels of military action, from the political decision to go to war to combat.

The most influential theorist of naval military doctrine in the 19th century was the naval historian Alfred Thayer Mahan. In his first book "*Influence*" Mahan analysed "the effect of maritime power on the course of history and the

[88] Cfr. *Makers of Modern Strategy*, p.73
[89] Jomini, Antoine Henry, *Précis de l'art de la guerre,* in Botti Ferruccio (a cura di), *Sommario dell'arte della guerra*, 1837-1838, Roma, 2007, p. 102. 112, 118.
[90] *Ivi*, p. 195-197.

prosperity of nations"[91]. In his work, he expresses the concept of "*maritime power*", which has two meanings: the first defines the command of the sea by means of naval superiority - which later became known as "*power of sea*"[92]-; the second encompasses the three elements that determine the wealth and greatness of a nation, namely production, navy and colonies and markets[93]. The greatest example of a state holding maritime power is Great Britain. As Lord Esher wrote: "*Britain either is or is not one of the Great Powers of the World. Her position in this respect depends solely upon sea command in the Mediterranean*"[94]. Subsequent theorists criticised Mahan's analysis of Britain's maritime power: Mahan was found guilty of what David Hackett Fisher calls "*error by reduction, reducing complexity to simplicity, or diversity to uniformity*"[95], changing necessary cause to sufficient cause. by changing a necessary cause to a sufficient cause[96].

Within the framework of military doctrines, naval strategy bases its operations on gaining and exercising domination of the sea: *sea command* and *sea control*[97]. Naval and air doctrines assume that sea and air space cannot be occupied or garrisoned, unlike land. In fact, naval blocks are rarely inviolable and airtight. Due to the inherent characteristics of the sea, naval dominance is a relative situation subject to limits. In the book "*Guerra Indolore*" (Painless War) by Corrado Stefanachi, the three components of the navy of the great powers are described: the first is the "battleship" constitutes the bulk of the destructive potential. The Royal Navy was the first navy to use dreadnoughts. The second component is the cruisers, which in the context of maritime military operations perform two supporting functions: to assist the large battleships, and to defend their own maritime trade and offensively against enemy trade. The third element is the flotilla

[91] Mahan, Alfred Thayer, *The Ingluence of Sea Power upon History*, 1600-1783, Boston 1890, v-vi.
[92] Stefanachi, Corrado, *Guerra Indolore. Dottrine, illusioni e retoriche della guerra limitata*, Milano, 2011, p. 99-102
[93] A. T. Mahan, *op. cit.,* I, 138, 71.
[94] Brett, *Journals and Letters of Lord Esher*, Vol. III, p. 123
[95] Hackett Fisher, David, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought,* London 1970, p.172.
[96] Paret, Peter, Op. Cit. p. 163
[97] C. Stefanachi, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-95

of smaller units, not suited to large-scale combat but to opportunistic attacks.

Another way for one power to gain control of the sea at the expense of the others is the naval blockade. The Royal Navy during the First World War tried to maintain dominance of the sea by implementing a naval blockade at the expense of the Germans. Throughout the war, the two enemy fleets clashed in the waters of the North Sea, but neither was able to block the other's access to the sea, bottling up the enemy in ports and neutralising the enemy navy.

Giulio Douhet and Basil H. Liddell Hart were the most influential theorists of air strategy in those years. Like the sea, the sky enjoyed the same peculiarities: continuity, the absence of barriers to movement, and the encroachment of the area. Douhet defined the atmosphere as "*the atmospheric ocean*"[98] and air warfare consisted of the conquest and the army of the air domain. The aircraft, said Douhet, "*because of its independence from the surface and its willingness to move, is the offensive weapon par excellence*". Liddell Hart concentrated his studies on the aircraft because it allowed him to overcome the army deployed on the battlefield and to "*strike directly and immediately at the point where the adversary's will, and policy reside*"[99]. In the First World War, the introduction of the aeroplane changed the war plans, having to include a third dimension that had never been calculated before. Air battles were fought, mainly between Great Britain and the German Empire, but the central role of aviation remained that of reconnaissance and tactical observation. The role assumed by aviation in the Second World War, when cities were targets for strategic bombing at the expense of the civilian population, was different.

"*Strategy decided where to act; tactics decide the manner of execution and the employment of the troops*"[100]. The primary objective of tactics is to

[98] *Ivi,* pp. 123-128

[99] Liddell Hart, Basil H., *Paride, o il futuro della guerra*, trad. it. R. Macuz Varrocchi, Libreria Editrice Goriziana, 2007, Gorizia, pp. 104-105

[100] J.B. Lippincot, *Baron Anotine Henry de Jomini: The art of War*, 1862, p. 69-71.

subdue the enemy into a position of inferiority. The application of tactics lies in manoeuvre, in which aspects such as movement, artillery and psychological aspects are calculated. When the manoeuvre is set up on enemy-controlled terrain, the tactic is defined as offensive; conversely, when the manoeuvre is set up on its own terrain, the tactic is defensive. The difference between tactics and technique is the type of command required: in the first case, command is decentralised; the second requires centralised and precise control. An example of a technique used during the Great War was that of the French and the methodical bombardment: this technique required an attack at a slow and steady pace in order to study and assess the condition of the enemy's defensive lines.

In conclusion, during the 19th century, many theorists began to formulate military doctrines and these notions were used to prepare the war plans of 1914. The armies that took the field in August 1914 were unprecedented in size and innovations in armaments, but the military strategies remained linked to the experiences of the previous century and the colonial wars: no one was ready to fight a rapid war of movement.

6. Cultural mobilisation and propaganda

Beaverbrook and Northcliff were the first of the British leadership to recognise the potential influence that propaganda could exert directly on public opinion and how it could alter the course of events and war.

At the outbreak of war, the British government had no propaganda apparatus. While measures to control the press were briefly established, official propaganda organisations emerged more gradually[101]. The purpose of wartime propaganda was to entice citizens to join the army, as compulsory recruitment was not established until 1916. The first propaganda structure established in Britain was the Natural Press

[101] M. L. Sanders, Taylor, Philip M., British *Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-1918*, London 1982, chapters 1-2

Committee[102], and the director was G.H. Mair. Robert Donald commented on the early propaganda activities saying: «*The system was started without any policy having been defined, or any clear conception arrived at about the way propaganda should be carried on. Mr Mair drifted between the Home Office, Press Bureau, and the Foreign Office - which began to take an interest in the work without being altogether reconciled to it*»[103]. The most influential propaganda organisation was the War Propaganda Bureau, or Wellington House[104], which was integrated into the Foreign Office - along with the News Department - in September 1914. At first, the News Department was under the orders of the Foreign Office, Sir Grey, then it was transferred to the orders of the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Frederick Acland. The News Department was not only involved in propaganda activities but maintained relations with the foreign press for the dissemination of information. Propaganda advertisements came in many forms, many were printed on postcards or on billboards that covered the city. However, a large part of the population at the beginning of the 1900s was illiterate and for this reason the cinema was included. In this area, the most influential figure was Hadley Le Bas. In August 1915, Le Bas joined a new Cinema Committee[105], linked to Wellington House, which produced the film *Britain Prepared*[106]. Propaganda had three aims: to increase the number of recruits, to raise the morale of the public to cope with the difficulties of war, and finally to create dissent towards the enemy. Indeed, in Britain, the phrase "*Remember Belgium*" became popular. Propaganda was also a tool to counteract the effects of enemy propaganda on the

[102] The Neutral Press Committee was set up on 11 September 1914, under the auspices of the Home Office, and worked in conjunction with the Press Bureau.
Sir Edward Cook, *The press in wartime*, London, 1920
[103] Donald to Lloyd George, 9 January 1917, INF 4/4B
[104] Prime Minister Asquith invited a loyal friend, Charles Masterman, the clarionman of the National Insurance Commission, to set up a literary office at Wellington House. The propaganda department was thus established in secrecy, under the direction of the Foreign Office.
The activities of Wellington House during the great war, undated, unsigned, INF 4/1B
[105] J. Brooke Wilkinson, *War of 1914 to 1918 Information Services'*, in Film and Censorship in England, p.305.
[106] M. L. Sanders and P. M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914*-1918, London, 1982, pp. 151-152.

country's prestige, not only on the home front but also in relation to the population of the allied countries.

As the first years of the conflict progressed, the emergence of several propaganda organisations without management and coordination between them developed problems of overlap and duplication. This problem led to interdepartmental jealousies and a lack of efficiency. In connection with this problem, the Director of Special Intelligence, General C. R. Cockerill said on 29th November 1915: «*the war of words should now demand a much greater attention as the economic war*»[107]. The Army Council did the same on 10th December 1915 and presented the problem to the Foreign Office: «*the multiplicity of organisations concerned and the lack of one central controlling authority [which] prove[s] a serious bar to effective action and proposed an inter-departmental conference to discuss the means by which efficiency could be improved*»[108]. Hubert Montgomery in turn wrote a Memorandum to the Home Office on 6th December in which he suggested transferring the Neutral Press Committee from Sir Mair's command to Foreign Office control to ensure «*more security that what is done is consistent with the interests of our foreign policy*»[109].

Subsequent the reorganisation of the General Staff in 1916, so did the propaganda machine of the War Office. The competition between the War Office and the Foreign Office was such that in July General Charteris, a member of Haig's staff intelligence, noted that «*the trouble is that the Foreign Office, Home Office, War Office, Admiralty and Masterman's absurd committee are all working separately, and each is jealous of the other*»[110].

When Lloyd George became Prime Minister, he set out his plan for managing the propaganda of the various organisations. His proposal was to centralise all sources of information and distribution. Moreover, it was suggested that offices be set up in the various belligerent countries to ease

[107] Public Record Office, *A history of the work of M.I. 7, 1914-1915*, United Kingdom, 1920, INF 4/1B.

[108] Sir R. Brade to Foreign Office, 10 December 1915, FO 371/2579, 188244.

[109] Memorandum by Montgomery, 6 December 1915, enclosed in Montgomery to S. W. Harris, 16 December 1915. FO 371/2579, 200406.

[110] Charteris, *At G.H.Q.*, Diary entry for 19 September 1916, FO 371/2835, 136247.

the workload on diplomatic and consular services. The Foreign Office responded by drafting a memorandum accepting the idea of a single propaganda authority, if and only if it was placed under the direction of the Foreign Office[111]. In setting up the new organisation, John Buchan divided the department into four sections: administration, under Montgomery's direction; the literary branch, at Wellington House; the press and cinema division, subject to the control of the House of Lords; and intelligence, with the bureau at 82 Victoria Street[112]. Buchan's plan was approved by the Cabinet on 20th February 1917[113].

After Carson's resignation in January 1918, the Foreign Office had to relinquish control of propaganda, which was now in the hands of the Minister of Information. To make up for this, the intelligence section was transferred to the Foreign Office and the Political Intelligence Department (PID) was rebuilt.

In the Italian case, propaganda activity arose spontaneously, and the main impetus came from the nationalist associations to support the claim to the "*irrident lands*". Since most of the population was uneducated and many means of communication, such as radio and television, were not widespread, posters were used. Posters communicated a basic message to a large number of people without encountering the obstacle of literacy. It constituted an urban and effective phenomenon[114]. The iconography of 1917 portrayed the war as if it were, for Italy, the fourth war of independence. For this reason, national figures such as Garibaldi, Mazzini, Cavour and Victor Emmanuel III are often depicted. In the first part of the war, the depictions were mainly patriotic and lively: national unity was the background. Then, as the war wore on and the heavy conditions in which the troops found themselves at the front, propaganda took on a different role. It was no longer national unity that spurred the men to the front, but

[111] Note by the General Staff on the organisation of propaganda, 23 December 1916. CAB 24/ G.103.

[112] Note by J. Buchan, *Propaganda – a department of information*, 3 February 1917, CAB 24/3, G. 128.

[113] CAB 23/1, 74 (13).

[114] G. Bone, L. Righetti, D. Savoia, *Immagini e documenti della Grande Guerra*, Cesena, 2000.

fear of the enemy, the focus of the new propaganda, portrayed as a cruel being and depicted with grotesque charges. According to the propaganda, the opponent to be fought is Emperor Franz Joseph. The enemy becomes a barbarian, dehumanised in form: it stirs the spirits of the population, who are prepared to endure the extreme conditions of war in order to defeat the enemy. If between 1914 and 1915 the fight was for "*irrident lands*", in 1918 a total war was fought to defeat "*barbarism*". In fact, the Italian mobilisation did not only concern the troops, but was also a psychological and material mobilisation. Throughout the course of the war, the Italians were asked for six national loans to support war expenses. On 2nd June 1915, Salandra pronounced at the Campidoglio: «*he who does not give his arm to his country must give his mind, his good, his heart, his sacrifices*». Italians responded generously to the request for aid. The first glimmer of light arrived with the entry of the United States into the war.

As well, in Italy propaganda passed through the cinema. The aim was not to show the population the military at the front, but to encourage civilian support for the military. Short films were often produced, the most famous of which was "*La Befana di guerra*" (The War Epiphany): through these films, the population was involved in the drama of war. Propaganda was intended to bind civilians to the fate of the state. Propaganda was institutionalised when military power took control over various areas of the state, such as the economy, industry, food supplies and information. The three institutions that supported propaganda were: the government, the army, and the interventionist elite[115]. The Cabinet was in charge of propaganda towards allied and neutral countries. After the defeat at Caporetto, the target of the propaganda was mass psychology. Faced with a possible Austrian invasion, the mobilisation of all sectors of the state was given a decisive boost. The Italian liberal regime realised the necessity of sustaining the morale of both soldiers in the trenches and on the home front through a wide propaganda campaign. The historian Gian Luigi Gatti

[115] Thomas Row, *Mobilizing the Nation: Italian Propaganda in the Great War*, in The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts, 2002, Vol. 24, Design, Culture, p. 145

underlined the effectiveness of "*Servizio P*", a special division of the army set up to boost soldiers' morale[116]. After Caporetto and thanks to Service P, attempts were made to address propaganda directly to the soldiers at the front. Before this, communication between the trenches and the home front was cut off for fear that the soldiers' war stories and discontent might cause a popular revolution. To prevent this, trench newspapers were set up, designed by the soldiers for the combatants. An example of a trench newspaper was the "*Tradotta*", founded by Umberto Brunelleschi, addressed to the Third Army at the front. The trench newspapers comforted the fears and hopes of the soldiers. However, war propaganda addressed to the soldiers in the war zones, both on the battle front and in the rear-guard supply lines, was under military control, which was harsh and rigid until Caporetto. As for internal propaganda, it had to consider class tensions and regional disparities. The wartime situation had put the country's social tensions to one side, but this did not mean that they had subsided. The government, civic organisations, the press, bankers, and industrialists were mainly responsible for war propaganda directed at civilians. The third front, also the target of the publicity campaign, was foreign public opinion. As happened in many European countries, such as Great Britain, the government sought support abroad, reacting to the enemy's foreign propaganda against Italy and seeking support from the allies.

7. The July crisis: the Kingdom of Italy and neutrality

On 10th July, General Luigi Cadorna took over as Chief of Staff of the Army from Alberto Pollio. The reorganisation of the military leadership was aimed at centralising technical and operational functions in the figure of Cadorna.
On the 23rd of July 1914, at 18:00, Belgrade received the final note from Vienna. The danger of a European war appeared. Italy found itself caught in a pincer between the old allies of the Triple Entente and the allies of the Entente. The British attempt to convene an inter-allied meeting, including

[116] Gian Luigi Gatti, *Dopo Caporetto. Gli ufficiali P nella Grande Guerra: propaganda, assistenza e vigilanza*, Gorizia, 2000

Italy, was thwarted by the German refusal. The Italian ambassador to Berlin, Bollati, was kept in the dark about the meeting between representatives of the Austrian and German governments in Potsdam on 5th and 6th July 1914[117]. Moltke wrote to his Austrian colleague «*we must start the war as if we were not waiting for the Italians at all*»[118]. Italian Foreign Minister Antonino San Giuliano questioned the possible abandonment of the Triple Entente, a possibility dictated by Italian geopolitical interests. On 24th July San Giuliano joined the German ambassador to Italy Hans Flotow[119] and Prime Minister Antonio Salandra in Fiuggi to examine the conditions of the Austrian ultimatum[120]. In the meantime, the Army Chief of Staff, General Luigi Cadorna, presented King Victor Emmanuel III with a "Summary Memorandum on our North-West muster and the transport to Germany of the largest possible force" for the transfer of troops to the Rhine[121], as provided for in the military convention of 1888 between Italy and Germany. The King approved the basic concepts of the plan of 31st July but distanced himself from the German Empire. On the same day, the Italian position was defined as neutral. This episode highlighted the uncertainty and lack of coordination between the political and military structure. The first convergence between the government and the General Staff took place on 19th August, when the possibility of opening hostilities against Austria was discussed. Three days later, General Cadorna divulged to the army commands the «*summary memorandum regarding a possible offensive action against the Austro-Hungarian monarchy during the current European conflagration*»[122].

On 2nd August 1914 Italy declared its neutrality. On the same day, the Foreign Minister sent a letter to the ambassador in Vienna, Giuseppe

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[117] G.E. Rusconi, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
[118] *Ivi,* p. 43.
[119] San Giuliano wrote: "I had the impression that Flotow finds our interpretation of Article VII correct.
Ivi, p. 111
[120] *Ivi,* pp. 85-86.
[121] *Ivi*, p. 90.
[122] M. Mondini, *Il Capo. La grande guerra del generale Luigi Cadorna*, chap. 4, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2019.

Avarna, explaining the reasons for neutrality[123]. The following week, San Giuliano tested the ground for informal contact with London. Simultaneously, San Giuliano addressed a letter to von Bülow in which he justified the Italian choice in favour of neutrality. On 1st August 1914, the day before the Italian declaration of neutrality, the Chief of Staff of the Austrian Army, General Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, asked General Cadorna with which military means Italy would like to collaborate in the conflict[124]. Cadorna's response came on 4th August, following the declaration of neutrality. For the German Chief of Staff, von Moltke, Italian neutrality was a positive factor. On 6th August, the Berlin government tried to mediate with Vienna to reconsider the question of Trentino[125]. Two days later, Vienna declined the German proposal, justifying Trentino as an essential element for maintaining the integrity and solidity of the empire. Furthermore, the Austrian government, assuming a change of alliance on the part of Italy, considered it futile to ingratiate itself with Salandra's government. On 9th August, San Giuliano sent Salandra a "*very secret memorandum*", in which the hypothesis of a war against the Habsburg empire was considered as soon as a favourable opportunity presented itself: "*only if there is certainty of victory*"[126]. The foreign minister addressed a letter to King Victor Emmanuel III in which he set out his intentions: not to come out in favour of any alliance and at the same time to secretly begin military preparations. San Giuliano sent Tommaso Tittoni, the Italian ambassador in Paris, a letter[127] in which he described the different positions of Italian public opinion: the majority of the population preferred neutrality; others supported action alongside the allies of the Triple Alliance; finally, a large part preferred to attack Austria-Hungary, subject to agreement with the Triple Entente. San Giuliano also addressed a letter to Guglielmo Imperiali, the Italian ambassador in London, to begin laying the foundations for a negotiating

[123] San Giuliano lettera all'ambasciatore a Vienna Avarna, DDI, V, 1, n°2, p.92
[124] G. E, Rusconi, *op. cit.*, p. 94
[125] *Ivi,* p. 95.
[126] Documenti Diplomatici Italiani, Serie IV, vol. XII, Roma, 1964, pp.83-84.
[127] DDI, V, 1, n° 206.

dialogue with a view to Italian entry into the war alongside the Entente, in exchange for "*military and political guarantees*"[128]. In making decisions, the government distanced the King and ignored Cadorna. The latter, under orders from the government, found himself planning the military structure lacking the necessary means, and in September 1914 the political leadership, without consulting Cadorna, altered the alliances and moved closer to the Triple Entente. The government considered the possibility of intervening in the conflict against Austria, but due to military unpreparedness, the intervention was postponed until spring. General Cadorna, from his inauguration until 24th September 1914, supported the project of general and immediate mobilisation[129]. On 26th September, the Italian ambassador in Berlin, R. Bollati, urged the Italian government to side with Germany on the question of Trentino, while he negotiated with the German foreign secretary Zimmermann to extract territorial concessions before Italy entered the war. The following day, Zimmermann secretly assured Ambassador Bollati that in the event of Italian neutrality Austria would agree to cede Trentino. On 5th November 1914 Sonnino was appointed Foreign Minister. His policy was based on decisive leadership in foreign policy and on the autonomy of political choices with respect to the development of the war. Five days after taking office, Sonnino sent an unofficial note to the Berlin government, through the German ambassador Flotow, clarifying that the Italian government would only intervene alongside the Triple Alliance if the German government ensured that it would mediate with Vienna for the renunciation of the Trentino. Secretary General De Martino justified the delay in choosing the allies to Sonnino in a report sent at the end of November 1914: "*at the end of the European conflict Italy cannot find itself on the side of the defeated*"[130]. On 3rd December 1914, the Austrians besieged Belgrade and the Italian government would be entitled to territorial compensation, as stipulated in Article VII of the Triple Entente

[128] DDI, Serie V, Vol. I, Roma, 1964, pp. 115-116.
[129] L. Albertini, *Epistolario 1911-1926*, Vol.2, Milano, 1968, p. 283
[130] De Martino report for Sonnino, 30 November 1914, IVI, Vol. II, D, 311. Sidney Sonnino, Diario 1914-1916, Pietro Pastrorelli, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1972.

Treaty[131]. National territorial aspirations were the *leitmotif* of the political and diplomatic conduct of the Italian Cabinet. Relations between Italy and Germany began to deteriorate; when von Bülow asked Giolitti whether Italy could still march alongside the empire, he replied "*four months ago, or rather three or two months ago, yes, but now it is too late. It is now only a question of seeing whether Italy remains neutral or attacks Austria*"[132]. From August to May 1915, the government in Vienna formulated four proposals, the last of which was communicated on 6 May in which it expressed its willingness to cede Trentino and Trento, excluding Trieste, which was considered a *conditio sine qua non* for the Italian government[133]. The Austrian proposals were all declined, with no margin for negotiation.

The change of alliances accelerated after Sidney Sonnino took office as Foreign Minister in November 1914, following the death of San Giuliano. During the July crisis, Sonnino supported an alliance with the Triple Alliance, but with the realisation of an attack on Serbia by the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the isolation of Rome in the run-up to the war by the governments of Berlin and Vienna, Sonnino reconsidered neutrality.

In October, the Office of Instructions and Manoeuvres and the Historical Office were disbanded, and the staff distributed to other organs of the Supreme Command and the operational departments. The responsibilities of the Instruction and Manoeuvres Office were taken over by the newly established Armed Forces Office, which consisted of a secretariat and three sections, divided into the Eastern Army Group, the Tyrolean Army and Various Affairs. In addition, the Western Exchequer and the Colonial Office were dissolved, and in place of the Eastern Exchequer, the Situation Office was established, structured in the same way as the Armed Forces Office, into the Tyrolean Army and the Eastern Army Group. The State Defence Office was converted into the Technical Office, which was responsible for managing fortifications, communications, and links. On the other hand, the

[131] Gian Enrico Rusconi, *op. cit.,* p. 58.
[132] A. Monticone, Deutschland und die neutralitat italiens 1914-1915, 1982, p.58.
[133] *Ibidem.*

Information Office was moved to the second-in-command of the General Staff Corps[134] and its responsibilities reduced. A further change made to the structure of the General Staff Corps was established by decree No. 997 of September 1914, which abolished the figures of second-in-Command and of the General in charge of the General Staff Corps. Cadorna's ultimate aim was to eliminate the constraints on the work and structure of the Supreme Command. At the same time as reorganising the General Staff Corps, General Alfredo Dallolio, Head of the General Directorate of Artillery and Engineering of the Ministry of War, led the first steps of covert mobilisation. The prediction of a short war meant a limited mobilisation of industrial resources, and it was not long before it was realised that the war would not be short. During the mobilisation, the use of the state railways was indispensable for moving the army and munitions to the Isonzo and Gorizia fronts.

General Cadorna's war planning appeared unrealistic in relation to the strategic objectives. The operational conception was optimistic with respect to the relationship between the Italian army and technological development: the Chief of Staff's vision of combat was ordinary and did not consider trench warfare. The end of 1914 with the advent of trench warfare represented the beginning of the military revolution that entailed a profound mutation of warfare: new dimensions, such as aviation, and new technologies came into play that implied an alteration in the operative and strategic planning of war. The accusations made against Cadorna were the underestimation of the experiences of the western front and the tactical unpreparedness of the infantry to face the static warfare pattern of the trenches. It is also true that in the period of neutrality information from the front was scarce, which did not allow a study and eventual modification of the war plans. The cardinal principle in war planning was offensive action until the enemy was annihilated: "*war should naturally be offensive*"[135] according to the general. The strategic plans of 1914 were studied with maniacal mechanics: all

[134] Agenda No. 20 of the Army Chief of Staff of 28 July 1914.
[135] M. Mondini, *op. cit.*, Chapter 5

studies assumed of an offensive war to be waged in a short period of time. The wrong assumption led to the failure of Cadorna's military projects. Angelo Gatti wrote about the modern conflict that it was the decline of the professional army, of movement warfare and the presence of military leadership in the field. Twentieth-century war varies profoundly in its nature. The main error within the Italian decision-making structure, unlike the British structure, was the absence of a summit for coordination and communication between politicians and the military. Civil and military power in Italy was an imperfect and conflicting dualism from the beginning of the preparation for war until the tragedy of Caporetto in 1917. Formal relations were based on mutual distrust. General Roberto Bencivenga testified in his memoirs how the political leadership deliberately did not communicate political decisions to military commanders. On 11th September, King Vittorio Emanuele III addressed to General Cadorna a warning about the delicate period and to avoid any impotence because of the possible consequences, and for this reason patience and calm were needed to avoid being dragged into the turmoil of events. For this reason, on 22nd September after a conversation with Salandra, Cadorna accepted the postponement of military operations. The first rapprochement between the government and the General Staff came with the appointment of Vittorio Zuppelli as Minister of War. The two figures drew up a scheme of advancement: initially the objective was to neutralise the Trentino and prepare a major offensive on the lower Isonzo, with the aim of establishing a security zone in the Treviso-Pontebbia area.
During the neutrality period, the powers of the Chief of the Army Staff were limited, and for this reason he had no formal right to intervene in political discussions. In political deliberations the General Staff only received orders from the Minister of War, who in peacetime personified the highest military authority. The highest example was the decision to enter the war by the top echelons of the Italian government: Cadorna, kept in the dark until the deeds were already done, did not have the necessary time to prepare a war plan, with executive orders defined in time and objectives. As a result, the

mobilisation and assembly of the Italian army was complex, rigid, and inefficient.

«*Before 1911 Italy had been military weak on one continent, after 1912 she was weak in two*»[136]. It is customary to present Italy in 1914 underlining the failed experience in Libya to justify the lack of preparation of the Italian army. Often elements of development and reorganisation are removed from the analysis of the Italian situation in the face of what was the first Italian experience of industrialised warfare. The Libyan war has raised discussions and solutions to the gaps in the Italian political and military organisational structure. One wonders about the reasons that drove Italy to enter the war: the first, the basis of the propaganda strategy, was the "*irrident lands*" held by the Austrian government, the second was the Italian government's desire to gain a place in international meetings alongside the European leaders.
For this reason, Italy had been preparing for a mobilisation of industrial resources and military forces since 1914. As far as industrial resources were concerned, between August 1914 and May 1915 there was an increase in the production of civil and military industries. This was mainly due to the Chief of Staff, General Cadorna, the Director General of Artillery and Engineers of the Ministry of War, General Dallolio, and the Director General of Logistics and Administrative Services, General Adolfo Tettoni. To optimise the management of industrial mobilisation, a Central Committee was set up, based in Rome, and seven regional committees[137], in Piedmont, Lombardy, Liguria, Veneto, Emilia, the central regions and Sardinia, the southern regions and Sicily. The Committee in Rome was headed by representatives of the Ministry of War, the Treasury, and the Navy, flanked by a Councillor of State and civilian personnel with specific industrial expertise. The regional committees were organised differently, with a general or admiral, a chairman, four to six civilians with relevant expertise, four to ten members representing industrialists and workers, and an officer-

[136] John Gooch, *op. cit.*, p.148
[137] Became 11 with the legislative decree of 9 September 1917, n° 1512

secretary[138]. The task of the regional committees was to coordinate the production of the auxiliary plants in order to avoid harmful competition between them. The committees, dislocated organs of the Ministry of Arms and Munitions, responded to the production requirements of the Ministry of War and the Navy.

As regards military mobilisation, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of mobilisation, i.e., the set of operations that ensure clothing, weapons, and equipment for war actions for all men called up to the barracks. On the other hand, mustering is the convoy of military units to the locations laid out according to the General Staff's strategic plan[139]. The Italian war plans of July 1914, based on an analysis of the 1870 campaign model, lacked both the number of officers and the necessary artillery equipment.

Concerning Cadorna's mobilisation plans, he already in September turned to planning a war against the Habsburg Empire to be implemented in the short term. In his preparations, he did not bother to check for possible army shortcomings. On 13th August Cadorna suggested to Salandra some political acts in the face of a war against the Central Empires, and for this reason he sought an alliance with Switzerland to be added as an ally in the Franco-Russian offensive at the expense of the Austrian Empire. But on August 19th, during a meeting with Prime Minister Salandra, Foreign Minister San Giuliano, War Minister Grandi and Cadorna, the possibility of postponing the mobilization was discussed. Cadorna yielded to the reasons of the government. However, during the meeting the thoughts of the Chief of Staff and the Government converged towards the same enemy: the Habsburg Empire. The same could not be said for the modalities and timing of the attack: the Government feared a long and exhausting war, while Cadorna hoped for a rapid breakthrough to the "*heart of the empire*". On August 21st, Cadorna issued the "*Memoria riassuntiva circa un'eventuale azione offensiva verso la monarchia austro-ungarica durante l'attuale*

[138] Ferruccio Botti, *La Logistica dell'esercito italiano (1831-1981)*, Vol. II, I servizi della nascita dell'esercito italiano alla Prima Guerra mondiale (1861-1918), Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Roma, 1911, pag. 624, 631, 635, 637-678.

[139] G. E. Rusconi, *ivi,* p.163

conflagrazione europea" (Summary memorandum regarding a possible offensive action against the Austro-Hungarian monarchy during the current European conflagration) to the army commands. Five days later, Cadorna and San Giuliano met, and the latter stopped Cadorna's intentions of waging war in the short term. San Giuliano said, «*we cannot take part in the war if we do not have a 99% probability of victory*», Cadorna replied by sending a document containing «*the conditions to be requested to the governments and the major states of the powers of the Triple Entente, for an intervention in favour of the powers themselves*»[140].

However, is the contrast between civilians and the military dictated by a systematic condition of the institutional relationship or is it dictated by the emergency situation? Both motivations are valid. Let us assume that in July 1914 there were disputes in all nations. The basic problem in a war situation is the secrecy of the war plans planned by the general staff, which are no longer manageable - unexpectedly - by politics. The political-military decision-making structure of a conflict, until the Libyan war in 1911, consisted of: the King, Commander-in-Chief of the army, who delegates the conduct of the war to the executive power. The Minister of War represents the junction between the government line and military requirements. Usually, the main reason for the contrast between civilians and the military is the army's budget[141]. The real difficulty was that mutual distrust and overly formal relations existed between the two institutions.

On the one hand Cadorna in the summer of 1914 pushed for instant action against the north-eastern front, the King, the Minister of War, and the President of the Republic asked him to wait until better conditions presented themselves. The Chief of Staff seemed to back down following a private conversation with Salandra on 22nd September. He then wrote a letter to the Minister of War Grandi, who was against Italian intervention, that the conditions for entering the war were not met. This decision would not stop Cadorna from planning the war, but the general staff did not have an

[140] G. Rochat, *l'Esercito italiano nell'estate 1914*, Roma, 2006, p.39
[141] G. E. Rusconi, *op. cit,* pp. 157-159

updated offensive plan against the Habsburg Empire. General Pollio had elaborated a plan of only fortifications on the eastern front, in respect of the Triple Treaty.

CHAPTER IV: 1915 “The war continues and confidence in the short war was slow to die”[142]

1. Great Britain during the first months of the conflict

At the beginning of 1915, thanks to Kitchener's recruitment campaign, a substantial number of volunteers volunteered to fight. For this reason, the British Expeditionary Force was divided into two armies and discussions began about where to attack. The first option was to concentrate the Royal Navy along the Belgian coast to support the Anglo-Belgian army. This was discarded when the Admiralty presented the structural problems of an attack on the English Channel: large British warships could not be deployed in a limited area of water and light ships could not be used to engage the German Empire's coastal artillery. The second option was to attack Austrian troops, but this proved to be an unrealistic plan. Although Austria-Hungary presented itself as a weak military power, it could not be approached and attacked by a maritime power. Moreover, the tight control of Austrian submarines made an attack in the Adriatic Sea impracticable. Other avenues were explored, but Serbia received aid from Bulgaria, a power not officially belligerent but hostile towards the Austrian Empire. Greece maintained a position of neutrality and Italy, despite its position of neutrality declared in August 1914, could be an ally but would not send direct aid to Serbia and would not open a front in the Adriatic to attack Austria. Therefore, a discussion opened about the possibility of detaching naval forces as long as British maritime supremacy in the North Sea was not challenged. The Western Front became deadlocked and the political and military leadership debated whether men and armaments should be diverted elsewhere. The British historian Sir James Edmonds commented on the situation in the battles of 1915: "*in view of the situation on the Western Front and the subsequent failures of the French and British offensives in 1915, the wisdom of the decision to make trial elsewhere - provided that surprise was ensured*

[142] Isnenghi Mario, Rochat, Giorgio, *La Grande Guerra 1914-1918*, Firenze, 2017, p. 160

- *can hardly be questioned*"[143]. The positions were divided between the "*Westerners*", Field Marshal French[144], Haig, Joffre and Foch and the "*Easters*"[145], Churchill, Lloyd George[146]. The former advocated the continuation of operations on the Western Front between French's positions in France and Belgium; the latter proposed redeploying troops engaged in the war of attrition to other tactical fronts such as Turkey, Mesopotamia and Salonicco, in order to defeat the powers of the Triple Alliance. In January 1915, French wrote: "*There are no theatres, other than those in which operations are now in progress, in which decisive results can be achieved*"[147]. Haig supported the position by writing in his diary: "*We cannot hope to win until we have defeated the German Army. The easiest place to do this is in France because our lines of communication are the shortest to this theatre of war*"[148]. The War Council met in January and considered the option of an offensive naval expedition against the Dardanelles. An Anglo-French naval force was prepared for the expedition and the Allies entered the strait on the morning of 19th February. The attack on the Turkish coast was not interrupted until 4th April, when the Turks retaliated, but the inefficiency of the Ottoman defence did not stall the allies. Lord Carden, head of the Middle East expedition, slowed down the advance in the first half of March until he sent a telegram to London on the 17th in which he resigned his commission for health reasons. Churchill learned of the telegram and ordered the local commander Sir John De Robeck to take

[143] Edmonds, Brig Gen Sir James, *History of the Great War: Military Operations France and Belgium 1914–1918*, Vol. I, London, 1927, p. 66

[144] Field Marshal French submitted a letter to the War Council supporting his position to continue attacking the Germans on the Western Front: *"in view of numbers and German commitments in Russia, it seems of the utmost importance that we should strike at the earliest possible moment with all our available strength*". *Ivi*, Vol. I, p.65

[145] Senior, Michael, *Victory on the Western Front: the development of the British Army 1914-1918*, Great Britain, 2016, p. 125

[146] The controversy between Westerners and Easterners, best described as a dispute between "Continentalist" e "Peripheral" school of strategy.
Cfr. Cassar, George H, p.58
D. French, *The strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition 1916-1918,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp.1-6

[147] FM Viscount French of Ypres, 1914, p. 317

[148] Haig's Diary 28 March 1915. Quoted in John Terraine, Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier, Leo Cooper, London, 1990 edn, p. 135.

control of the expedition. The following day De Robeck ordered the final attack and after a preliminary bombardment, the Allied fleet entered the strait on 18th March 1915[149]. The landing attempt was cancelled when a repositioning of Turkish mines caused damage to two British ships. The report of the attack was three ships sunk and three damaged. The same cannot be said of the Turkish account: in the absence of munitions and sea mines the Ottoman Empire was now defenceless and London was aware of this. In fact, a German telegram had been intercepted on 19th March, and subsequently forwarded to Churchill and the Admiralty, informing them that the Turkish forts had run out of ammunition. The mismanaged British advantage led to a consolidation of positions: the British troops on the banks and the Turks on the plateaus. The problem of ammunition went side by side: thanks to its allies, the Ottoman troops were able to supply ammunition more easily than the British, but for reasons of national prestige, it was difficult for them to turn back[150]. Ian Hamilton, in charge of the landing forces[151], took control of the expedition. The failure of the planned two-pronged attack in the summer of 1915 led the London leadership at a council of war to replace Hamilton, who wanted to continue the attack against the Turks in a clear stalemate war, with Sir Charles Monro, who supported the idea of a quick and competitive evacuation[152]. The Dardanelles expedition represented a major missed opportunity for the London government[153]. With the fall of the Asquith government in May 1915, the new coalition government renamed the War Council, Dardanelles Committee on 7th June. The structure of the Committee was changed, the number of members was reduced, and it was renamed the War Committee.

One more defeat for the British troops was the Battle of Neuve-Chapelle fought from 10 to 13th March 1915 on French territory. The expedition was entrusted to Haig who, despite the war plans proving inadequate, ordered

[149] Liddell Hart, Basil Henry, *The real war 1914-1918*, London, 1963, P. 165

[150] *Ivi,* p. 167.

[151] Stevenson, David, *1914-1918 The History of the First World War,* Milano, 2004, p. 156

[152] Liddell Hart, BH, *op. cit.* p. *168.*

[153] Macleod, Jenny, *General Sir Ian Hamilton and the Dardanelles Commission*, in Sage Publications, Vol. 8, N° 4, November 2001, pp. 418-441.

the attack to continue "*regardless of losses*"[154]. The Spring Offensive raised the structural and functional problems of the British military apparatus. Functional deficiencies, like insufficient artillery support to operations, inflexibility of full strengths, errors in the disposition of reserves, and lack of delegation of command, were overcome with time. Structural problems remained and conditioned the course of operations: not even the development and deployment of tanks in large-scale operations in 1917 resolved the situation. The problem of using nineteenth-century military doctrines in the new war situation weakened the function of the infantry, which was vulnerable to enemy fire and isolated from the artillery by the absence of rapid means of communication between the front and rear. During the battles of 1915, the Royal Flying Corps[155] played a central role. On the one hand, they protected the airspace above their own trenches, preventing the enemy from observing the preparation of British troops. In addition, the RFC developed a new box camera, called the "A" Camera), which was used for area reconnaissance to study enemy trench lines. The important strategic role of photographs taken at high altitude was the reason for the establishment of the Air Photographic section and its schools of photography, mapping, and reconnaissance. A second role of the air force during the offensives of 1915 was aerial bombardment, targeting tactical points such as the railway system, as was the case with the bombing of the Lille-Dovai-Valenciennes railways during the Battle of Loos[156] in September

[154] Liddel Hart, Bh, *op. cit.,* p. 174

[155] The Secretary of State, Lord Kitchener, satisfied with Sir Henderson's command of the Royal Flying Corps, refused to promote him to commander of the First Division of the British Expeditionary Force, so that he could remain in charge of the RFC. Kitchener invested heavily in enabling the RFC to develop and expand its war skills. Henderson became a member of the War Office in August 1915.

[156] An important aspect of the Battle of Loos was the incompatibility of the positions of the military-political leadership on the plan to be implemented: on the one hand we find Haig, commander of the First Army, who did not want to undertake the attack considered unfavourable to the British position, supported by Lieutenant General William Robertson, Chief of Staff of the British Expeditionary Force, and on the other hand Sir John French, Sir Henry Wilson and the Secretary of State for War Lord Kitchener who supported the idea of an intervention alongside the French troops to avoid greater damage in the event of a German victory.
Liddel Hart, B.H., pp. 284-300

1915[157]. Another technological advancement first implemented at the Battle of the Loos was the use of gas, launched from aircraft across enemy lines. During the First World War there were several episodes, on both sides, in which gas was used but without any strategic results. Massive use of the gas would come in World War II with devastating results.

The fundamental role of artillery for victory in the field was clear to all, especially after the battles of 1915. Sir John French had repeatedly called for additional weapons and ammunition: "*it's a rough war, but the problem itself is a comparatively simple one: ammunition, more ammunition, always more ammunition*"[158]. The discontent spread to English circles, and the crisis, known as the "*Shell crisis*", broke out. Sir French wanted to blame Kitchener, who, as Secretary of State for War, was in charge of munitions. The lack of a compact chain of command would have compromised the effectiveness of military decisions on the battlefield. In Britain, the cabinet disagreed with the military policy conducted by Lord Kitchener and Sir French. The discontent was compounded by an article on 21 May by Lord Northcliffe, owner of "The Times" and "Daily Mail", entitled: "*The Shell Scandal: Lord Kitchener's tragic blunder. Our terrible casualties' lists*"[159]. Also, Fleet Admiral Lord Fisher resigned as First Sea Lord because of ongoing discussions with Winston Churchill concerning the Dardanelles expedition. The turmoil over the Shell Crisis and Fisher's resignation led the Prime Minister to make a speech to his cabinet on 17th May in which he expressed concern that the events could have a "*disastrous effect on the overall political and strategic situation*"[160]. On 25th May 1915 a new coalition government was formed between the Liberal Asquith and the Conservatives. The Admiralty was given to Balfour, Churchill was transferred to a less prestigious office, Kitchener to the War Office, and

[157] Stevenson David *op. cit.*, p. 280

[158] Michael Senior, *Victory on the Western Front. The Development of the British Army, 1914-1918*, Great Britain, 2016, p. 240.

[159] D. Lloyd George, *Memoirs Vol. I,* p. 123

[160] Asquith to Cabinet, 17 May 1915, TNA, CAB 37/128/19.

Lloyd George to head the Ministry of Munitions[161]. The new government was short-lived.

On 19th May 1915, Lloyd George sent a letter to Asquith protesting the lack of executive authority of the impotent Munitions of War Committee. Kitchener enjoyed too much fame to be dismissed from the War Office, so the only solution was to assign Lloyd George to control the production of munitions. In theory, Lloyd George was unofficially appointed to the Ministry of Munitions, to prevent the appointment of Bonar Law. He expected to return to the Treasury but was then officially appointed by royal warrant on 9th June. In Lloyd George's view, the way to ensure increased munitions production was through state control, so he issued the Defence of the Realm Act[162]. Thanks to the latter, engineering factories were converted to munitions production. The munitions of war act, enacted in July 1915, placed all private companies involved in munitions production under the strict control of the ministry[163]. During Lloyd George's tenure[164], from May 1915 to June 1916, he expanded his power to expand state control over every aspect of development and production. Lloyd George headed the first Cabinet Committee on Munitions on 12th October 1914. Established on 1st July 1915, the Ministry of Munitions was headed by Lloyd George. One of the first jobs was to enact the Munitions of War Act.

Allied politicians, unhappy with the course of the conflict, realised that a system of military-political coordination was needed to plan a common military policy. In Britain, several options were discussed between closer military cooperation, better political liaison, or both. The first option was put forward by Kitchener, who favoured collaboration between the British and French military staffs. Then Lord Esher proposed a plan to ensure a balance of decision-making between the political and military leadership. Lord

[161] Alessandro Torre, *Storia costituzionale del Regno Unito attraverso i primi Ministri*, Padova, 2020
[162] M. Senior, *op. cit.*, p.291
[163] Ian F. W. Beckett, *The Making of the First World War,* Great Britain, 2012, p. 139
[164] The Ministry of Munitions, established in May 1915 and abolished in January 1919, was headed by Lloyd George (May 1915 to June 1916), Edwin Samuel Montagu (June to December 1916), the civilian Christopher Addison (December 1916 to July 1917) and finally Winston Churchill (July 1917 to January 1919).

Esher's idea was to set up a six-member decision-making centre to discuss major strategic issues. Colonel Maurice Hankey suggested adding a joint secretariat. Lord Esher supported the idea. Unfortunately, no well-structured and permanent inter-allied summit came into being until 1917. In the midst of military confusion and civil-military tension, the only draft inter-allied meeting was presented by Joffre[165]. From 6 to 8 July, at the suggestion of the British government, the Allied War Conference was convened at Joseph Joffre's GQG in Chantilly[166], France. France, Great Britain, Belgium, Serbia, Russia and Italy sent representatives to attend the conference. The aim was to coordinate a common strategy against the Central Powers, but the scarcity of available means prevented any cooperation on the ground. Due to the lack of sufficient cannon and ammunition from the British Expeditionary Force and following a meeting with Albert Thomas, the French Minister of Munitions, Lloyd George proposed extending the inter-allied offensive into the spring of 1916[167]. The harsh German offensive had placed the Allies in a difficult position. The representatives participating in the Chantilly Conference were: the French General J. Joffre, the English Commander-in-Chief Sir John French and Sir Archibald Murray, the Italian General Porro, sent by order of General Cadorna, the Russian General Gilinsky, General Wielmans, the Belgian Chief of Staff, the Serbian Colonel Stephanovic[168]. Civilian members of the conference were voluntarily excluded. At the end of the inter-allied conference, it was decided that the re-equipped Serbian troops would be moved to Salonika, the Italian army to Albania, and the Franco-English army

[165] The substantial difference between the scheme presented by Esher and that presented by Joffre and Wilson was that the former proposed a committee with an executive function, while the latter envisaged a committee with an advisory function. This meant that the former was a political-military council, in which political influence carried more weight than military power, while the latter, by including the Commands-in-Chief, strengthened military power over the conduct of the war.

[166] J. Joffre explained to the Minister of War, Alexandre Millerand, that «gouvernement français proposerait aux puissances alliées de centraliser la conduite supérieure de la guerre au Grand Quartier Général français où les plans d'ensemble et les directives d'opérations seraient élaborés». Joffre, *Mémoires*, tome II, Plon, Paris, 1932, p. 125.

[167] John Keegan, *La Première Guerre mondiale,* Paris, Perrin/Angès Vienot, 2003, p.250.

[168] Joffre, *op. cit.,* pp. 167-168.

to Macedonia. The British War Committee followed the directives of the Chantilly military conference: it was unanimously decided that the battle would only be won on the Russian, Franco-British and Italian fronts[169]. Principles were agreed upon for outlining a plan, rather than a precise programme of action. For the first time there was a unanimity of military opinion to which the civilian members of the War Committee could not place reservations. It was the first Allied military summit, eleven months after the start of the conflict. The delay had a negative influence on the battlefields in 1915. This was also due to the departmental administration of the major state sectors involved: military, political-diplomatic and economic. This led to discouraging results and was a widespread problem in the first months of combat, but in the final stages of the war the link between these decision-making areas was strengthened. Subsequent to the inter-allied conference at Chantilly, there were several meetings between the Franco-Italian and Anglo-French leadership. The first took place between 4th and 5th September, when J. Joffre met the Italian Chief of Staff, General Luigi Cadorna; the second took place the following month, when Prime Minister René Viviani and French Navy Minister Augagneur went to London on 7th October. The following day, Lord Kitchener met with Viviani in Chantilly. As a result of the meetings between the French and British leadership it was decided to increase the number of men in the BEF, and the British agreed not to evacuate Salonicco.

1915 was a painful year for the Entente: the Allies' maximum effort achieved only a minimal result, and the prospect of supremacy over the Germans was put off until the following year[170]. The failure was due to «l'indépendance

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[169] *Ibidem.*

[170] « *En France tout d'abord, après les dures campagnes d'été et d'automne, les armées franco-britanniques avaient un impérieux besoin de repos pour se refaire et reconstituer leurs stocks de munitions. Nos alliés russes, après une longue et coûteuse retraite, étaient hors d'état de reprendre des opérations offensives avant une complète réorganisation. Les Italiens se disposaient à hiverner, l'armée serbe entreprenait une pénible retraite vers l'Adriatique après avoir abandonné son artillerie et ses équipages, pendant que l'armée d'Orient, ne pouvant plus la secourir rétrogradait en bon ordre sur Salonique ; la situation du corps expéditionnaire des Dardanelles était arrivée, comme je l'ai dit, à un tel point, que notre seule ressource était de retirer nos forces de ce guêpier ; le corps britannique de Mésopotamie avait été battu à Ctésiphon et rejeté sur Kut-El-Amara…* »
Joffre, *op. cit.,* tome III, p. 161

avec laquelle chaque allié avait conduit la guerre, chacun sur son front particulier et selon ses vues propres»[171]. The factors that had benefited the Germans were the defence methods they had learned for the entrenched front, while the Allies had not understood the offensive methods for the entrenched line. This was the focal point of 1915 and the reason for a stalemate in the fighting positions. "*King had lost confidence in Field Marshal French*"[172], Sir Haig noted in his book, "*but the French had lost confidence in Field Marshal French*", noted Sir Haig in his diary on 14th July 1915. Disappointing battles from a British point of view were fought in 1915, such as Neuve Chapelle, Aubers Ridge, Loos, and it was this last unsuccessful battle that brought down French, who was forced to resign on 6 December 1915. Sir French was in command of the British Expeditionary Force in France, but his inexperience and mental and physical weakness prevented him from coping with modern warfare: French's lack of adaptability was the reason for his unpopularity. However, French's difficulties were shared by all the generals on the Western Front: all were flawed in their management of the war, but none had the ability to manage a rapidly expanding army while fighting a war of attrition.

In the summer of 1915, the military leadership realised that the method of recruiting that had been used up to that point was failing to meet the need for men. The wave of recruits thanks to Kitchener's propaganda was also diminishing. The recruitment process required a man to choose a particular regiment or corps, and this weakened the strength of the British Army as a whole. Furthermore, a volunteer could not be deployed overseas without his consent, and this created a manpower crisis in the Territorial Force infantry battalion. To deal with the problem, in the autumn, Parliament implemented a series of measures to induce men to enlist. The first scheme introduced was the *"Derby Scheme"*[173]. The scheme proposed by Lord Derby, the new recruitment director appointed by Kitchener, replaced the recruitment

[171] *Ivi,* p. 163

[172] Richard Holmes, *Britain at War: Famous British Battles from Hastings to Normandy, 1066-1944,* New York, Hylas Publishing, 2004, p. 298

[173] Bruce Gudmundsson, *The British Army on the Western Front 1916*, Osprey Publishing, pp. 12-13

system with a system of 'attestation'. The new method involved the man not enlisting directly but signing an undertaking to serve when needed. Supported by a propaganda campaign, aimed at men between the ages of 18 and 41, whose occupation was not defined as essential, the new scheme had three effects: firstly, a large number of men enlisted immediately; secondly, the man - not having to enlist immediately - could enjoy some support services; and thirdly, the new system of enlistment made it possible to respond to requests for men when needed, avoiding overcrowding or periods of shortage. If the recruit was declared fit following a medical examination, he would be sworn in and given two pounds and nine pence. Under the new scheme 200,000 men were directly enlisted and 2 million men were promised service if called up. Between July 1915 and February 1916, thanks to the new recruits, the Fourth and Fifth Divisions were created. The scheme worked for the first few months, but this method failed to meet the need for men for battles. So, Parliament passed the first *Military Service Act* in 1916 to conscript all men of suitable age. This brought two major steps forward: firstly, the introduction of general conscription and secondly increasing the homogeneity of the British army[174].

From November 1915 to December 1916, the new war committee was set up with supreme command over the army. On 2nd November, Prime Minister Asquith announced the new formation of the War Committee in the House of Commons. The following day, the War Committee met. On 11th November, the Prime Minister announced the House of Common the committee, in Kitchener's absence, would consist of the Prime Minister, the First Lord, the Minister of Arms and Munitions, the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Except for secret matters, Parliament oversaw the work of the War Committee, as all members of the Committee were heads of the largest departments of state. Churchill did not attend the meetings because shortly before the announcement of the new committee he resigned. And Asquith, in Kitchener's absence, had taken

[174] *Ibidem.*

over the reins of the War Office. In Lieutenant General Robertson's opinion, no war decision could be made in the absence of the Chief of Staff.

On 3rd November 1915, Lord John Wynford Philipps Davids, at a meeting of the House of Lords, raised the issue of the role of representative assemblies during the world conflict[175]. General dissatisfaction with the coalition government headed by Asquith prompted speeches in support of a decisive role for the British Parliament even in wartime. Great Britain was one of the few countries in which Parliament could continue its work during military operations. The same cannot be said of the Italian case: during the conflict, the number of sittings of both chambers decreased. Parliamentarians were resigned to playing a marginal role since, with the outbreak of the conflict, most parliamentary prerogatives were suspended or ceded to the government. The executive was given the power to make laws. As a result, the legislature had little or no control over the executive. In both countries, however, there were calls for parliament and the government to discuss the conduct of the war in ad hoc committees. This led to the institution of "*parliamentary control committees*"[176].

Faced with the stalemate in Salonicco, the British government met on 3rd December 1915[177]. During the session, Lord Kitchener informed his colleagues that he would not be responsible for the conduct of the war if it was decided to keep the troops in Salonicco[178]. Kitchener explained in an interview with Douglas Haig, Commander in Chief of the British Army in France, that the British only went to Salonicco to satisfy French demands[179]. Due to the progress of the war in the East, Kitchener lost favour among his ministerial colleagues, but his prestige in the country remained unchanged. As a result of the crisis that erupted following Lord War's declaration and the possibility of Kitchener's downfall, a conference between the two allies

[175] Marco Meriggi, *Parlamenti di guerra (1914-1945): caso italiano e contesto europeo*, Napoli, 2017, p. 113

[176] *Ivi,* p.133

[177] D. J. Dutton, *The Calais Conference of December 1915*, in "The Historical Journal", Vol. 21 N° 1, Cambridge, 1978, pp. 143 - 156

[178] Asquith to George V, 3 December 1915, CAB 37/139/7.

[179] R. Blake, *The private papers of Douglas Haig*, London, 1952, p. 115

was proposed in London or Calais. The two governments agreed to hold the military conference on 5th December in Calais. The conference ended in confusion and disagreement. When the War Committee met on 6th December, Asquith spoke with Kitchener about French intentions[180]. Kitchener replied that Colonel Panouse told him that the French government would not follow the Calais decision to evacuate Thessaloniki until the other two allies, Russia, and Italy, had been consulted. At the same time the French government met and, reviewing the conclusions of the previous day's conference, decided that France had accepted the decision to evacuate[181].

The year 1915 ended with the abandonment of the idea of a rapid victory for the Western Front.

2. Italy between interventionists and neutralists

In Italy, as early as August 1914 society was divided between neutralists and interventionists. The socialists, the Catholics and the Giolittian liberals were the component of society that supported neutrality; while the nationalists, the republicans, the radicals, the major industrial groups - Fiat, Ansaldo and Ilva - and the revolutionary socialists supported the entrance into the war. The interventionists represented a minority of Italian public opinion. The Socialists were against the war for ideological reasons and on 26th July, in the Socialist Party's newspaper, "*l'Avanti*", Benito Mussolini headlined *"Abbasso la Guerra!*" (Down with the war!). The Socialist Party also sought support in European countries through the Socialist International: the idea was to prevent, or at least to delay, the mobilisation of European countries for an imperialist and capitalist war through a general strike. Following the first battles on the western front, many European socialists began to espouse the idea of patriotism. As a result, international support for the Italian Socialist Party dwindled and the idea of a general strike collapsed. On the eve of the war, the socialist Costantino Lazzari

[180] Minutes, CAB 42/6/3.
[181] Poincaré, *Au service*, VII, 312.

published the motto "*Neither join, nor sabotage*". Among those opposed to the war we also find the Catholic movement, supported by Pope Benedict XV.

Some socialist figures, such as Bonomi and Bissolati, faced with the German invasion of Belgium, supported intervention alongside France and England, firmly democratic countries. A new movement was established: 'democratic interventionism'.

At the same time, the republicans set up interventionist committees. The artistic movement in favour of intervention was Futurism, with Marinetti and Boccioni. They led the first revolts against Austria-Hungary in the streets of Milan in September 1914. Benito Mussolini, who in August published anti-war articles in "*L'Avanti*", from October 1914 converted his position from absolute neutrality to active neutrality. His position, disavowed by the socialists, would cost him his job as editor of "*L'Avanti*". Therefore, on 15th November, Mussolini founded a new newspaper: "*Il Popolo d'Italia*"[182]. In support of the war are the nationalists, led by Enrico Corradini and the newspaper "*l'Idea Nazionale*". The nationalists were pushing for Italy to intervene alongside Germany. The nationalists, represented by only five parliamentarians, increased their influence on public opinion thanks to the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio.

3. Italy and the Decision to Enter the War

In early January Karl von Macchio, representative of the Austrian Empire, met with the Italian Foreign Minister, Sidney Sonnino, to discuss the conditions for Italian intervention in the war. The Austrian position was less inclined to meet Italian demands since Stephen Burian took over from Leopold Berchtold at the Foreign Ministry in Vienna on 13th January. Sonnino, for his part, increased his demands to the point of causing a rupture in Italian-Austrian relations. On the Austrian side, Sonnino's behaviour was interpreted as a bluff, and that Italy would not enter the war. At the meantime, on 15th February 1915, the Imperial ambassador received

[182] G. Mammarella e P. Cacace*, op. cit.,* p 72

authorisation to resume dialogue with the British government. On the same day, Cadorna sent a note to the government in which he clarified that "*the moment of our entry into action should be chosen appropriately*", but in making the final decision, the government would not consider military concerns[183]. On 25th February, Sonnino wrote a long letter to Salandra in which he warned the government of the need to begin talks with London as soon as possible, given that those with Bülow and Vienna had now completely stalled[184]. On 1st March, General Cadorna launched preparations for the "*red mobilisation*"[185]. The Italian mobilisation did not pass unnoticed, and the government in Berlin negotiated with Vienna to extend territorial concessions to Italy in order to maintain neutrality. The Austrian Emperor Wilhelm only granted a territorial change in the event of a victory in the war. It seemed to be the resumption of the Italian-Austrian negotiations, but this was not the case. If the Austrian government wanted to wait until the end of the conflict to honour the agreements, the Italian government demanded, as an absolute condition, the immediate execution of the concessions[186]. On 4th March, negotiations between Rome and London resumed, when Foreign Minister Sonnino had sent London the "*telegrammone*"[187]. The telegram submitted by Italy contained the Italian demands. On a territorial level, Italy asked for Trentino, Alto Adige, up to the Brenner Pass, Trieste, the Counties of Gorizia and Gradisca, the Istrian peninsula, half of Dalmatia, Albania divided equally between Italy, Serbia and Greece, and finally, in the case of a partition of Turkish territory, Italy would gain Adalia. On the economic level, the Italian government asked for an immediate loan of 50 million pounds. Finally, on the military front, it demanded cooperation with the French and British fleets against the Austrian fleet in the Adriatic and the Russian offensive in the east. In return,

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[183] G. Rochat, *Alcuni dati sulle occupazioni militari adriatiche durante il governo Nitti*, in "Risorgimento", 1966, 1, pp- 29-45.

[184] G. E. Rusconi, *op. cit.*, p. 125

[185] The mobilisation was called red because of the colour used in the communication documents.

[186] S. Sonnino, *Diario*, Vol. 2, Bari, 1972

[187] The 'telegram' was forwarded on 16 February to Ambassador Imperiali, but without showing it to the British Foreign Office, Sir Grey.
S. Sonnino, *Carteggio 1914-1916,* P. Pastorelli (a cura di), Roma-Bari, 1974, pp. 194-195

Italy was to join the war alongside the Entente no later than one month later[188].

In response to the Italian memorandum, Ambassador Bollati submitted a long letter on 10th March 1915 to Ambassador Avarna, arguing that "*war remains inevitable because our rulers want it at all costs"*[189].

On 27th March Vienna declared its intention to cede the territories of the southern Tyrol and the city of Trento, but Sonnino was not satisfied. Trieste remains the main point of disagreement: for Italy it represents part of the national territory, for the empire it is the Austrian opening on the Adriatic. Sonnino and Salandra gained time before formally breaking off contact with Austria. This behaviour was justified by the low political consensus, the insufficient preparation of the army and the desire to conclude an agreement with London.

On 8th April the Italian government issued with a memorandum to the Austrian government guaranteeing Italian neutrality for the duration of the war[190].

The dispatch of the Memorandum, in a situation of diplomatic double-dealing on the Italian side, was dictated by the Italian desire to conclude an agreement with the Entente in a short time. Only Vienna's acceptance of the Italian conditions would reveal Italy's true intentions[191]. Ambassador Bollati, bewildered by the contents of the Memorandum, writes to Avarna on 14th April:

> I would not have expected an accumulation of demands, one more exaggerated, more humiliating, more offensive than the other. It is a set of conditions which, after a long war, the winner could impose on the enemy completely undone: and we demand

[188] *Ibidem*.
[189] DDI, V, 3, n° 82.
[190] E. G. Rusconi, *op. cit.*, p. 132
[191] Monticone, *op. cit.,* p. 140.

them as the price of maintaining a neutrality to which we are obliged by the treaties[192].

Ambassador Bollati was not wrong.

The lack of communication between Italian politicians and the Italian military led to an operational disorganisation that was already clear in 1914. The Italian army was not prepared for a conflict as costly as the First World War turned out to be. Regarding the situation of the Italian army, E. J. Dillon wrote in the 'Daily Telegraph': "*the outbreak of the present conflict has caught Italy by surprise in a situation of total military unpreparedness. [...] The army was created rather than reorganised*"[193].

On 26th April 1915 the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Grey, the two ambassadors in London of the powers of the Triple Entente, the Frenchman Pierre Paul Cambon and the Russian Alexander Benckendorff, met in London and the Marquis Guglielmo Imperiali, the Italian ambassador in London, signed in utmost secrecy the London Pact, prepared by Salandra and Sonnino. The Pact sanctioned Italy's entry into the war on the side of the Entente within a month. On 1st March, during a meeting of the Council of Ministers, the Foreign Minister denounced the Triple Alliance Treaty and encouraged his colleagues to do the same in anticipation of an agreement with the Western powers. The Council was unaware of the signing of the London Pact, which had taken place five days before Sonnino's speech. Salandra presented the *'fait compl*i' of the London Pact to Parliament the following week. Parliament, the vast majority of whom were neutralists, accepted the King's and the interventionists' *diktat* in order to avoid an institutional crisis[194]. When the support of the majority had fallen, Salandra should have resigned, but thanks to the King's intervention he kept his office. Sonnino and Salandra drew up the London Pact without discussing it in Parliament and without consulting the military leadership. General

[192] DDI, V, 3, n. 349.

[193] E. Ragionieri, *Italia giudicata: 1861-1945*. *Ovvero la storia degli italiani scritta dagli altri.*, Roma-Bari, 1969, p. 441

[194] G. Mammarella e P. Cacace, *op. cit.*, p. 74

Cadorna learned of Italy's commitment to the Entente in the last days of April, without having read the content of the treaty. Moreover, Sonnino and Salandra had not calculated the high military cost of defending the Dalmatian area in their territorial requests[195]. Italian neutrality was approved by Parliament with a vote of confidence on 3rd December 1914 with 413 votes in favour and 49 against[196].

On 4thMarch the Italian ambassador in Vienna was ordered to announce that Italy was no longer bound to the Triple Alliance. Austria and Germany replied that they did not want to abandon the treaty.

In this context, Giolitti tried to take a decisive role in maintaining neutrality or allying himself with the Triple Alliance, because for him "*breaking the treaty and breaking his word is the most serious thing of all*"[197]. Ambassador Avarna in Vienna also wrote to Ambassador Bollati about the hope that was arousing in Vienna that Giolitti would intervene decisively to maintain neutrality and avoid war[198]. The crisis in which Italy entered ended with the decision in favour of the interventionists, thanks to the agitation in the streets and the King's commitment to sign the London Pact. The Chamber of Deputies, by secret ballot, approved by a majority of those present the law to cede powers to the government[199]. Giolitti had failed. He concluded his speech to Malagodi on 18th May with: *"the ditch has been jumped. I do not doubt that the country and the army will do their duty. The test will be harsh and long*"[200].

On 13th May Salandra announced his resignation. On 23rd May Italy sent an ultimatum only to the government in Vienna, with Berlin interrupting diplomatic relations until the summer of 1916. On 24th May, the first Italian

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[195] Lieutenant Colonel Alberico Albricci wrote a memorandum to Cadorna: 'the importance of a purely territorial occupation of Dalmatia with no other objectives is more political than military. A stable occupation should be pushed to absolutely well-defended lines [...]. These lines form a really strong barrier [...] but it is a good 250 kilometres long'.
Cfr. G. Rochat, *Alcuni dati sulle occupazioni militari adriatiche durante il governo Nitti*, in "Il Risorgimento", 1966, n.1, p.43.

[196] Cfr. A Monticone, *La Germania e la neutralità italiana (1914-1915)*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1971.

[197] G. E. Rusconi, *op. cit.*, p. 138

[198] DDI, V, 3, n°682.

[199] G. Sabbatucci, V. Vidotto, *Storia d'Italia*, Vol. IV, Roma-Bari, 1997, p.18

[200] G. E. Rusconi, *op. cit.*, p. 140

troops crossed the border: the Kingdom of Italy formally entered the war. The army was ready for rapid and decisive offensive operations, but from the beginning of June it turned into a static war of attrition: the positions remained unchanged until the disastrous battle of Caporetto in 1917. On the same day, the *Comando Supremo del Regio Esercito*, arising from the mobilisation of the Command of the General Staff Corps was made up of three main bodies[201]: the Office of the Chief of Army Staff, the Operations Department and the Headquarters[202]. After the crisis of May 1915 - caused by Salandra's resignation, Giolitti's appointment to the Ministry and the government's assumption of full powers to defend the state - and Italy's entry into the war, the disharmonious configuration of the state's powers stiffened. The triangle of power was made up of the King, the executive - in the hands of the government and the Chief of Staff[203] - with full nominal powers over the military structure, and finally the legislative power - kept in the dark both by the government on the London Pact and by the Supreme Command, since the plans were covered by military secrecy. Once the crisis was over, Foreign Minister Sonnino presented to Parliament the diplomatic documentation, the famous Green Book, which denounced the Austrian unwillingness to reach a sincere territorial compromise with the Italian government.

The Chief of Staff's command was renamed *Comando Supremo* (Supreme Command) following mobilisation, and was divided into the Commander, the General Staff, the Commands of the Support Arms - artillery and genio, then in 1917 the air force was included - the commands of the logistic

[201] These were at the level of a general division of a ministry or an internal department of the general staff, thus consisting of several offices.
A. Gionfrida, *Inventario del fondo E-4 carteggio G.M. del Comando Supremo – 1° Guerra Mondiale*, 27 june 2016, p. 3

[202] Command of the Army Staff: general norms about the constitution and functioning of the mobilized supreme command, April 1915, pp. 7-10 and circular no. 935 of the Supreme Command - Operations Department - Secretariat Office, dated 20 May 1915, obj. Office correspondence to the Supreme Command Mobilized", both in Archivio Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito

[203] The Chief of Staff became Supreme Commander on 24 May 1915.

services, or *intendenza*, and the general headquarters[204]. The various offices were also divided up: the Ordering and Mobilisation Office and the Technical Office were placed under the command of the Colonel of the Secretariat; and to relieve the Ordering Office, the Operations Office was placed under the direction of the Secretariat Office[205]. During Cadorna's period in command of the General Staff, the Intelligence Service did not have great freedom of action. The main task was to capture and collect information: then this information, when strategic in nature, was communicated directly to General Cadorna or to the War Situation Office, while other information was entrusted to the commanders, who were knowledgeable about the combat field and the army available and capable of interpreting the news. Subsequently, the structure was modified by memo no. 37 of 13th February 1915 "Constitution of the Supreme Command" by the Chief of Army Staff. The tasks were reassigned: the Defence Office was responsible for the study of fortifications and communication routes. The Ordering Office handled communications between the Chief of the Army Staff and the armed forces. The Secretariat Office was responsible for maintaining communications concerning mobilisation between the Chief of Staff, the King, the Government and the Minister of War. General Cadorna modified the structure of the Supreme Command with the aim of making it strictly top-down, of restricted composition and dependent on Cadorna's directives, with whom he studied and planned war operations. From the beginning of the conflict until May 1915, the Office that dealt with the preparation of war operations was made up of Colonel Montanari, Major Roberto Bencivenga and Marshal Tedone. Then, when Italy entered the war, the Secretariat Office included two officers in charge of operations, one for artillery and munitions and one for general affairs. The Chief of Staff[206],

[204] *Funzione del Comando Supremo,* promemoria n° 41 del 7 gennaio 1915, Ufficio del Capo di Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito.

[205] F. Cappellano, B. Di Martino, *La catena di comando nella Grande Guerra*. *Procedure e strumenti per il comando e controllo nell'esperienza del Regio Esercito 1915-1918,* Verona, 2019, pp. 26-28

[206] The figure of the Chief of Staff of the Army was established by decree no. 337 of 28th March 1915 and the powers defined by the subsequent decree no. 383 of 1st April 1915: to assist the Chief of Staff in discharging his duties and to take over command in case of absence.

General Porro, was thus excluded from the preparation of plans. Once the internal organisation had been structured, the external relations between the Chief of the Army Staff and the King, the Cabinet and the Minister of War were regulated by decree no. 676 of 23rd May 1915[207]. In April, following the mobilisation order, the Command of the General Staff issued the circular "*General rules for the constitution and functioning of the mobilised Supreme Command*", which regulated the deployment of the units in the war zones: in May in Treviso[208] and in June in Udine[209]. The Office of the Army Chief of Staff[210] together with the Operations Department[211] and Headquarters[212], they formed the Supreme Mobile Command.

As the British experience showed, despite the mediating role of the Prime Minister, it was necessary to set up a body to take decisions of an operational nature. The war had revolutionised the institutional structure: lengthy collegial meetings could not meet the rapid military demands. For this reason, the military sectors expanded to include civil sectors. Law No. 671 of 22nd May 1915 stripped Parliament of its prerogatives in favour of the

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[207] A. Gionfrida, *Inventario del fondo E-4, carteggio G.M. del Comando Supremo – 1° Guerra Mondiale,* 27 giugno 2016

[208] The order to assemble was sent by secret communication No. 2 of 19 May 1915 from the Operations Department Secretariat.
Instructions concerning the mobilisation of the Supreme Command.

[209] Very secret communication n° 3 issued on 22 May 1915. The General Intendancy was moved from Rome to Treviso the following week.
Instructions concerning the mobilisation of the Supreme Command.

[210] The Colonel of the General Staff, Cadorna's secretary, headed the Office of the Chief of Staff. This consisted of the Secretariat, the Ordnance and Mobilisation Office, the Technical Office, and relied on a group of officers at the disposal of the Office. his task was to communicate orders to the various offices.

[211] The Operations Department was structured into: Secretariat Office, Various Affairs, Armed Forces, Information and Cipher, War Situation, Air Services. The Department, headed by the General Officer in charge of the General Staff, was responsible for gathering information on the battlefield.
Ibid.

[212] Headquarters was responsible for logistics, administration and security. The Headquarters included an artillery train section, the Administration Office, a postal, medical and veterinary unit, canteen, a printing workshop, the General Artillery Command, the General Command of the Engineers, the High Command of the Royal Carabinieri and the Under-Secretary General for Civil Affairs. The latter, thanks to the delegation issued on 19 May 1915, enjoyed political and administrative power in the occupied civilian war zones. On 26 May 1915, the Advancement and Discipline Department was established and added, with headquarters in Castelfranco Veneto, divided into the Secretariat and Rewards Office, the Discipline Office, the Advancement Office and the Justice Office. Ibid, pp. 32-36.

Cabinet. During the Great War, the principle of 'check and balance', which was peculiar of parliamentary systems, disappeared.

4. The Italian Army in 1915

General Cadorna, from August 1914 until May 1915, was concerned with preparing the army according to pre-war plans. The units available at the time of mobilisation should have been ten divisions: new units were created to replace those lost in Libya. Cadorna's focus was on officers and artillery. Thanks to accelerated courses, 17,000 career officers were available in the summer of 1915. The organisation of the artillery was improved, and the production of new equipment increased. Despite Cadorna's improvements to the military structure, when the army was deployed to the front, it was not ready until a month and a half after war was declared against Austria. This was due to the rigidity of mobilisation plans in 1914. The Italian army in the summer of 1915 consisted of: large mobilised units divided into 4 armies, 14 army corps, 35 infantry divisions and 4 cavalry divisions. The infantry consisted of 146 regiments and 438 infantry battalions, together with 58 bersaglieri battalions and 52 alpine battalions. The Royal Navy consisted of 11 battleships, 12 cruisers, 58 destroyers and 21 submarines. In all there were 548 battalions. The cavalry consisted of 30 regiments with 171 squadrons. Finally, the air force[213] was divided into 10 aerostatic sections, 12 aeroplane squadrons[214] and 5 airships[215]. In total, the army force mobilised at the beginning of July consisted of 31,000 officers, 1,058,042

[213] In Italy, no proportionate funds had ever been dedicated to aviation compared to other European nations. In addition, by the winter of 1914, total expenditure on aviation was reduced from 14 to 12 million. Another problem inherent in Italian aviation was personnel. To solve this problem, Royal Decree No. 11 of 7 January 1915 was issued, establishing the Aeronautical Corps. At the same time, the category of 'civilian technical specialist personnel for the Air Force' was established. Finally, the Royal Decree allocated a special fund for aeronautics amounting to 11,500,000 lire.
Ufficio storico dell'esercito, *L'esercito italiano nella Grande Guerra 1915-1918,* Vol. 1, *Le forze belligeranti*, Roma, 1927, p. 128-130

[214] *Ivi,* p. 133

[215] As of 24 May 1915, the available airships were divided into: three at the disposal of the army, and two units at the disposal of the navy.
Ivi, p. 130

troops, 10,957 civilians and 216,018 quadrupeds[216]. Considering the forces deployed in the interior of the country, the force of arms rose to 1,556,000 men[217]. The army was divided into arms and combat corps, non-combat elements and services. The former was divided into: Royal Carabinieri, Infantry, Bersaglieri, Alpini, Cavalry, Country Artillery, Horse Artillery, Pack Artillery, Mountain Artillery, Heavy Field Artillery, Fortress Artillery, Anti-Aircraft Artillery, Air Force, and the Engineer Corps. Non-combat elements were divided into territorial militia and garrison companies. Finally, the services were designed to meet any needs the army at the front might have, such as an ammunition reserve, hospitals, doctors and vets and a section for food supplies.

The Italian army entered the campaign on 24th May 1914, by order of King Vittorio Emanuele III and was structured in four armies, plus the command of the Carnia Zone, the command of the Cavalry Corps, and an aliquot of "*troops at the disposal of the Supreme Command*"[218]. Relations between Cadorna, Chief of the General Staff, and Vittorio Emanuele III, King of the Kingdom of Italy, were regulated by Royal Decree no. 676 of 23rd May 1915:

> As from today, Our orders concerning the operations of the Army and the Army and their units shall be communicated by Our command to the Army and the Army respectively by the Chief of Staff of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Navy, who shall put them into effect in the parts concerning land or sea operations and shall inform the respective Ministers of War and the Navy of the provisions which may affect them[219].

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[216] *Ivi,* 168

[217] Ufficio storico dell'esercito, *L'esercito italiano nella Grande Guerra 1915-1918,* Vol. 1, *Le forze belligeranti*, Roma, 1927.

[218] It comprised 14 army corps, 35 infantry divisions, 1 division of bersaglieri, 4 of cavalry and 2 alpine groups.
Ivi, p. 166

[219] *Ivi,* p.167

The General Intendancy Department administered all the services of the mobilised army and was under the direct command of the Supreme Command.

In June 1915, an information and liaison service were established with the Supreme Command in Udine. The task of this office was to keep General Cadorna, as Chief of the General Staff, continually informed of events in the battle. The information was sent by officers not engaged on the battlefield, so that the news was not subject to the emotions of war[220]. The centre of the office was headed by Colonel Giuseppe Pennella, at the time head of the secretariat of the Office of the Chief of the Army Staff. He, supported by three officers, had the task of reporting troop deployments, operation orders and all phases of combat in detail. The speed and efficiency of communications from the front to the Information and Liaison Service Office in Udine were the main factors in the success of the service. To meet the needs of the war, Royal Decree No. 993 of 26th June 1915 was issued. The plants that produced the necessary war supplies came under the control of the military authorities. At the same time, in order to manage the supply needs of arms and ammunition, Royal Decree No. 1065 of 9th July 1915 established the Undersecretary for Arms and Munition[221], entrusted to General Alfredo Dallolio, under the authority of the Ministry of War. The increase in industrial production for war purposes and the administration of this by military authorities gave rise to an industrial mobilisation body, approved by legislative decree no. 1277 of 2nd August 1915. Industrial mobilisation came under the control of the Central

[220] Comando Supremo, Reparto Operazioni, Ufficio Armate, *Servizio d'informazioni e di collegamento*, circolare a stampa in data 4 giugno 1915.

[221] The Undersecretary for Arms and Munitions became Minister for Arms and Munitions by Royal Decree No. 980 of 16 June 1917.
Archivio centrale dello Stato, *Ministero per le armi e munizioni. Decreti di ausiliarietà*, A. G. Ricci, F. R. Scardaccione (a cura di), Roma, 1991, p. 7

Committee[222] and the Regional Committees[223], which were presented earlier. In order for a plant to come under state and military control, it had to be declared an auxiliary plant, by joint decision of the Ministry of War, Navy and Treasury. The functions and duties of the Committees remained unchanged until the suppression of the industrial mobilisation services by legislative decree no. 468 of 18th March 1919. Establishments declared auxiliary were subject to military jurisdiction and the control of the establishment came under the control of the Regional Committees.

Cadorna, in preparing his war plans, said "*faremo un piccolo asalto a la baioneta*"[224]. The failure of Cadorna's plan in 1915 was due to the poor preparation of the Italian troops, incomplete training and insufficient weapons and ammunition. In addition, he advocated the static nature of a plan that did not conform to the situation in the first months of 1915. In addition, the original design was based on an offensive tactic that in the course of the work would change to a defensive tactic, altering the substance of the plan itself. However, Cadorna could not be blamed for everything: he was kept in the dark about the Triple Alliance's denunciation of 4th May and the French government published in mid-May the timetable for Italian intervention under the London Pact. Despite the fact that the largest war machine ever created by the Kingdom of Italy was set up, neither political nor military power was able to guide it through. On 26th July, the Foreign Minister spoke to the journalist Malagodi admitting the failure of Cadorna's plan. He concluded:

[222] The Central Committee was an advisory and deliberative body and administered the work of the Regional Committees and discussed the Regional Committees' proposals for increasing the production of the mobilised factories. The Central Committee, headed by the undersecretary, consisted of a general officer from the army or navy, a state councillor, an official from the Ministry of the Treasury and four people from outside the organisation.

Ivi, p. 8

[223] The Regional Committees were composed of a president, a general officer of the army or navy, two civilian members, and four members - with only an advisory function - selected from among industrialists and workers.

Ibid.

[224] A. Frescura, *Il diario di un imboscato*, Milano, Mursia, 1981, p. 21

> It is now evident that this war is quite different from those of the past and will be reduced to a struggle of positions and attrition without brilliant and decisive strategic movements. [...] The public must be made to understand that things are going to take a long time; there will certainly be a war next year too, unless there is a surprise[225].

Sonnino's prediction turned out to be correct.
Angelo Gatti in 1917 commented "*Cadorna's war was the one he had in his mind, not the real one".*
On 23rd June 1915, one month after the ultimatum had been sent, Italian troops clashed with Austrian troops on the Isonzo. The objective of the Italian operational plans was to conquer Ljubljana, the heart of the Habsburg Empire. But Italian mobilisation was slow and cumbersome with serious logistical problems. The delay stalled the possibility of surprising the Austrians at the front. On 16th June the Italians conquered Monte Nero, a strategic position across the river Isonzo. The Italian assault, carried out with the bayonet, was surprised by barbed wire and machine guns and was a terrible event for Italy. On 7th July, the day on which the inter-allied conference was convened in Chantilly, it was ordered to suspend operations: the human toll was unpredictable and equal to 6% of the force employed. From 18th July to 3rd August, Cadorna ordered the attack and the "*second push*" took place. The consequences of the first two battles of the Isonzo were impressive: the exhausted army had lost most of its men, the territorial conquests were minimal, and ammunition began to run out. All the conditions of stalemate warfare were in place, the only option left to the soldiers was to entrench. The guiding principle of trench warfare was to defend and not to attack. At the end of the summer, troops from both sides clashed between 18th October and 4th November, and then between 10th November and 2nd December. These are remembered as the third and fourth battles of the Isonzo.

[225] G. E. Rusconi, *op. cit.*, p. 172

CHAPTER V. The year of the great offensives: 1916

1. Great Britain, the Offensives of 1916, and the Relationship with Allied Heads of State

From the beginning of the war until the fighting of 1915, Britain relied on voluntary recruitment to establish the two forces. Between August 1914 and December 1915, 2.4 million people enlisted voluntarily. Apart from the Derby Scheme and Kitchener's propaganda, the number of enlisted men was not sufficient to meet the needs of war. On 27th January 1916 the Military Service Act was passed, introducing compulsory conscription for all unmarried men of eligible age and revoking the provisions that allowed a soldier to choose his own battalion and not to be deployed overseas without his consent. It brought with it two reforms to the conscription system: firstly, the introduction of compulsory conscription to make up the army abroad, and secondly, increasing the homogeneity of soldiers within the British Expeditionary Force. The Military Service Act became law on 10th February 1916.

The first major battle of 1916 was the one fought at Verdun, France, from 21st February to 15th December 1916. This was an offensive involving four million soldiers, first a quiet sector. In December 1915, the German armies were ready to launch their 'doomsday' plan, the objective being the conquest of Verdun, considered a key stage in the march towards the French capital. Moreover, according to the vision of the German Chief of Staff, General von Falkenhayn, to protect Verdun, the French commanders would deploy all their forces. The German strategy behind the attack was a long war of attrition. Contrary to Joffre's assessments, the Germans will attack Verdun. On 12th February, the German army is ready to attack but because of bad weather they have to wait. The French, understanding the period, reinforce the lines of trenches. Conditions improved and on 21st February the Germans launched the attack. In five days, they managed to

open a breach on the west bank of the Meuse[226]. The situation on the French front is critical. It is now important not to retreat and to preserve the town of Verdun. Resistance becomes the only objective: a defensive action devised by General Pétain. On 9th March, the German army retreated and became entrenched. It was to be a long and exhausting war between two trenches, with no hope of victory on either side. In July there was the last crisis for the French army. On 24th June, the French won strategically: the British were finishing preparations to attack the Germans on the Somme on 1st July. The German trenches would no longer receive artillery supplies and soldiers, these were transferred to prepare the defensive on the Somme. Verdun and the Somme will become the emblem of modern warfare, of the First World War.

The second major Anglo-French offensive was the Battle of the Somme[227] between July and November 1916. The decision for an inter-allied offensive attack in the Somme was discussed and planned in December 1915 at a conference in Chantilly convened by General Joffre, the French Commander-in-Chief. Initially, the date of the attack was set for March 1916, but due to the unpreparedness of the Russian troops, it was decided to postpone the attack in July. The principle of the attack consisted of a combined offensive on the Italian, Russian and French fronts, carried out with the least amount of intermission between them[228]. The three allies, France, Italy, and Russia were exhausted by the clashes with the Central Empires; therefore, Joffre was pushing hard for British support. Sir Douglas Haig, who succeeded Sir John French as commander of the British Expeditionary Force, accepted Joffre's plans to assemble the two armies on the Somme River on 14th February. As planned, the Anglo-French offensive began on 1st July[229]. The British effort was greater because of continuing French losses to the Germans at Verdun. The English tactic was based on

[226] B. H. Liddell Hart, *op. cit.*, pp. 323 - 337

[227] B. H. Liddel Hart, *op. cit.*, Scena III: l'offensiva sulla Somme.

[228] Public Record Office, CAB 28/1.

[229] Joffre and Haig met at British HQ on 28 May. On this occasion, the date for the joint offensive on the Somme was discussed. It was decided for the 1st of July.
R. Blake, *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig 1914-1919*, London, 1952, p. 145 AFGG 4/2.

the use of cannons, thanks to which they opened a mobile barrage, supported by covering fire. Resistance was inexorable; for the English it was a massacre: on the evening of 1st July out of 120,000 men, only half survived. The British, at the end of July, introduce the tanks - Mark I model - on the battlefield. Unfortunately, this did not produce the desired results. The lessons learned from Verdun were applied on the Somme. The "*bite and hold*"[230] tactics: after the experience of the Somme the General Staff favoured the offensive. Two manuals were published: the first, in December 1916, SS 135 *'instructions for the training of division for offensive actions*', the second in February 1917, SS 143, *'instructions for the training of platoons for offensive actions'*[231]. The note to the armies published on 3 June by the GQG advised against attacks by excessively dense attack formations. The front line was to be attacked by the smallest number of troops, with the rest of the army in the second line in case of reinforcements. General Rawlinson formulated the attack so that there would be 8 or 9 men per yard[232].

After four months of attack, the result was a substantial draw: both armies exhausted themselves without gaining any ground. But both sides learned a great lesson: for the powers of the entente how to structure an attack, for Germany how to defend itself, economising on resources. The war was ended first by the British, on 18 November, then by the French a month later.

The French commanders' perception of the British army's plans was based on two factors: first that the British army would refuse to fight for the whole year of 1916, and second to wait until the French-Russian armies could sustain the war, so that they could deploy their troops at the best time and reap the greatest spoils. The assumption that the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, along with other members of the Asquith government were waiting for the best time to go to war was supported by David French:

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[230] TNA WO 9158/18, 2 November 1915, General Staff Note on the situation.

[231] *Ibidem*.

[232] R. Prior, T. Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: The military Carreer of Sir Henry Rawlinson 1914-1918*, Oxford, 1992, p. 143

> Kitchener raised the New Armies in the expectation that by late 1916 the land forces of all the continental belligerents would be exhausted. But Britain's army would be unbloodied and in early 1917 it would be able to intervene decisively on the continent. After the British army had inflicted a final and crushing defeat upon the Central Powers, British statesmen would be able to grasp the lion's share of the spoils and dictate terms not just to their enemies but also to their allies[233].

Evidence was presented to refute this view. Although Kitchener had repeatedly argued that the French army was unreliable, he sent large numbers of divisions to France throughout the war as soon as they had received basic training. Kitchener's resistance was *"we must wage war ad we must not as we would like"*: he was against the idea of sending untrained men to the front. In addition, the facts show the Secretary of State for War's support for the French plan on the Somme, when he sent new divisions of the British Army weeks before the offensive. The second perception was that Britain was forced to support the French army on the Somme. Several historians over the years have commented on Haig's choice as a decision dictated by external pressure. In the words of two historians, the first Sir J.E. Edmonds commented: "*It would appear that if the British Commander-in-Chief had had a free hand and had not been obliged to co-operate with the French, he would have made his offensive in the northern area and not on the Somme*"[234]. The second one, in 1996, Briand Bond explained Haig's choice by writing: "*In 1916, French pressure on their ally to relieve Verdun had forced Sir Douglas Haig to attack prematurely in adverse conditions*"[235]. The reality was not: Britain entered the war following the invasion of neutral Belgium. This was the reason for the intervention, but the British wanted to

[233] D. French, *The strategy of the Lloyd George coalition 1916-1918*, Oxford, 1995, p.4
[234] Sir J.E. Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1916*, London, 1932, p.32.
[235] B. Bond, *Worse than the Somme? Time Literary Supplement,* London, 1996, p.4.

protect their own interests, ensuring the return of the balance of power in Europe. Moreover, the British Expeditionary Force was composed of fewer units than the European armies and needed a stable army like the French to be able to fight the enemy effectively and ensure its survival[236]. This support could not be provided by the Belgian army. The foreign minister, Sir Grey, also supported the idea of an intervention alongside France: *"The interest of Britain required that we should not stand aside, while France fought alone in the West, but must support her"* continued "*it is against British interests that France should be wiped out as a Great Power*"[237]. Asquith's view was also supported by the two war ministers: Churchill and Kitchener. The latter said, "*if we were to break with France the war would be over*"[238].

Finally, the third major British sea offensive was fought in the waters of Jutland, off Denmark: the first - and only - naval battle of the Great War. Until then, the fleets, moored in ports, acted as a deterrent. But in the spring, the German High Seas Fleet approaches the Danish coast to attract the British Home Fleet. The two fleets are different: the Germans prefer battleships, slow and heavy but well-protected vessels; on the other hand, the British prefer fast ships, equipped with cannons but more likely to sink. On June 1st, the fleets - Scheer's and Von Hipper's, and Jellicoe's and Beatty's - opened fire. The British enjoyed maritime superiority over the other powers, especially its rival, but not only. In August 1914, on Russian shores, the German light cruiser Magdeburg sank, and Russian petty officers had found the German codes and cipher without Berlin knowing about it. Thus, during the naval battle, the British commanders, having succeeded in deciphering the German messages, had at their disposal what is of incalculable value in warfare: enemy information. In six hours of interminable attacks, the British navy gained a strategic victory thanks to

[236] W. Philpott, *Anglo-French Relations and strategy on the Western Front 1914-1916*, London, 1996, p. 14

[237] M. E. Brock, *H. H. Asquith: Letters to Venetia Stanley*, Oxford, 1985, p. 146

[238] Secretary's Note of a Meeting of the Dardanelles Committee, 25 October 1915, CAB42/4/17, p.5

two fast manoeuvres that allowed an attack with all available weapons. At the same time, the German fleet won tactically. From then on, the British fleet would use the strategy of the naval blockade to break the German home front.

1916 was a militarily challenging year both on land and at sea. In December, Lloyd George replaced Asquith as head of the Cabinet. According to the new prime minister, the composition of the War Commission - renamed the War Cabinet - was too large and had to be reduced. Therefore, the number of members was reduced to four: Andrew Bonar Law, Arthur Henderson, L. Milner and Lord Curzon. The War Cabinet administered the conduct of the British war until the armistice.

> With the advent of the new government, a modification was introduced whereby the supreme direction of the war was entrusted to a small War Cabinet, freed from all administrative duties, and yet in the closest touch with all departmental ministers, while administrative responsibility was placed in the hands of Ministers who were left free to devote their whole time to this aspect of governmental work"[239].

Lloyd George's government was identified with the new War Cabinet. The two unofficial members of the War Cabinet, Lord Milner and Mr Henderson, were the recipients of much criticism, including on 3rd February 1917 in the House of Commons. The issue debated was the funds allocated, but once voted, the Cabinet received formal budgetary approval[240]. The British administration was described as "*amateur government*"[241]. The knowledge and technical training of cabinet members was poor or absent. Thanks to the War, it became clear that knowledge was a prerequisite for those leading

[239] Cd, 9005, pp, vii, 1
R. Livingston Schuyler, *The British War Cabinet*, in "Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 33, N° 3, 1918
[240] Lord Lansdown, when a member of the coalition cabinet without portfolio, received no slary; Hansard, fifth series, XC, p. 481.
[241] S. Low, *Governance of England*, Chapter XI.

the government. In its composition, the new regime favoured members with a reputation as technical experts rather than political figures[242]. Another innovation of the new War Cabinet was the abandonment of secrecy and the publication of an official report, a task entrusted to the secretariat. In addition, the latter had to communicate decisions to the departments concerned so that they could be implemented: a system of liaison officers was set up to link the War Cabinet with the government departments. The Cabinet is a unit in relation to both the sovereign and Parliament. Sidney Low declared that the legislature had lost control over the executive, reversing the balance of power. He added: "*In our modern practice the Cabinet is scarcely ever turned out the office by Parliament whatever it does*"[243]. Since the outbreak of the war, the government has changed Prime Minister twice, and in both cases the House of Commons has assisted without taking an active role. Sideny Low said "*The House did not vote Mr-Lloyd George, Lord Curzon, and Lord Milner into office; it did not vote Mr. Asquith out, for the late coalition ministry had an unbroken majority in the Chamber when its Chief resigned in defence to what was understood to be the voice of public opinion*"[244]. The lack of effective control of the War Cabinet by the legislature brought with it another consequence. Before December 1916, every member of the Cabinet had to sit in the House of Parliament and the Prime Minister, if not a member of Parliament, had to lead the House of Commons. With the new restricted War Cabinet, this practice ceased: they ceased to participate in parliamentary debates. The Prime Minister's seat in the House of Commons was delegated to the Chancellor of the Exchequer[245].

Relations between the generals and politicians in London were very tense because of the great cost of the battles. Lloyd George and Churchill openly

[242] Dicey, *The New English War Cabinet as a Constitutional Experiment,* in "Harvard Law Review", Vol. XXX, p. 790

[243] S. Low, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-81

[244] Sidney Low, *The Imperial Constitution: The New Phase*, Nineteenth Century, vol. lxxxii, p. 242.

[245] Cd. 9005, p.1; Hansard, fifth series, XCIII, p. 2289; XCIV, p. l422; XCV, p. 1600; Low, "The Imperial Constitution: The New Phase," Nineteenth Century, vol. lxxxii, p. 244.

criticised the actions of Haig and his generals. These tensions soured the difficult relations between the British civilians and military.

2. The great offensives in Italy and the turmoil between politicians and the military

In Italy, since the early 1900s there had been no relationship between the military and politicians. This difficult communication showed all its difficulties with the advent of the First World War. In addition, 1915 did not end satisfactorily for Italy. On the 26th of January, the Council of Ministers met and discussed the discontent over the failure to conquer Gorizia. The only one sitting at this meeting competent in tactics and strategy was War Minister Zuppelli and replying to his colleagues he wrote in a memorial addressed to President Salandra a few days earlier[246]. The document collected criticism of General Cadorna's actions. Between the Chief of Staff and the minister of war there was clear dissent and disagreement with the operations. Sonnino proposed to convene a Council of Ministers and Generals to discuss war actions. However, the Council of Ministers could only be formed in peacetime[247] and a few days later Salandra and Sonnino realised their mistake during a meeting at the Quirinale. In order to reach an agreement with General Cadorna, Zuppelli was sent to the front on 6th February to discuss the contents of the memorial with the head of state. In it, Zuppelli called for a jointly agreed political and military direction of the war. The passage of time and the severe conditions on the battlefield caused the plan to crumble. There was a clash between Cadorna and Salandra over the War Minister's resignation. Salandra requested the intervention of the King to judge the unconstitutionality of Cadorna's request. Within a couple of weeks, on 9 March, Minister Zuppelli resigned and was

[246] Copy of the memorial preserved in Lucera, *Carte Salandra*, C.2.81, n°19
[247] F. Martini, *Diario*, (26 january 1916), pp.620-621

replaced by General Morrone[248]. In this episode it became clear that the government in Udine was much more influential than the one in Rome.
The Austrian Chief of Staff, Conrad von Hötzendorf, had in the years leading up to 1914 always made proposals to the Austro-Hungarian Emperor, Franz Joseph, to pre-emptively attack the Kingdom of Italy. Proposals were made first in 1908 and then in 1911, when Italy was engaged in the colonial war against Libya, but the emperor disapproved of both proposals. He was against attacking an ally, Conrad was removed from the leadership of the General Staff. The situation changed in 1915 when Italy sided with the Entente countries. Meanwhile, Conrad resumed his command. In the spring of 1916, he devised a plan of attack against Italy, the Strafexpedition or punitive expedition. The offensive was designed to attack from the Trentino to the Veneto, entering Italian territory and routing the Italian defensive lines and then turning the armies towards the Isonzo, where the Italian troops were stationed. Conrad's aim, who was engaged in two wars on opposing fronts, was to defeat the weaker enemy, Italy, and then concentrate all his forces on the eastern frontier. On 10th December 1915 during a summit in Teschen, Conrad with the support of the Austrian Emperor proposed a joint attack to the new German Chief of Staff. Falkenhayn refused the proposal. Conrad did not give up his plan but had to rewrite it. The two Austrian armies, the Third and the Eleventh, numbered 157,000 men and were deployed on the border in May. Cadorna, who had underestimated the Austrian preparation against the Italian front in the Trentino, expecting an attack on the Karst, was caught unprepared. On 11th May, four days before the offensive, the commander of the army in Trentino, Brusati, resigned. On 15th May 1916 the Austrian offensive began. The first lines at Rovereto and Carbonare were routed, and it was time for the infantry to attack. The Austrian conquests on Italian territory threatened the civilian population for the first time since the beginning of the conflict. Because of the worsening situation in Trentino, on 23rd May 1916 General Cadorna ordered the recall of an entire division from Valona and a division from Libya. The order was

[248] Cfr. Lucera, n° 43, telegramma Salandra al re del 9 marzo 1916.

also telegraphed to the Prime Minister, Salandra, and to the Ministry of War, Lieutenant General Morrone. The Council of Ministers did not oppose the order, but Salandra added that, for prestige, Vlore had to be protected from the enemy and any future decisions had to be taken after agreement[249]. Salandra proposed convening General Cadorna and Porro, the four army commanders, the Prime Minister, the two military ministers and two other members of the Council of Ministers[250] in Padua. General Cadorna opposed the idea. On 25th May he sent a telegram to Salandra in which he assumed all responsibility on condition that the decision remained in his hands:

> The advice of war in difficult circumstances only serves to further compromise the situation with the diversity of opinions that create uncertainties and divide responsibilities and induce procrastination while a lightning decision is required. As long as I have the honour of enjoying the confidence of His Majesty the King and the Government, the responsibility is mine and I assume it entirely[251].

In conclusion, he added that he would accept a meeting with the Prime Minister and ministers, excluding Porro and the commanders[252]. Sonnino and other ministers pushed to replace Cadorna in command and delegated the final decision[253] to King Victor Emmanuel III. In the meantime, the Salandra government fell in June 1916: the Prime Minister resigned as his domestic policy plan failed and the war proved long and difficult. Boselli was presented as his replacement, but he did not enjoy the full support of Parliament. Senator L. Albertini wrote about Boselli that he was "*a man who slipped away in discussion without being able to grasp his thoughts,*

[249] Ministero della Guerra, Esercito italiano nella Grande Guerra, Vol. III, tomo 2, Ufficio Storico, Roma, 1936 p.153
[250] Cfr. Lucera, pp.702-704
[251] Ministero della Guerra, Esercito italiano nella Grande Guerra, Vol. III, tomo 2, Ufficio Storico, Roma, 1936, pp. 153-154
[252] L. Cadorna, *La guerra alla fronte italiana fino all'arresto sulla linea della Piave e del Grappa*, Treves, Milano, 1921, pp. 228-229
[253] A. Gatti, *Caporetto*, Il Mulino, Milano, 2014, p.160

because he had no clearly defined thought and preferred to draw rules for his decisions from his environment and circumstances"[254]. General Cadorna also frowned upon the work of the new government. Leonida Bissolati, minister without portfolio, was appointed to the new government to act as a liaison between the government and the Supreme Command. Cadorna opposed the intermediary figure, stating that only the head of the Supreme Command could have direct relations with the government. Bissolati's weak character could not withstand the will of a determined Cadorna. Moreover, Cadorna called Minister Bianchi back to Prime Minister Boselli for the inspection he carried out in some hospitals in the Isonzo area[255]. On 28th May, the Austrian troops launched their second offensive, advancing up to the Altopiano dei Sette comuni. Cadorna realised the real possibility of invasion. The Italian Chief of Staff hastily recalled the reserves to the front. The conquest of Cengio[256] by the enemies decreed the end of the offensive against Italy and the beginning of Cadorna's dismissal[257] against the officers. Three reasons prompted Conrad to suspend the offensive: firstly, the troops clashed with the Italian defensive lines on the plateau, without meeting with victory; secondly, Cadorna allocated a substantial number of reserves on the plain; thirdly, the advance on Italian territory did not allow for effective supply. In addition, Russian troops continued to attack on the eastern front. But Conrad was adamant in his choice and on 15 June he launched his last offensive in the easternmost part of the plateau. The next day, Conrad ordered the end of the advance and the retreat.

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[254] F.S. Nitti, *Rivelazioni: dramatis personae*, Edizioni scientifiche italiane, Napoli, 1948, pp. 488-489

[255] ACS, *Presidenza*, circolare del Comando supremo dell'11 agosto 1916, n.2681

[256] The report of 9 June 1916 by the liaison officer of the I Corps raised the problem of the high number of men missing compared to the number of casualties as a clear sign of the suboptimal conduct of the war and the morale of the troops.
Bulletin dated 15 June 1816 from the War Situation and Operations Office sent to the Secretariat of the Chief of the Army Staff.

[257] Cadorna's policy of systematic dismissals destroyed the solidity of the army. This policy was at the centre of the accusations made against General Cadorna after the defeat of Caporetto, especially for the arbitrary nature of the exonerations.
M. Mondini, *Il Capo. La grande guerra del Generale Luigi Cadorna, il Mulino, Bologna, 2019*, chapter 6.

At the same time, in order to guarantee the secrecy of operational planning, the Office of Situation and War Operations prohibited the sending of communications relating to operations and action plans, by telegraph, even if they were coded[258]. Furthermore, in the same month, the allies of the Triple Entente signed the Paris Economic Convention, a list that included all enemy countries or countries under enemy influence with which trade agreements[259] were prohibited. This pact was mainly aimed at Italy, which, with economic aid from the Allies and funds raised through national loans, traded with countries such as Switzerland, Denmark, Holland and Sweden, all blacklisted countries. Therefore, Britain and France wanted Italy to spend the financial aid in their markets, to allow the economic cycle, interrupted or heavily damaged by the war, to continue.

In the summer of 1916, the sixth offensive on the Isonzo was fought. The Austrian army engaged on the Trentino had depleted the Isonzo with troops, only the San Michele area remained well equipped. On 26th June, the Austrians attacked the Italian troops using gas, exterminating the Italian infantrymen at the front. The Italians reacted promptly to the attack. Cadorna, thanks to a skilful logistical operation, deployed a contingent number of men on the Trentino. The direction of the VI Army Corps was entrusted to General Cappello. The offensive began at dawn on 6th August, surprising the enemy. The joint action of General Capello's and Badoglio's

[258] Office for Situation and Operations of War, News Transmission, No. 9824 of 10 July 1916. The next circular, No. 10797 of 26 July, ordered those communications for war operations be sent only by confidential letter, delivered only by hand.

[259] In 1904, Italy and Germany signed a trade treaty, which lowered tariffs on industrial products imported from Italy, thus becoming trading partners. The Italian and German markets were established because metallurgical products were complementary and not competitive. With the outbreak of the Great War, Italian exports to Germany fell by 25% and imports by 40%. The trade link between the two countries was one of the reasons why Italy did not declare war on the German Empire in 1915. The worsening of economic conditions due to the Allies' war led Britain to convene the Inter-Allied Economic Conference in Paris in April 1916. The Committee on Commercial and Industrial Policy was set up. British businessmen pushed for the implementation of Anglo-Italian trade: the Committee, chaired by Lord Balfour, set up the British-Italian Commercial Association, supported by both British and Italian banks. The reason for the establishment of financial agreements was the anticipation of post-war reconstruction.
L. T. Ventry, A. Mandolfi, Considerazioni sella decisione italiana d'intervenire nel conflitto contro la Germania, in "Archivio Storico Italiano", 1972, Vol. 130, n° 3/4, pp. 474-477

troops forced them to retreat to the second lines, leaving Gorizia. Two days later, Italian troops entered Gorizia and hoisted the tricolour. If strategically the victory in Gorizia is not fundamental, the same cannot be said politically. Carona's power was strengthened thanks to the propaganda of the news of Gorizia, the first Italian conquest. Certainly, the events of 1915 and 1916 did not meet the expectations of the Italian victory plans. In 1916, they envisaged the conquest of Ljubljana, if not Vienna. But Gorizia raised the morale not only of the troops, but also of the home front and the political environment. On 10th August 1916, Victor Emmanuel III sent a proclamation to the soldiers congratulating them on their conquest. The Italian victory convinced the government to fully comply with its obligations under the London Pact, declaring war on Germany on 28th August 1916. Until then, the Italian government had not wanted to antagonise a country with which it had no direct conflict of interest and with which it could re-establish ties after the war. This would be a choice that would put Italy in serious difficulty on the battlefield.

General Cadorna and his subordinates misinterpreted the Austrian retreat and set off in pursuit of it beyond Gorizia, encountering an impregnable entrenched camp. The infantrymen's race, without the support of the artillery, broke down bloody. General Cadorna seized the opportunity of the defeat and reprimanded General Capello, his rival, transferring him to the command of an army in the Trentino, thus removing him from the war area. The alliance of the German and Austrian armies on the battlefield made it possible to prepare a plan, to be implemented the following year, that would break Italy at Caporetto.

From the experiences in Gorizia and Trentino, in June the Supreme Command decided to set up a figure: the first, Inspector General of the Rear, dependent on the orders of the General Intendency Office, had the task of examining the work of the troops, secondly, the Inspectors of the Army Rear, dependent on the Chief of Army Staff and the Army Intendency Office, inspected transport, such as vehicles and trains.

In October 1916, the Army Information Service was reorganised and subsequently divided: the office located in the war zones was assigned to the Situation and War Operations Office of the Supreme Command; the other office, responsible for information in the rear and abroad, was placed under the command of the Information Service of the Supreme Command and transferred from Udine to Rome. The latter was responsible for collecting information and observations concerning enemy action in combat zones, troop missions in allied territories, the situation in the rear and counter-espionage services. Thanks to this reorganisation, the competencies between Office I and the Situation Office, which was responsible for gathering operational information, were delineated. An information centralisation body was set up in Milan, Section M, with the task of analysing information and forwarding information of an economic nature to Section R in Rome, and information of a military nature to Section U[260] in Udine. The division stipulated that the Rome office depended on the Office of the Chief of the Intelligence Service and the Commander of the Territorial Staff Corps, while the U office depended on the Chief of the Intelligence Service and the General at the Supreme Command[261].

[260] F. Cappellano, *op. cit.*, p.43
[261] *Ibidem*.

CHAPTER VI: 1917, the critical year of the war

1. Great Britain

In 1917 the war between the British and Germans widened from the Western Front to include fighting by air and sea[262]. From 17th to 30th April, a period nicknamed 'Black Fortnight', a large number of British, allied, and neutral merchant ships were sunk[263]. The use of submarines and the placement of mines off the British coast by the Germans, who from 1st February proclaimed the waters the "*Sperrgebiet*"[264], or forbidden zone, put the British fleet in serious difficulty. The latter's attempts at patrolling with surface ships supported by destroyers, such as Operation BB off the Scottish coast[265], were in vain. The only measure implemented by the Allies that proved effective were the convoys[266]. The Admiralty at the beginning of the last century abandoned this practice, used during the Napoleonic wars, but was forced to reintroduce it during the Great War. In this way, while merchant ships sailed on suggested routes, the navy carried out manoeuvres of offensive anti-submarine operations, such as patrolling and mine clearance[267]. But the shipping company opposed the convoys because of the apparent inefficiency of carrying more commercial ships, which by slowing down could be more easily spotted by the enemy and a non-quota arrival would have congested the ports. The criticism was refuted by several factors: firstly, all the ships escorted reached British ports and none sank under German attack. It was different for the ships destined for Dutch and French ports between the summer of 1916 and the winter of 1917, but the losses were small and caused by the new German submarine campaign. Secondly, thanks to American support, escort ships increased:

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[262] Murray, *War in the Air*, pp. 69, 73-74
[263] Wilson, *Myriad Faces*, p. 429
[264] D. Stevenson, *1914-1918 The history of the First World War*, RCS, Milano, 2004, trad. it. G. Maini, *Storia Universale*, Vol. 21, Corriere della Sera, RCS, Milano, 2004, p. 408
[265] Helpern, *Naval History*, pp. 338-339, 341
[266] A convoy is defined as a group of merchant ships accompanied by an armed escort.
G. Maini, *Storia Universale, op. cit.,* p. 409
[267] *Ivi,* p. 410

US Admiral William sent 35 destroyers by September 1917. Thirdly, the Admiralty's estimates of 300 merchant ships leaving and 300 arriving turned out to be wrong. According to the merchant navy's figures, 20 ships left port and as many reached British ports. Compared to the 'black fifteen', the commander of Grand Fleet Jellicoe recognised the efficiency of the new system. In addition, Jellicoe was aware that if he did not approve the convoy system soon, the Cabinet would impose it on him anyway[268]. In addition, starting in May, Room 40 intelligence complemented the convoy system and, by intercepting German radio messages, was able to steer ships away from German submarines.

During the stalemate in 1917, the British Army had a larger conscript army and a significant number of weapons at its disposal. The shortage of ammunition production was overcome by measures implemented by the Ministry of Munitions from 1916. In terms of transport, the increase in the flow of supplies was made possible by the restructuring of the BEF's railway system, designed by Sir Eric Geddes[269]. British supremacy in 1917 was made possible by the new generation of fighter aircraft produced: the S.E.5, the Sopwith Camel and the Sopwith Pup. These enabled the British Air Force to take back the skies and regain air superiority[270]. Regarding the land wars, Haig, after the April offensive, stopped being subordinate to the French command. This meant planning an attack in Flanders. Haig wanted to attack before Lundendorff could concentrate his reinforcements, but he encountered the government's position in London. Robertson, the Imperial Chief of General Staff, supported the idea of maintaining forces on the western front by defensive manoeuvres, but was sceptical about Russian resistance, with the risk of plunging the BEF into a war of attrition. Robertson, in the absence of an alternative, supported Haig's plan. Lloyd George had reservations about Haig's operation, but he too, without an alternative, gave in to the plan. There were, however, two considerations

[268] Hapern, *Naval History*, pp. 351-360
[269] Brown, *British logistics*, cap. 5
[270] Murray, *War in the Air,* p. 55-61

that cast doubt on the feasibility of the Flanders operations: firstly, the uncertainty of the date of American intervention on European soil. It was assumed that aid would not reach the continent until 1919 and only then could an offensive capable of winning the war be launched. Secondly, France. Foch and Pétain supported the British offensive but not the Flanders project. The motivation for the British offensive was the government's fear of an internal capitulation and consequent defeat by Christmas. The government in London agreed to the offensive but reserved the right to stop and modify manoeuvres if the battle proved to be long and costly, with no chance of victory[271]. The French leadership had welcomed the Nivelle offensive with the same conditions as the British government, to avoid another debacle like the Somme. Unfortunately, it had common elements.

On the morning of 7th June, the British detonated mines on the Messines-Wytschaete ridge, south of Ypre. The front lines retreated within hours. Haig ordered an advance on the end of the ridge and then continued the fighting for a week. According to German sources, if the British had pushed deeper, they could have taken the Gheluvelt plateau. But over the next six weeks the Germans managed to amass men in the Messines. The delay in British decision-making was not the fault of the War Policy Committee, but rather the logistical problems of transporting the guns to the new attack position[272]. In addition, under Haig's orders, responsibility for the 2ndArmy offensive was given to Sir Hubert Gough[273]. The attacking manoeuvre devised by Gough implicitly involved breaking through the German lines with an ambitious goal. The first day of the Third Battle of Ypres, 31st July 1917, ended disastrously in terms of both casualties and territory gained. Despite the BEF's tactical developments, the British were unable to overcome the defences. At the end of the month, the leadership of the 2nd Army was handed over to Plumer. For three long weeks, Plumer and his competent

[271] French, *Startegy of the Lloyd George Coalition*, chapter 4, Priori e Wilson, *Passchendaele*, chapter 4.
[272] G. Maini, *Storia Universale, op. cit.,* p. 424
[273] *Ibidem.*

staff planned short and limited offensives, compared to Gough's plans. In the battles fought between 20th September and 4th October, the British concentrated more soldiers on the front lines and as a result German losses were heavy: the German high command did not know how to counter-attack Plumer. Opposed to the cautious Plumer, Haig wanted to continue the attack towards the Channel ports, hoping to end the war within the year. The two attacks on Passchendaele on 9th and 12th October were unsuccessful. The Battle of Ypres increased civil and military discontent due to several factors: firstly, as the Somme and Verdun campaigns showed, the dominant role in the war was passing to the British. Secondly, the removal of Joffre at the end of 1917 meant the loss of the only French Commander-in-Chief capable of coordinating the separate national armies neutrally. Thirdly and finally, the crises that spread across Europe could only be quelled by American intervention.

Lloyd George, appointed Prime Minister in December 1916, was to face a series of problems between 1917 and 1918 due to a lack of manpower. Britain was no longer able to finance Allied imports without American economic aid. She had to meet the needs, on the one hand on the home front, of industry and agriculture, and on the other hand on the battle lines for General Haig's demands to send troops to Palestine, Italy, and the French Western Front. The manpower shortage was debated in Parliament, but Lloyd George concluded that the number of troops present in 1917 was far greater than in the early years of the war. In parallel with the manpower crisis, the artillery also needed reform to cope with the new ways of warfare. In the summer of 1917 sound rangers were developed, which allowed the location of enemy guns within 15 metres. Counterbattery was used frequently in 1917: at Arras in April, at Messines in June and finally at Cambrai in November.

In Britain, Lloyd George had a stronger parliamentary base than his allies and this resulted in greater BEF discipline at a time of mutiny. After the Easter Rising, the British government could no longer count on war support from southern Ireland. In the UK, the main challenge came from the left,

which called for strikes in industry, especially in the English industrial districts. The reasons for the strikes were mainly twofold: the abolition of the trade card, and the extension of the dilution plans of the state-owned factories[274]. The government had to negotiate with both the strike organisers and the trade unions and postponed the implementation of both proposed measures, despite the need to implement naval and army production. The consequence was the stabilisation of the limit to the militarisation of the British home front. The government was deeply impressed by the workers' tough stance and decided to set up regional commissions to identify the causes. Mainly, the reasons lay in high food prices, economic speculation, leave certificates and conscription. The new Minister of Munitions, Winston Churchill, fearful of the possibility of internal revolution, abolished leave certificates and introduced no other measures. In July, the Cabinet voted for a bread subsidy and the number of men in agriculture was no longer halved. "*A satisfied working class is indispensable for a vigorous continuation of the war*"[275]: the government was aware that without the moral support of civilians, the national interior would collapse. The civilian front became part of the war and for that reason had to be taken into consideration[276].

2. Italy

> The Austrians have a crumbling army. Time has acted for us. The Austrians are very tired: a colonel, regimental commander, taken yesterday after being left with only 200 soldiers, said to us: 'But how can you still want to fight? We can't take it anymore[277].

So wrote Angelo Gatti on 25th May 1917. The Austrian imperial army was profoundly different from the Italian one: it was not homogeneous and often

[274] Wrigley, *David Lloyd George*, cap. 12
[275] G. Maini, *Storia Universale, op. cit,* p. 442
[276] Wrigley, *David Lloyd George*, pp. 203, 218.
[277] A. Gatti, *Caporetto. Diaro di guerra (maggio-dicembre 1917)*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2014, p.33 (25th May 1917)

prone to indiscipline. During the summer of 1917, at Carzano, Slovenian officers made an agreement with the Italians to allow the latter to overrun the lines on an agreed day. The event failed and, as Pettorelli-Lalatta wrote, it was "*a lost opportunity*"[278], and the blame cannot be attributed to the Slovenes. Furthermore, in the summer, Romanian and Czech officers notified the Italians of the forthcoming offensive[279]. At the same time, Germany also experienced a crisis in the relationship between political and military power. The leadership lost the consent of the popular masses because of the difficult famine conditions. This was also due to Britain's naval blockade of Germany. In the First World War, the objectives of the war widened to include the home front. The aim was to break the support of the population and the subsequent internal capitulation. In 1917, internal turmoil within the population and the political and military leadership was widespread in the belligerent countries. There was a fear that the internal situation could provoke «*something very like a revolution*»[280]. The country that capitulated and withdrew from the war was Russia.

Before Caporetto, no political or military leadership investigated the morale of the troops. The head of the Supreme Command's Information Office, Marchetti, pointed out that the answers to vague questions about the troops' morale were *"always optimistic*"[281]. In Italy, the problem was General Cadorna's command; if a commander declared the inefficiency of his troops, both physically and morally, he risked being 'torpedoed' and immediately exonerated[282].

From the beginning of 1916 until May 1917, there was a pause in military operations on the Italian front. In April 1917, two events shook the course of the war: firstly, the revolution in Petrograd on 12 March, and secondly, the entry of the United States into the war. Omodeo wrote to his wife on 23rd

[278] C. Pettorelli-Lalatta, *ITO (informazioni truppe operanti), Note di un capo del servizio informazioni d'armata (1915-1918)*, Angelli, Milano, 1931, pp. 145-162
[279] *Ivi*, pp. 364-365
[280] J. J. Pershing, *Le mie esperienze della Grande Guerra*, Mondadori, Milano, 1931, p.71
[281] A. Gionfrida, *Inventario del fondo H-4, Commissione d'Inchiesta Caporetto*, Vol. II, p. 461
[282] L. Capello, *Caporetto, perché?*, Einaudi, Torino, 1967, p. 320

April*: «I feel inside me that the war cannot last much longer»*[283]*.* Optimism of an end also spread among the military. Colonel Bencivenga declared that «*there is a feeling that something is creaking, and despite all appearances, the end of the war is near*»[284]. In May, the Italians launched their tenth offensive on the Isonzo, which proved to be a failure. This was a blow to the morale of the armies, galvanised by the possibility of seeing the conflict come to an end: during the last hours of the battle, with resignation the infantrymen walked towards the front without complaining "but they cried"[285]. Following the offensive, the armies had lost half their men and territorial gains were lost during the Austrian counterattack. When, in the first days of June, three Italian regiments passed to the enemy without a fight, General Cadorna sent President Boselli the four letters, later challenged and examined by the Commission of Inquiry on Caporetto, in which he blamed the political power for the military defeat[286]. By the end of June, the condition of the troops had deteriorated significantly. The Supreme Command had no choice but to declare a truce for about two months, suspending the fighting. The period of detention and the preparation for the eleventh battle of the Isonzo galvanised the troops. Mr Gasparotto asked an officer deployed on the Karst what the morale of the soldiers was. He replied, «*it's good, but everyone is hoping for peace soon, and they believe that the upcoming offensive will be the last»*[287].

Enthusiasm spread among the troops. After the first few days, the offensive failed on the open fronts: on Tomino, Karst and the Bainsizza plateau. This resulted in another collapse of morale and frequent cases of collective crime. In order to prevent disorder and rebellion among the soldiers on their way to the front, the military authorities issued circulars, dated 28th March[288], 5th June and 16th July, containing very strict regulations. At the same time,

[283] A. Omodeo, *Lettere 1910-1945*, Einaudi, 1967, pp. 187-190
[284] A. Gatti, *Caporetto,* p.6
[285] *Ivi*, pp. 60-61
[286] *Inchiesta Caporetto*, Vol. II, pp. 506-514
[287] L. Gasparotto, *Rapsodie (diario di un fante)*, Fratelli Treves editori, Milano, 1924, pp. 149-150 (28th August 1917)
[288] *Inchiesta Caporetto,* vol. II, pp. 491-492

also on the home front, many popular uprisings and demonstrations took place in the city centres. For example, the revolt in Turin on 21st August 1917 ran out of flour and the bakeries closed. The revolt broke out spontaneously. It was the women who led the population into the streets. The intervention of the armed forces did not stop the revolt. If before, people were claiming lack of peace, now they were shouting 'down with war'. These revolts had less impact than hoped for. Demonstrations often came to an end at the end of the day. Internal resistance committees arose against the popular uprisings. On 15th May 1917, the Milanese committee warned the government that without intervention, the people would take the law into their own hands[289]. The convergence between the interventionists and Cadorna's policies strengthened the latter's power. The interventionist committee sent a telegram to Cadorna, highlighting the need to fight both internal and external enemies[290]. As a result of the interventionists' support for Cadorna and the Udine government, on 31st May the Milan newspaper "*Secolo*" criticised the parliament, addressing severe judgments to Boselli, and glorifying Cadorna[291]. The desire for a military dictatorship began to spread. Sonnino told Cadorna, «*I don't say and I want to believe that this was the case, but it was believed throughout Italy*»[292]. The following day Boselli summoned General Cadorna to Rome to discuss the article published in the "*Secolo*". In March the interventionist exponents met secretly, and according to police investigations, to plan an act of force[293]. On 6th June, Bissolati, Bonomi and Comandini handed in their resignations. The editor of the "*Popolo d'Italia*", Ottavio Dinale, a Milanese interventionist exponent, went to Udine together with the Honourable Pirolini to discuss the

[289] F. Martini, *Diario 1914-1918*, Mondadori, Milano, 1966 p. 914 (15th May 1917)

[290] See the content of Cadorna's telegram in historical archives"Corriere della Sera", 27 maggio 1917, p.2 (*Un memoriale al governo del comitato milanese per la resistenza interna)*: «Grazie, nella vittoria ho creduto sempre e senza esitazione. Essa è e sarà il premio del pooplo italiano che, nella lunga prova, contro tutte le previsioni dei suoi nemici interni ed esterni, ha creduto con eguale fede».

[291] "Il Secolo", 31 maggio 1917 (*Il Governo della guerra)* ripubblicato in L. Cadorna, *Pagine polemiche*, Garzanti, 1950, pp. 64-66

[292] O. Malagodi, *Conversazioni sulla guerra*, Vol. I, Riccardo Ricciardi Editori, 1960, p. 238 (colloquio con Giolitti del 20 dicembre 1917).

[293] Cfr. Restrict information in ACS, UCI, b.31, ff. 635 e 649.

plan for an army-assisted coup d'état. Benito Mussolini was also included in the planning. On their last trip to Udine in July, Pirolini and Dinale hoped to reach an agreement with General Cadorna, through the member of the supreme commander's secretariat, Duke Gallarati Scotti, to carry out the coup[294]. The Chief of General Staff took a step back.

Relations between the command and the government before Caporetto became even more complicated. The only encounter between Boselli and Cadorna took place on 28th September, following numerous invitations from the government throughout the summer, but it seemed that Cadorna did not want to discuss domestic politics. Nevertheless, it was him who sent the four letters in 1917 in which he accused the government of the inefficiency of the war. In fact, he argued that the war could no longer be solved by military means exclusively, but at the same time he kept the two environments well apart. In September, during a meeting of the Council of Ministers, Cadorna went to Rome. Cadorna and Orlando accused each other. The resolution of the differences between politicians and the military was postponed[295].

On 1st August 1917 the Secretariat Office changed its name to the Office for War Operations and General Affairs[296]. In practice, under Cadorna's direction, the head of this office had a central role in the Supreme Command to the detriment of the Chief of Staff of the Army and the other offices of the Supreme Command[297].

Back on the battlefield, the Austrian troops were devastated by the eleventh battle on the Isonzo and asked the German ally for help. The latter, with a view to a major offensive in the spring of 1918, had to yield to the Habsburg

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[294] O. Dinale, *Quarant'anni di colloqui con lui*, Edizioni Ciarrocca, Milano, 1953, pp. 84-85
Cfr. Camera dei deputati, *Discussioni*, seduta del 12 luglio 1917.

[295] On the reunion of 28 September see V.E. Orlando, Memoirs, pp. 63-67; Chamber of Deputies, Secret Committees on the Conduct of the War, pp. 215.217 (session of 18 December 1917).

[296] Ministry of the War – General Staff of the Realm Army– Historical Office, *Le grandi Unità nella guerra italo-austriaca*, p. 14. Sometimes in contemporary documentation it is called: "Office for war operations and various affairs".

[297] In this way, the head of the secretarial office of the Army Chief of Staff also became the head of the office in charge of coordinating all the studies on the war and preparing the executive provisions: in essence, he acted as General Cadorna's chief of staff.
R. Bencivenga, *Il periodo della neutralità*, Udine, Gaspari editore, 2014, pp. 131-139

Empire's demands on the advice of the political leadership and temporarily sent seven divisions to join the eight Austrian divisions already deployed. Thus the 14th Army was formed under the leadership of General Otto von Below. The plan was to make a surprise attack on the Italian forces in the unprotected area of the upper Isonzo, Caporetto. Overcoming Caporetto meant for the Austro-German commands to open up the route to the tableland. The aim was to relieve the massive Italian war effort by forcing them to retreat a few kilometres. Although some deserting Austrian officers had notified the arrival of German troops at the front, as happened with the Strafexpedition, General Cadorna downplayed the attack as a diversionary move. Moreover, the entire army, from commandos to infantrymen, was convinced that there would be no more offensives until the spring of 1918. It was the practice that at the end of each autumn, the war was suspended and then resumed in the spring as soon as weather conditions improved. Many contingents returned to the cities for their winter leave. Cadorna had exchanged views with Minister Orlando in early October, and both were sceptical about information of an Austro-German attack. It was not until 23rd October that a memorandum from the Situation Office of the Supreme Command wrote that an enemy offensive on the Tomino could be considered "very probable and imminent"[298]. Even on this occasion, Cadorna was not concerned. The sector under presumed attack was under the direction of General Capello, who on 16 October sent Cadorna a memorandum in which he declared that the enemy attack would probably come at the end of the month[299]. General Capello warned the generals subordinate to him: Badoglio and Cavaciocchi. General Cadorna shortened his stay at Villa Camerini and returned to Udine on the 19th of October. He summoned Capello. The latter said he had prepared a line-up suitable for the "counter-offensive". The generalissimo ordered them to modify it

[298] *Relazione ufficiale Caporetto*, t. 3°, pp. 93-94
[299] *Ivi*, pp. 109-111

according to a defensive line and adopt "defensive to the bitter end"[300]. Capello executed.

On 21st October, a Bohemian officer and soldier and two Romanian officers deserted from the enemy army and gave detailed notification of the offensive plan in the Vodil sector. The declarations were not entirely believed[301]. The next day Capello was recalled from Padua, where he was staying for health reasons. General Cadorna, in Capello's absence, prepared the defence plans. On the 23rd Cadorna met with General Bongiovanni and General Badoglio.

On the morning of 24th October 1917, all seemed quiet on the front[302]. The Italian Command could not have imagined that a few hours later, Caporetto would become the symbol of a military catastrophe. During the night of 24th October, an Austro-German bombardment of the entire upper Isonzo sector began. Connections between the front and rear were severed. In a short time, the enemy managed to outflank the Italian lines. The Austro-German troops applied a new tactic: from the usual tactic of attrition, they switched to a tactic based on surprise and infiltration, concentrating their armies in a short stretch of the front. Deployment to the front was to be carried out at night and staggered "*little by little, in tiny groups, in drops as it were*"[303]. In addition, the Italians expected a joint attack between the two central empires and dropped their guard as soon as they realised that the men all belonged to the Austrian army. This was not the case; German soldiers were instructed to wear the uniforms of the Allies to avoid arousing any suspicion. Gas was used in addition to artillery. The artillery attack was also changed from a prolonged attack, which allowed the army to take countermeasures, to an intense but relatively short attack[304]. In addition, the Italians were not trained for a rapid breakthrough. Amongst General Caviglia's papers, there is a 'summary of what the Historical Office of the General Staff of the Army

[300] J. Gooch, *The Italian Army and the First World War*, Cambridge Unievrsity Press, United Kingdom, 2014 p. 228

[301] *Relazione ufficiale Caporetto*, t. 3° bis, pp. 38-45

[302] E. Caviglia, Diary, p. 111 (as of 31 March 1933) and p. 114 (as of 17 April 1933)

[303] L. Albertini, *Venti anni di vita politica*, part II, Vol III, pp. 9-10

[304] *Relazione ufficiale Caporetto,* t. 3°, pp. 224-227

had to say about the days of Caporetto', in which he wrote *"the rapid breakthrough not only disorganised us, but also forced us suddenly into a war of movement for which we were not prepared, and made the enemy appear to have superior qualities. The commands themselves lost heart. [...] Too many commanders withdrew before the troops did"*[305]. In fact, the commanders did not separate from their troops voluntarily, but it was a consequence of the disorder of the retreat[306]. General Badoglio's gun battery, capable of slowing down the advance, remained idle; because General Badoglio gave orders to wait to attack until his personal order, yet the lines of communication were broken. The accusation made against the entire military command was the unpreparedness of a defensive plan. From 1915 to 1917, Italy prepared its war plans and its men to attack according to the principles of an offensive, not defensive, attack. On 25th October, the lines in the Tolmino area broke through and consequently the Isonzo defences collapsed. On the 27th, General Cadorna telegraphed to Rome *"the army does not fall victim to an external enemy, but to an internal one"*[307]. On the same day, Lloyd George decided to send divisions to support the Western Front. He wrote to Robertson:

> If we mean to exercise a dominant influence in directing the course of the War, we must do so in the way the Germans have secured control, i.e., by helping to extricate Allies in trouble. We cannot do so by merely lecturing them at conferences. We must help them, then we will have earned a right to dictate to them[308].

On the 29th the Chief of Staff ordered the troops to retreat towards the Venetian lagoon. On 2nd November the situation became extremely serious: the Austro-German troops crossed the Tagliamento and Bissolati sent a

[305] Milano, *Risorgimento*, cart. 159, b.8, pp. 29-31
[306] C. Galli, *Diarii e lettere*, p. 292
[307] A. Moscato, *La madre di tutte le guerre. Primo conflitto mondiale 1914-1918*, Aosta, Edizioni La.Co.Rì, Coll. "Centro Studi Livio Maitan", 2014, p. 60
[308] PA, Lloyd George Papers, F44/3/28, Lloyd George to Chief of Staff, 27 October 1917.

dramatic note to the new Prime Minister. The Council of Ministers met and decided to send the Minister of War, General Alfieri, with full powers, to the front[309]. On the evening of November 2nd, Cadorna had written a letter to Orlando, who in the meantime was on the train to join Lloyd George and Painlené in Rapallo for the inter-allied conference. Cadorna denounced the government as responsible for the Italian military defeat. This annoyed Orlando. The next day, the three Entente representatives, among other issues, discussed Cadorna's definitive exoneration from Supreme Command. In his memoirs, Orlando recalled that the decision to dismiss Cadorna dated back to a conversation with the king on 28th October[310]. During the conference, Lloyd George said, «*from enquiries made, I do not believe that the Italian Command is such that it can be entrusted with British and French divisions. According to my information, the Supreme Command was as panicked as the soldiers*»[311]. President Orlando replied: «*The Italian government has already considered it necessary to reorganise the general staff. This was decided in the last Council of Ministers, which gave full powers to me and to Sonnino, in agreement with the Minister of War. [...] I confirm, however, that the reorganisation has been decided and is underway*»[312]. The figure of Cadorna worried Orlando who wanted to remove him both from the front and from the government. The solution was presented by Sir Maurice Hankey who, during an informal meeting with Count Aldrovandi-Marescotti, remarked «wouldn't this body [Allied High Council] offer us the opportunity to assign Cadorna to it?»[313]. After discussing the proposal with Orlando and later with Sonnino, the afternoon meeting voted on the solution. Consequently, Porro and Gatti were charged with conveying the announcement to Cadorna the following day. The troubled generalissimo would never have accepted the new assignment[314].

[309] V. E. Orlando, *Memorie*, pp. 504-505
[310] *Ivi,* p. 227
[311] L. Aldrovandi-Marescotti, *Guerra diplomatica*, p. 143
[312] *Ivi,* pp. 144-145
[313] *Ivi,* pp. 147-148
[314] A. Gatti, *Caporetto, op. cit.,* p. 332

The break in the chain of command after years of hardship and deprivation turned the route of Caporetto into a break in the rules. The repercussions of Caporetto caused the collapse not only of the military leadership, General Luigi Cadorna, but also the political leadership of Boselli, who was dismissed by the Chamber on 25th October. Hence the military command was entrusted to General Armando Diaz on 8th November 1917, while Vittorio Emanuele Orlando took over the government. On the same day, decree no. 1824 authorised the appointment of two Deputy Chiefs of Staff[315]. By order of service on 15th November 1917, General Porro was designated as Italian representative to the Supreme Command, while General Cadorna was transferred to France as representative to the Supreme Inter-Allied War Council. At the beginning of January, when the investigation of the Caporetto Commission of Inquiry began, both generals were dismissed from the Army[316].

In December 1917, the new Orlando government established a war committee[317] to coordinate communications between the Supreme Command and the government. The Italian war committee was composed of the ministers of War, Navy, Arms and Munitions, Foreign Affairs and Treasury, and in an advisory capacity the Chiefs of Staff of the Army and Navy[318].

3. The First Steps of Allied Cooperation: Italian Front

1916 ended with the fall of the Asquith government and the inauguration of David Lloyd George at 10 Downing Street. The latter modified his combat tactics to favour a defensive stance. The aim of Lloyd George's action was to leave Germany without allies by attacking Austria-Hungary first, forcing

[315] Circular n. 725 of 8 November 1917 of the "Giornale Militare Ufficiale". Generals Pietro Badoglio and Gaetano Giardino were appointed. On 27 February 1918, the office was unified again under Badoglio.
See F. Cappellano and B. Di Martino, La catena comando. Di Martino, La catena di comando nella Grande Guerra (The Chain of Command in the Great War), op. cit., p. 46.
[316] Telegram No. 7205 of 3rd January 1918, signed by General Diaz.
Ibid.
[317] Legislative Decree No. 1973 of 15 December 1917
[318] Decree No. 1973 of 15 December 1917.

Berlin to surrender[319]. Between 1916 and 1917, the Italian army asked the Allies for artillery supplies to maintain the offensive action against the enemy. Lloyd George agreed with the Italian requests and proposed to coordinate the campaigns conducted by the Entente members in order to implement a common strategy. The same project was introduced by Lloyd George[320] at an inter-allied conference in Rome in early 1917[321]. He desired to send a strong British contingent to Italy along with a supply of artillery[322]. However, the Italian command preferred to keep its troops on home soil[323]. Moreover, Italy did not welcome the deployment of Anglo-French troops on its territory, for fear of a German reaction and the consequent sending of troops to the Austrian side of the front. The Italian choice put Lloyd George in a difficult position, and he became critical of the Italian government and military leadership[324]. Unwilling to send the heavy guns to Italy, France and Great Britain sent some cannons on condition that they were manned by national artillerymen. From a military point of view, this was the only aid to the Italian front. Robertson agreed to send cannons so that Italy could continue its offensive campaign[325] to prevent the Habsburg Empire from transferring troops to the western front. But after the eleventh battle of the Isonzo, Cadorna decided to stop the offensive attack. General Robertson replied harshly demanding the return of the artillery, he wrote: "*As Your Eminence has decided to adopt a defensive attitude and as the sixteen batteries of British howitzers have been sent to you for offensive purposes, you are pleased to order that they be withdrawn from the frontier*

[319] D. French, *The strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition 1916-1918,* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2002.
[320] Lloyd George, in order to get Austria-Hungary to capitulate and force a separate peace, turned to the Italians. In the summer of 1916, between 11 June and 18 July, the Cabinet's War Policy Committee met sixteen times. In the face of numerous meetings, the Committee decided to send heavy cannons to Cadorna.
G. Maini, *Storia Universale, op. cit* p. 423
[321] G. Innocenti, L'avvicinamento britannico al fronte italiano durante il 1917, in "Revista semestrale di Storia e Politica Internazionali", Università di Salento, 2017, n°2, p. 310
[322] Cfr. D. Lloyd George, *War Memory*, vol.3, Boston, Little Brown, 1934, pp. 337-340
[323] *Ibidem.*
[324] J. Gooch, *The Italian Army and the First World War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 204
[325] *Ivi*, p. 207

immediately as I need to assign them to another theatre. General Robertson"[326].

This resulted in an even harsher response from Cadorna. The British government sent a telegram to the Italian foreign minister, Sonnino, which was then forwarded to Cadorna:

> The Chief of the Imperial General Staff has received a telegram from General Cadorna in which he states that he proposes to suspend until next spring any further offensive on the Italian front. His Majesty's Government has received this news with the greatest regret and surprise [...] The reasons put forward by General Cadorna for this new decision seem to the Cabinet to be inadequate to justify such a serious change of decision. Your Lordship must insist that the Italian Government reconsider the matter[327].

The tension between the two armies was resolved thanks to the involvement of Borghese, the Italian chargé d'affaires in London. The English general agreed to leave part of his staff on Italian territory with the promise of sending new artillery in the spring[328]. For the British, the Italian front had the sole function of relieving the western front. The British generals changed their opinion after the 12th Battle of the Isonzo.

Following the 11th Battle of the Isonzo, Berlin had to transfer armies to Austria-Hungary's side on the Italian front. The Austro-German force was commanded by German General Otto von Below and Chief of Staff Konrad

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[326] Telegram T. Gab. S. 1609 bis, 26 September 1917, in Ministro degli affari esteri, Commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, I documenti diplomatici italiani, edited by E. Anchieri, series V, vol. IX (1 September-31 December 1917), Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 1983, p. 84.

[327] *Telegramma dal ministro degli esteri Sonnino al Capo di Stato Maggiore Cadorna,* 22 settembre 1917, T. CAB, 1596, ibidem, p.69

[328] Telegram from the Chargé d'Affaires in London Borghese to Foreign Minister Sonnino, 2 October 1917, T. GAB. S. 2667/445, in Ministero Degli Affari Esteri, Commission For The Publication Of Diplomatic Documents, I documenti diplomatici italiani, edited by E. Anchieri, series V, vol. IX (1 September-31 December 1917), Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 1983, p. 98.

Krafft von Dellmensingen[329]. The Triple Alliance attack was so successful that Italy's staying in the conflict was called into question. The Orlando government had to ask the allies for help. Haig was not in favour, but the consequences of a possible Italian defeat left the British head of state with no other options. As a result, six French and five British divisions[330] were transferred under the direction of General Sir Herbert Plumer. The Imperial Chief of General Staff Robertson expressed his concerns regarding the critical situation of the Royal Army on the Italian front: "*It is by no means certain at present that we shall be able to keep Italy in the War*"[331]. The British deployed on the river Mincio for two reasons: firstly, because of its proximity to the railway system, which allowed for rapid supply, and secondly, it allowed enough distance from the front line to guarantee the safety of the British[332].

In the first battle of the Piave, fought between 13th and 26th November 1917 on Monte Grappa, the Allied armies were not employed, and some were progressively reduced. The Anglo-French commands lost interest in the Italian front, as the latter refused to take offensive action. In December 1917, Italian Treasury Minister Francesco S. Nitti implored Lloyd George to "*give Italy a greater force of resistance*"[333]. The new Chief of General Staff, General Cadorna's successor, was General Armando Diaz.

In conclusion, the rapprochement between the Kingdom of Italy and the United Kingdom was Lloyd George's project. This opening was not welcomed by the British generals, who did not want a national conflict against the Austro-Hungarian Empire to become a coalition war. For this reason, British involvement was slow and muddled on the part of the British

[329] K. Krafft Von Dellmensingen, *1917 lo sfondamento dell'Isonzo,* a cura di G. PIEROPAN, Milano, Mursia, 1981.

[330] J.E. Edmonds - H.R. Davies, History of the Great War – Military Operations – Italy 1915-1919, Uckfield, The Naval &Military Press Ltd, 2011, pp. 88-97, e J. WILKS - E. WILKS, The British Army in Italy 1917-1918, Barnsey, Pen&Sword, 2013, p. 50.

[331] CIGS report addressed to the War Cabinet, dated 14 November 1917, TNA, WO, Fund 106, Envelope 796.

[332] The British did not want to get involved in the fighting.
Ausse, fund E2, envelope 79, folder 1.

[333] J. Gooch, *The Italian Army and the First World War, op. cit.,* p. 25

generals. The situation changed after the Italian defeat at Caporetto, at which point British involvement became mandatory. This resulted in a change of both military and government leadership, and a greater inclusion of Italy in the Great War.

Due to the seriousness of the war situation, the House met on 14th November 1917 and 16 senators proposed that a secret committee be convened[334]. Approved by the Assembly, the Committee was convened on 13th December 1917. The Secret Committee of the Chamber of Deputies met from 13th to 18th December 1917. The Secret Committee was chaired by Giuseppe Marcora, President of the Chamber. The Minister of War, Vittorio Luigi Alfieri, took the floor first, making it clear that the investigation had to be limited to the course of events and therefore investigate the "*conditions of our frontier that would necessarily lead to a defective deployment*"[335]. too extensive and in mountainous terrain. In addition, the impact - in the common opinion - of General Cadorna's change of tactics from offensive to defensive was considered negative. The deployment of a large number of soldiers, just less than two million, in a position too close to the enemy troops to make it difficult for them to fall back, and for this reason 350,000 men ended up as prisoners of the enemy. However, the defeat was not only due to the Supreme Command's decisions, but also to the anti-war propaganda of the home front. Finally, the assembly of 13th December ended with Socialist Giacomo Ferri asking the Foreign Minister why Cadorna had been appointed Italian representative in Paris and not on the front[336]. At the same time, the Minister of War proposed a thorough investigation into responsibility for the defeat at Caporetto[337]. Prime Minister Orlando accepted the proposal and set up an Interministerial Committee for

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[334] Article 52 of the Statuto Albertino, under the heading "Disposizioni comunali alle due Camere", gave the Chambers the power to set up a Secret Committee, following a request signed by at least 10 deputies or 10 senators. The Assembly was convened to deliberate on the proposal.
Cfr. M. Meriggi, *Parlamenti di guerra (1914-1918): Caso italiano e contesto europeo*, Cliopress, 2017, p. 148

[335] *I comitati segreti sulla condotta della guerra giugno-dicembre 1917,* Camera dei deputati, Segretario Generale, Roma, Archivio Storico.

[336] Camera dei deputati, *I comitati segreti*, *op. cit.*, p.124

[337] *Ibidem.*

the Conduct of the War, which, in addition to investigating the matter, was also to supervise the Supreme Command, limiting the autonomy gained during the Cadorna period. In the following years an *ad hoc* parliamentary commission was set up in 1920.

Italian historiography ascribed the defeat at Caporetto to nineteenth-century combat tactics, which were backward and unsuited to the new ways of warfare.

4. The Supreme War Council

During the war years, as early as 1915, the Allied powers met in conferences to discuss military actions to be taken jointly. The first step in this direction was taken by the French government in July 1915 during the Chantilly conference to discuss offensives in Artois and Champagne. At the same place, between 5th and 8th December, the Allies met three times and attended not only by government representatives, but also by the Commander in Chiefs and their staffs to discuss the summer offensive on the Somme. The next conference was convened on 14th March 1916 following the German attack on Verdun. It was concluded that the offensive should be initiated by Russian forces and then supported by France, Britain and Italy. In the early months of 1917, Italy, France and Britain met in Rome at the behest of Lloyd George who hoped for a joint effort for future military operations. The knowledge that Russia was succumbing to internal revolution and would soon be out of the war, which meant that Germany could deploy all its forces on a single front, the western front, worried the Allies. The Intesa could not be unprepared for this threat. Two resolutions were passed in the Italian capital: the first, *"if common Allied action becomes necessary on the Italian front, France and England will send troops there. The details will be decided on the military experts"*, and secondly, *"the organisation of an Inter-allied staff will be studied at one of the Conferences to be held henceforward by the Entente Ministers every two months"*[338]. At

[338] *The History of the Supreme War Council 7th November 1917-11th November 1918*, Royal United Services Institution, 2009, p. 486

the subsequent conference held in Calais between 26th and 27th February 1917, the British army was placed under the direction of General Nivelle. In July of the same year, the French General Staff drafted the *'Note on the creation of a central Inter-Allied Staff'*[339]. The French proposal laid the concrete foundations for the proposed creation of a central inter-allied organisation, with the mandate to give advice of a technical-executive nature to be submitted to the commands for consideration, and in cases of serious necessity to take decisions on behalf of the commanders. During the meeting in early September between the British and French Prime Ministers, the structure of an Allied War Committee was discussed and Paul Painlevé proposed that General Cadorna should also be included[340]. Lloyd George did not merely want a unified command, but a structure to be given both political and military powers. During the meeting, there were opposing positions on offensive manoeuvres for the following spring: on one side British Field Marshal Douglas Haig and General Robertson Chief of the Imperial General Staff who preferred a *policy of attrition*[341] on the French front, and on the other Lloyd George and Pétain who preferred a *policy of active defence*[342].

The second concrete step was Lloyd George's letter to M. Painlevé on 30th October 1917, recommending the creation of "*a single committee - a sort of Inter-Allied Staff - which shuold study the best methods of obtaining victory on the whole of the fronts and with the whole of the available resources*"[343]. For this reason, he suggested that each Allied country should send one or two political representatives, a military staff, and a naval and economic staff. The military staff had to be a permanent body, closely related to politics.

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dx.doi.org/10.1080/03071842109434628

[339] *Ivi*, p. 487.

[340] Greenhalgh, *Victory through Coalition,* p. 166

[341] D. Woodward, *The military correspondance of Field Marshal Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, December 1915-Feburary 1918*, London, 1990, p. 133

[342] M. McMeae, *Coalition Startegy and the End of the First World War. The Supreme War COuncil and War Planning 1917-1918,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2019, p.14

[343] *The History of the Supreme War Council 7th November 1917-11th November 1918*, Royal United Services Institution, 2009, p. 487

The defeat at Caporetto led to the Inter-Allied Conference in Rapallo on 7th November 1917[344]. The meeting in Rapallo brought together the British Prime Minister D. Lloyd George, the French Premier P. Painlevé, the Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando, Chef of the Imperial Staff, Sir William Robertson, Major General Sir H. Hughes Wilson, General Smuts, Italian Foreign minister Baron Sonnino, the French minister of Missions Aborad, H. Franklin-Bouillon, General Foch, Chief of Staff of the French War Ministry and their respective staffs. The one who pushed for the creation of the Supreme War Council was David Lloyd George. The aim was a *"better co-ordination of the military action on the Western front"*[345]. He wanted to give inter-allied command to a person who would make the decisions. Bringing the decision-making centre together in one person, instead of convening numerous conferences, would optimise operations[346]. In Rapallo, the eight points for the creation of the Supreme War Council were drawn up:

1. With a view to assuring a better co-ordination of military action on the Wsetern European front, there is formed a Supreme War Council composed of the President of the Council and a member of the Government of each of the great Powers whose armies are fighting on this front. The extension of the Council's powers to the other fronts will form the object of future discussion with the other great Powers.
2. The Supreme War Council has the mission of superstending the general conduct of the war. It prepares the bases for the Government's decisions, assures itself of their execution, and renders account to the various Governments.

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[344] *The Supreme War Council a step Toward Allied Unity, and the Storm Raised by Mr. Lloyd George's Explanation*, in "Current History (1916-1940)", Vol. 7, No. 3, Part. 1, University of California Press, pp. 434-436

[345] Article I of the Agreement.
Ibidem.

[346] Lloyd George discussed the Rapallo plan with French Prime Minister Painlevé on 12 November during a meeting in Paris.
Ibidem.

3. The General Staff and Higher Commands of the armies of each of the Powers charged with the conduct of military operations, remain responsible for them to their respective Governments
4. The general war plans established by the competent military authorities are submitted to the Supreme War Council, which, under the authority of the Governments, assures their concordance, and suggests, if need be, necessary changes.
5. Every power delegates to the Supreme War Council a permanent military representative whose exclusive function will be that of technical counsellor.
6. The military representatives receive from their Government and the competent military authorities of their countries all projects, information and documents relating to the conduct of the war.
7. The military representatives will keep the Supreme Council constantly informed of the situation of the forces and resources of all kinds at the disposal of the Allied and enemy armies.
8. The Supreme Council meets normally at Versailles, where the permanent military representatives and their staffs will reside. It may hold its sessions in any other place, as a result of special circumstances and decisions. These meetings will take place at least once a month.

The structure consisted of the Prime Minister of each of the powers, flanked by a second member of each government - the Foreign Minister, or the War Minister, depending on the subject under discussion - and a Permanent Military Representative (PMR). There were discussions on who should fill the role of PMR within the Supreme War Council: according to General Wilson and Prime Minister Lloyd George, the representative should not have ties with the War Office, to ensure impartiality and independence in decisions, different positions of the French and Americans, who preferred a unified command and for that reason the work of the War Office and the

Permanent Representative should not be divided[347]. Between the British representative Wilson and the Army Council there were discussions about the relationship between decision making between the two bodies. Wilson would include the Army Council when decisions in the Supreme War Council affected British military forces; the Army Council preferred that Wilson should not make proposals to the Supreme War Council without prior approval[348]. The clash of positions ended with Wilson being given "*unfettered discretion permeated into Allied discussion*"[349]. The Council would have held a meeting once a month at the Hotel du Trianon in Versailles, where the Permanent Military Representatives had their permanent headquarters. The mission of the Supreme War Council was to "supervise the general conduct of the war" by preparing recommendations, ensuring the convergence of military plans, and reporting on their implementation. The General Staff and the military commander were answerable to their governments. The governments appointed as their Permanent Military Representative: the British General Sir Henry Wilson, the Italian General Luigi Cadorna[350] and the French General Ferdinand Foch. The latter, who, according to Article 5, was not allowed to serve as Chief of Staff and Military Representative, was replaced by General Maxime Weygand. The United States declared war on Germany in 1917 and sided with the Entente. For this reason, the United States was included as an associate power.

The British Permanent Section was divided into three branches and a fourth, smaller one. Branch A (Allies) dealt with the military strategies of the Allies and neutral countries and the study of enemy offensives, and for this reason was divided into theatres of war. Branch E (Enemies) studied the moves

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[347] M. McMeae, *Coalition Startegy and the End of the First World War. The Supreme War Council and War Planning 1917-1918, op. cit.,* p.19

[348] Relations between Army Council and British Representative, 12 November 1917, TNA, CAB 27/8/WP65A.

[349] *Ibidem.*

[350] General Cadorna was removed from office when the Commission of Inquiry began its investigation of Caporetto in February 1918. He was replaced by General Mario Nicolis di Robilant. M. McMeae, *Coalition Startegy and the End of the First World War. The Supreme War Council and War Planning 1917-191, op. cit.*, *Ibidem.*

and decisions of the German High Command. The third, Branch M (Material), dealt with such matters as manpower, munition, and transport. This Branch worked closely with the Inter-Allied Transport Council. The Branch minor was concerned with studying political situations and how they might affect military actions. In total, the British section had 150 men[351]. The American section was structured along the lines of the British one. Only the political branch was expanded. In fact, the American representative Bliss was in regular contact with General Peyton C. March, Army Chief of Staff, and Newton D. Baker, Secretary of War[352]. The French Section was divided into three offices: one for the Eastern Section, one for the Western Section and a joint Political and Economic Section. The French Section was composed of 12 officers and 60 personnel. Italy decided differently, as it did not divide its section into branches and the composition was very restricted: 8 officers, 2 drivers and 20 soldiers[353].

The second meeting of the Supreme War Council took place on 4th December 1917. During the session, issues for the final offensive for the victory of the Entente were discussed. The theatres of war requiring attention were: the Italian front, in which the military councillors were instructed to draw up a general plan of action, the question of Salonicco and finally communications by rail between France and Italy, and by sea for the eastern theatres. At the next session, the military commanders presented the plan of action, which was discussed and adopted. In addition, it was proposed that a general inter-allied reserve be set up, consisting of the reserves of the Entente countries. The discussion ended with the approval of the military representatives' plan to set up an executive committee, headed by General Foch. The management was defined by the approved resolution, according to which the Supreme War Council established the General Reserve to deal with the Western, Italian, and Balkan fronts. The executive body consisted of military representatives from Great Britain, Italy,

[351] 'Historial Record of the Supreme War Council', n.d., TNA, CAB 25/127.
[352] Report of T. H. Bliss, Bliss/253/p.45
[353] 'Note relative à l'installation à Versailles de l'État – Major Italien', 23 November 1917, SHD-DAT, Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 61.

the United States and France. The Executive Committee determined in every detail the manoeuvres of the offensives and counter-offensives, the number of forces to be deployed, on what date and at which location. A second resolution placed Foch in the chair of the Executive Committee.

The fourth convocation took place in London on 14th and 15th March, when it was decided to postpone the creation of the general reserve. Meanwhile, an Anglo-French contingent was invited to the Italian front along with a committee of generals to discuss a plan of action with the Italian Commander-in-Chief. It was decided that American troops, when deployed in Europe, should replace the Allied contingent on the western front. The situation accelerated after the victorious German attack of 2nd March, and Foch was appointed to take over the strategic direction of operations on 3rd April. The Supreme War Council decided to abolish the Executive Committee at its meeting on 1st and 2nd May and extended command to General Foch for the Italian theatre. In the summer of the last year of the war, the American government was asked to send a foreign number of infantrymen and machine gunners.

The last wartime meeting of the Council was held on 3rd October and 2nd and 4th November at Versailles, but issues for the end of the war were discussed, not in military terms: Bulgaria and Turkey laid down their arms, while Austria-Hungary and Germany demanded an armistice.

CHAPTER VII: 1918, "peace without victory"

1. Great Britain

In December 1910, by general consensus, the term of Parliament was postponed avoiding holding elections during the war. In 1918 the war was over, and the question of elections was taken up again in Parliament. Many citizens were still wearing uniforms at the front and the electoral system risked collapse. Therefore, Parliament entrusted an extraordinary committee, consisting of the President of the House of Commons, parties and groups in Parliament and public opinion bodies, with the task of examining a new electoral law. The Committee met for the first time on 10th October 1916. The Speaker's Conference[354] presented its report to the House of Commons in March 1917. This became a draft law on 5th May and discussions continued until December. On 7th December the Bill was passed and forwarded to the House of Lords. On 30th January, it was returned to the House of Commons, with eighty-seven pages of amendments attached. The risk of institutional crisis was imminent: within a short time, an agreement was reached between the two chambers, and this received the King's assent. The Representation of the People was the first legislation on universal male and female suffrage. This was a clear consequence of the war on the civilian population.

Relations between civilians and the military in Britain from the end of 1917 until the end of the war were not the most pleasant. Lloyd George wanted to remove Haig and Robertson from the military leadership by creating the Supreme War Council. The Prime Minister wrote to Secretary Hankey: «*He would not go on unless he obtained control of the war. He meant to take advantage of the present position to achieve this*»[355]. At the inter-allied conference at Rapallo, he undermined Robertson's authority by establishing the War Supreme Council and placing Sir Wilson as Permanent Staff at

[354] F. A. Ogg, *The British Representation of the People Act*, in The American Political Science Review, August 1918, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 498-503

[355] Hankey Diary, October 29, 1917, 1/3.

Versailles. In a speech in Paris on 12th November, Lloyd George expressed disapproval of Haig's conduct of the war. This speech worried the British newspapers who, from a generally favourable attitude to the creation of the inter-allied council, began to express concern. Support for the Prime Minister began to waver; an article in the Spectator read:

> The risks run by having at the head of affairs a man capable of such levity, such irresponsibility, such recklessness, such injustice, are beyond endurance. Unless the House of Commons marks its condemnation of the speech, and so dismisses Mr. Lloyd George, we shall be in hourly peril of national shipwreck. All parties must join to put the vessel and her priceless cargo beyond the reach of Mr. Lloyd George's frantic egotism[356].

The next day, on his return, the press and Parliament were abuzz with excitement over his speech. Support for Robertson from the King, Derby, the Army Council, and the press forced Lloyd George before Parliament on 19th November to praise the soldiers and denied Wilson's use of Paris against the General Staff. Events in 1917 refuted the advice of the General Staff: in early December General Allenby managed to get through the gates of Jerusalem without the required Allied reinforcements, and on the Western Front Haig collected two defeats, the first at Cambrai and the second at the front when the British Army lost some 760,000 soldiers. The War Cabinet was in shock[357]. Lloyd George's strategy for 1918 was defensive on the western front while waiting for American reinforcements. On the eastern front, the fall of Russia posed a danger to imperialist Britain. It opened the way to Berlin for the Black Sea, the Caucasus and the Caspian; while Turkey was free to expand its influence in Persia, the Caucasus and Turkestan. For the oriental strategy, Lloyd George sought support in Wilson at the High Command of the Supreme War Council and Smuts at the War Cabinet. The risk that a German attack would lead to German defeat was high. But Haig was confident that he could block any German offensive but

[356] *The Spectator*, November 17, 1917
[357] Forth Meeting of the Man Power Committee, December 15, 1918, CAB. 27/14.

not defeat Germany entirely. Like the government, he was concerned about the eastern aspirations of the Triple Entente. With the support of the Permanent Military Representatives at Versailles, Sir Wilson proposed to the Supreme War Council a major offensive against the Turks. The Imperial Chief of Staff, Sir Robertson, was opposed to an offensive against the Turks. He opposed the establishment of an Executive War Board at Versailles to administer the reserves of the Allied armies for fear of Lloyd George and Wilson meddling in military strategy to his and Haig's detriment. In support of his concerns, the Chief of Imperial General Staff raised constitutional issues and civilian interference with the army. In February the turmoil between civilians and military echoed in the press and in Parliament. On the one hand Lloyd George denounced Robertson and his colleagues for the military's imposition of power on civilians. On the other hand, Robertson wanted to place himself above the government and overrule Lloyd George and Versailles in military decisions. Robertson did not win the battle against Lloyd George, partly because of his lack of confidence in the strategies of the General Staff, and he resigned. Wilson replaced him at the War Office as Chief of Imperial General Staff. On 21st March the German strike failed and the War Office, headed by Wilson, considered action in the east. A new committee, the Eastern Committee was set up as the «*Vigilance Committee, ready to warn the War Cabinet and furnish advice on the Eastern area of operations*»[358]. The consequence of the German attack in the west and the military crisis had a positive outcome: the appointment of Foch as Generalissimo. The German attack, however, did not change the prospects for an attack in the east; on the contrary, it convinced Lloyd George and other ministers that it could be the only theatre of war. Amery said «*for the next eighteen months at least the only theatre in which the Allies can take the strategic initiative is in the East*»[359]. Lloyd George, convinced that conquests in the east might favour Britain at the negotiating table, transferred Milner to the War Office, where they met secretly with Wilson

[358] War Cabinet Minutes (369), March 21, 1918, Cab. 23/5.
[359] Amery, "War Aims and Military Policy", June 1915, 1918, Lloyd George MSS F/2/1/25.

before the Cabinet meeting to discuss military policy. The War Office placed no obstacles in Lloyd George's way. On 27th May Wilson in a meeting with Lloyd George suggested that they concentrate on peripheral theatres to allow the Allies to reorganise[360]. Moreover, with the American intervention, it was optimal for British imperial aspirations to shift to eastern theatres of war. With Lloyd George, the political powers took an active role in military matters. The greatest opposition came from the Allies. At the meeting of the Supreme War Council between 2nd and 3rd July, Clemenceau and Ferdinand Foch were determined to keep the British on the French front. The British Prime Minister began to doubt the inter-allied committee headed by General Foch. The fear that the French would take control of the American troops, preventing support for the British, drove Lloyd George away. Furthermore, he considered reducing the number of American troops if the French would not allow a transfer of American troops to the British sector[361]. In addition, the central objective of British policy was to preserve its economic power and prevent the British army from being worn down. The Committee of Prime Ministers declared *«at the present stage of the War, manpower has become the controlling factor on the handling of which victory or defeat may defend. The husbanding of our manpower has become a consideration on which the whole future of our Empire depends»*[362]. In July there was a rift between Prime Minister Lloyd George and Chief of Staff Wilson. The latter published a memorandum on the offensive strategy to be implemented on the western front to win the war in the summer of 1919[363]. Instead, Lloyd George preferred to adopt the policy of "*chipping around the edges*" while the American army was transferred to Europe. In the meantime, the Allies were victorious in the East and Germany was defeated. With the collapse of the armies in the East and the difficult army conditions in the West, Berlin demanded an armistice and peace negotiations began. At that time, the

[360] [360] X-4 Minutes, May 27, 1918, Cab. 23/17.
[361] Cfr. Wilson Diart, July 3 and 4, 1928.
[362] Imperial War Cabinet Minutes (27 B and 32 b), August 1 and 16, 1918, CAB. 23/44.
[363] "Report of the Committee of Prime Ministers, Preliminary Draft as a Basis for Consideration", August 14, 1918, CAB. 23/44.

political and military leaders failed to resolve the civil-military conflict in the direction of war. The ministers relied excessively on the Prime Minister, obscuring the military leadership.

In conclusion, civilians during the war years followed the advice of military advisers on all major strategic issues. Lloyd George's appointment to the premiership did not profoundly alter the relationship between civilian and military power, but it did cause debate and disagreement. He openly avoided interfering in the strategic discussion of military operations because of the political consequences. The creation of the Supreme War Council did not question the strategic calculations of the British command, as the council deliberated on mainly organisational matters. Influence between commands, on the civilian and military side, during the conduct of war is almost necessary. A military operation cannot be planned without calculating the political consequences and vice versa.

In the course of the war, technological advances were the needle of the scales. The development of aviation in the early years of the 20th century in the military field was mainly used as air support for aerial reconnaissance, for gathering tactically useful information, and in support of the infantry and navy. But during the conflict, military commanders realised the tactical and strategic potential of the aircraft so on 1st April 1918 the Royal Air Force was established by merging the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service. The plan to establish the RAF came from the report prepared by Lieutenant General Smuts for the War Office. From that moment on, the force ended its auxiliary function to the army and navy, gaining its own independence in manoeuvres. In the Second World War, air power and strategic bombing played a key role in the course of the battle.

On 21st March 1918, the German Chief of staff, Eric Ludendorff, launched a massive offensive on the Western Front in order to overwhelm the Allied army before the Americans intervened. The army fought back against the unprepared British Fifth Army, which had to retreat, losing large numbers of men. General Foch was appointed on 3rd April to counterattack, and the two armies ended up entrenched. The offensive, in the first part in favour of the

Germans, ended with a stalemate in the fighting. On 7th May 1918, Major General Sir Frederick Maurice, a senior officer in the British army, published a letter accusing Lloyd George of forcing Sir Haig to falsify troop strength figures on the Western Front for submission to Parliament. Maurice Hankey, Cabinet Secretary, wrote in his diary «*the figures and statements of the War Office are completely unreliable, and their facts are distorted to support their arguments*»[364]. Liberal leader Asquith seized on the accusations and addressed them to Prime Minister Lloyd George, also a Liberal, before the Houses of Parliament on 9th May 1918. Lloyd George stated his position before the chambers, refuting all of Maurice's accusations. The speech won the chambers and healed the differences within the Liberal party, saving the government. The effects of the Maurice debate[365] were to strengthen Lloyd George's position at the expense of Asquith, who was weakened, and to strengthen civilian control over the military.

The German spring offensive had failed and on 29th September 1918 Haig's forces breached the powerful defence system of the Hindenburg Line, established in 1917. The German defeat was clear, and the morale of his soldiers sank. Ludendorff was discharged on 26th October. On 11th November 1918, Germany signed the armistice. «*That evening of unbridled joy clashed with my feelings. I felt an inexpressible relief that the end had finally come, but I was overwhelmed by waves of memories of those years of struggle. That evening, filled with sadness, I retired early*». These were the words of Colonel Alan Brooke in London when the armistice was signed.

2. The Kingdom of Italy

After the deep wound of Caporetto, it became clear that a restructuring was necessary. First, the command of the Army was given to General Diaz. By June, the Italian army consisted of 50 infantry and four cavalry divisions. After the halt on the Piave and the heavy losses suffered in terms of men

[364] J. Grigg, *Lloyd George: From peace to war, 1912-1916*, Penguin 2002, pp. 506-507.
[365] J. Gooch, *The Maurice Debate 1918*, Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 3 issue 4, 1968, pp. 221-228

and artillery, the army was in a difficult situation. Fortunately, Allied reinforcements were arriving behind the Italian front. In November 1917, six French and five British divisions, well supplied with artillery, were deployed. In November 1917, two liaison centres were set up at the headquarters of the Allied forces: the Italian delegation to the British troops and the Italian delegation to the French troops[366].

In command of the Allied force, General Foch refused to deploy troops on the battlefield immediately. He pointed out that the lack of reserves was one of the causes of Cadorna's defeat[367]. The Allied forces would have contained the lines in the event of an enemy breakthrough. Since this did not happen, five Allied divisions were moved to the Piave area in December. The main Allied support was indirect: General Diaz deployed all available Italian forces to the front, with support from Anglo-French reserves. From 9th to 25th November, the enemy troops clashed with the strong resistance of the Italian army. Rejected, the Austro-Germans suspended operations to replenish their artillery deployment and resumed fighting on 4th December. The conflict lasted for another twenty days, at the end of which Italian victory was declared. The Battle of the Piave paved the way for the final Austrian defeat: the hope of victory for the Central Empires vanished forever.

The changes in the army, together with the support of the allies, was the key to victory. Compared to previous armies, Diaz's army benefited from young generals who were competent in the new models of trench warfare. The young generals were a - positive - consequence of Cadorna's torpedoes. The new Chief of Staff, thanks to his direct experience of the war on the Carso, also had a more modern and realistic conception of war. With Diaz's intervention, the new Supreme Command, transferred to Abano Terme[368] in January 1918, also became more efficient. One of the general's

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[366] Supreme Command, Ordnance and Mobilization Office, Liaison Offices with Allied Troop Headquarters, No. 148970 of 11 March 1918. With the subsequent circular of the Ordnance and Mobilization Office no. 16550 of 19 June 1918, Military Delegation to the British and American troops.
See F. Cappellano, B. Di Martino, *La catena di comando nella Grande Guerra*, op. cit., p. 46.

[367] Cf. M. Isnenghi, G. Rochat, *La grande guerra*, op. cit, p.817

[368] Supreme Command, General Office Attaché, Service Order No. 3 of 24 January 1918. The Press Office remained in Padua; the Special Promotions Office moved to Bologna.

strengths was his style of command: he was more inclined towards a model of command that was not centralised, but well-organised on the basis of delegation. The offices of the Supreme Command were reformed, and each was given concrete responsibilities, guaranteeing a well thought-out and detailed plan of action. The relationship between Chief and Deputy Chief also improved: Deputy Chief General Giardino was transferred from the Operations Department to the Inter-Allied War Council at Versailles, deposing Cadorna, but then recalled to the war front. General Badoglio was appointed Deputy Chief from 1917 to 1919[369]. The relationship between the military and political power improved as Diaz made direct contact with the king, the government, and political circles. The Supreme Command was opened to politicians and Vittorio Emanuele Orlando visited a couple of days a month and when conditions required it. The open dialogue with the institutions also benefited the army, which, thanks to meetings between Diaz and Treasury Minister Nitti, was granted funds for military needs. The Chief of staff developed relations both with his own government and with the allies, and just as he did not interfere in the affairs of others, he demanded the same from others.

In January 1918 the Office of the Adjutant General[370] was established, but in the following month it was absorbed into the Office of the Chief of the General Staff Secretariat. With the modernisation of the General Staff structure, all officers received Diaz's and Badoglio's directives directly from the Secretariat Office or the Adjutant General[371]. The latter, with service communication no. 5400 of 9th February 1918, reorganised the offices by incorporating the Office for War Operations and General Affairs and the Office for Situation, War Communiqués and Missions Abroad into the Operations Office, and the Office for Various Affairs was renamed the General Affairs Office. Finally, to facilitate the Commission's investigation of

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Cfr. F. Cappellano e B. Di Martino, *La catena di comando nella Grande Guerra, op. cit.,* p. 46

[369] *Ibidem.*

[370] Service Orders No. 46218 dated 29 December 1917 of the Supreme Command.

[371] Supreme Headquarters, Office of the Adjutant General, Direct Correspondence to the Supreme Headquarters, No. 6000, 17 February 1918.

Caporetto, a secretariat office was set up at the Supreme Command[372]. With the reorganisation of the Chief of Staff's secretariat, the latter lost the centrality of orders - Cadorna's type - in favour of a collegial activity[373]. Under the measures of March 1918, the Supreme Command was divided into the Secretariat Office, the Operations Office, the Ordnance and Mobilisation Office, the General Affairs Office, the Technical Office, the Information Service, the Personnel Office, the General Secretary for Civil Affairs, the Military Justice Office, the Central Office for Gifts and Propaganda, the High Command of the Air Force, the High Command of the Royal Carabinieri, the Cavalry General Headquarters, the Artillery General Headquarters, the Engineer General Headquarters, the Special Promotions Office and Headquarters[374]. The structure remained so until 4th November 1918.

On 14th May 1918, the Minister for Arms and Munitions, Alfredo Dallolio, resigned. Nitti and Orlando wanted to entrust the post to the industrialist Ettore Conti, but due to opposition from Breda, Agnelli and Perrone, the entire department was entrusted to the Minister for War, Zuppelli. On 15th September, the Minister for Arms and Munitions was abolished[375], and the tasks entrusted to the General Commissariat for Arms and Transport[376], but a month later the responsibilities returned to the Minister for War.

The army was reformed and equipped with new tools, such as tanks, automatic muskets, but also gas masks provided by the British, which made the last offensives effective and led to the defeat of the Central Empires. The deployment of the army was based on two criteria: limiting the number of soldiers in the armies and establishing a strong reserve in the hands of the supreme command. The central point of Diaz's reorganisation was the attention paid to the soldiers, who had been neglected by Cadorna, which led to an improvement in living conditions in the trenches, with shorter shifts,

[372] Sheet no. 9 dated 20 February 1918 of the Supreme Command, Secretariat Office.
[373] Circular No. 6025 of 15 February 1918.
[374] Supreme Command Circular No. 9450 of 7 March 1918.
[375] Decreto Legislativo n° 1318 del 15 settembre 1918.
[376] The Ministry of Arms and Transport will be established by merging the General Commissariat and the Ministry of Maritime and Rail Transport. Legislative Decree No. 1748 of 24 November 1918.

adequate shelters, and higher food rations. Those coming down from the front were guaranteed effective rest, more comfortable lodgings, and the *Case del soldato* (Soldier's Homes) were set up, centres for reception and recreation[377]. Following three years of hard fighting and the Cadorna administration, the morale of the soldiers was now very low. Realising its importance for the conduct of the war, Badoglio set up the P-Service in February 1918: its main task was to monitor morale and send periodic reports to the Supreme Command.

The internal situation in the Austro-Hungarian Empire was deteriorating food shortages, strikes and protests and a strong nationalist drive. Emperor Charles sought contact with the Entente to negotiate peace terms, to no avail. The last offensive in June 1918 was supposed to guarantee victory because it was the last Austrian chance for victory. Due to miscalculations and the conviction of victory, an extended manoeuvre from the Asiago plateau to the sea was prepared. At the same time, General Diaz did not accept French suggestions for an attack on the western front if they lacked strategic advantages. Moreover, thanks to the work of the Information Service, the Italian commands were aware of the great Austrian offensive.

On 15th June, the Central Empires' offensive began. The smallest Austrian territorial conquests, such as the “three mountains”, were quickly regained by the Italian troops. The battle on the Piave River was at first in favour of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and defeated the Italian armies, but thanks to the intervention of the artillery and air force and Italian resistance, the enemy troops retreated. The failure of the offensives relieved General Conrad of his command. The Piave became the symbol of Italian resistance and boosted morale, invigorating the soldiers for the final offensives that led to victory.

On the Italian side, Diaz did not want to compromise troop numbers with attacks on the front before the big offensive planned for spring 1919. From Orlando's continuous pressure to anticipate the attack, it was not until October that Diaz relented and prepared an offensive across the Piave

[377] Cfr. E. Franzina, *Il tempo iibero della guerra*, Gaspari, Udine, 1999.

towards Vittorio Veneto. Caviglia's army, flanked on the left by the armies led by French General Jean-César Graziani[378] and on the right by the army commanded by British General Frederick Cavan. The concentration of the armies was mainly in defence of the Piave and less in the Grappa. Weather conditions forced a change of plan in favour of the Grappa: it was not the best moment for the offensive, but one could not wait any longer. On 24th October the attacks began. In the first few days the Austrian units managed to resist the attack, but after the 29th the situation precipitated. At the front, the various units that made up the armies refused to go to the front and returned to their homelands. In a short time, the army fell apart completely, and the government had no choice but to demand an armistice. The Italian government took its time in the negotiations to gain more success, until on 3rd November the Italian troops entered Trento and Trieste. On the same day, the armistice was signed at Villa Giusti in Padua, ending hostilities at 3 p.m. the following day. On 4th November, Diaz issued the "war bulletin": «*We have won. They are retreating, they have lost*»[379]. The battle of Vittorio Veneto was not a crushing, Napoleonic battle. On the Grappa there were neither winners nor losers. Caviglia's manoeuvre was not decisive, but the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian army. The only merit attributable to the Army Chief of Staff was that he fielded an army in better condition than the enemy.

Subsequent the armistice, under the proposal of the Minister of the Treasury, Nitti, the Inter-ministerial Committee for the reorganisation of war industries was set up in November 1918: the period of demobilisation and industrial revitalisation began[380]. According to Article 1 of the decree, the Committee is composed of the Minister of the Treasury, Minister of War, Marine, Arms and Transport, Public Works, and Industry[381]. At the head of

[378] See. G. Lenci, *Le giornate di Villa Giusti. Storia di un armistizio*, Padova, Il Poligrafo, 1998.

[379] M. Isnenghi, *Le guerre degli italiani*, pp. 62-63

[380] Decreto Luogotenenziale, 17 November 1918, n°1698, Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia, Part 1, n°273, 20 November 1918

[381] The membership of the Interministerial Committee was enlarged, firstly by the Lieutenant's Decree of 5 January 1919 n°9 art.2 paragraph 1, to include the Under-Secretary of State for the Treasury and for the liquidation of arms and munitions and aeronautics. Subsequently, with Royal

the executive committee, Ettore Conti[382] was assisted by his deputy, Arturo Bocciardo. With the outbreak of the war, state and private industries were reorganised to support the army at the front, with the signing of the armistice, war production had to be reduced and contractual relations between the state and companies concluded. This was the start of the civil reconversion of industries. The policy of demobilisation and industrial reconversion required the centralisation of responsibilities from ministries and military administrations to a single body: the Inter-ministerial Committee for the reorganisation of war industries[383]. The responsibilities of the Committee were defined in Article 2:

> For contracts in progress at the date of publication of the present decree between the State Administration and private individuals, for supplies, works and works dependent on or connected with the state of war, as well as for contracts between private companies in relation to the above-mentioned contracts, the Committee may order the suspension, recession, reduction, extension, transformation and any modification, giving the companies the necessary provisions also with regard to the materials used to execute the contracts[384].

In other words, the committee was responsible for ending the production of war supplies and converting them to civilian production, ordering public works and works, and determining the prices of raw materials and finished products.

This committee was headed by the Minister of the Treasury, who was renamed Minister of Reconstruction after the war. Concerning the industrial reconversion process, the Pantano resolution for industry, published on 25th October 1918, presented unemployment as a possible cause of economic stagnation, and therefore to be avoided. The problem of military

Decree Law no. 504 of 26 April 1920, the Director of the Bank of Italy, the Accountant General of the State and the Director General of the Treasury were added.

[382] [382] E. Conti, *La liquidazione dei servizi delle armi e munizioni e dell'aeronautica*, Roma, Stabilimento poligrafico per l'amministrazione della guerra, 1919

[383] Decree-Law No 1698 of 17 November 1918.

[384] Art. 2 Comma 1, Luogotenenziale Decree n° 1698 of 11th November 1918

demobilisation would lead to a large number of unemployed and Pantano identified sectors for which labour was needed and in which it was necessary to invest: agriculture and public works. On the one hand, much of the countryside was abandoned, both because of the recruitment of soldiers and because of the war zones that destroyed the land, and there was a need for a large increase in manpower. On the other hand, many cities were devastated by the war. The basic problem was the return of about 2.5 million soldiers to the cities, who were soon unemployed, in a fragile economic situation, where industries stopped production. Italy emerged among the victorious powers, but internally it was fragmented. Four long years of war had changed the structure of the country. The members of the Orlando government, the Minister of the Treasury Francesco Nitti, the Minister of Agriculture, Industry and Trade Augusto Ciuffelli and the Minister of Public Works of the Kingdom of Italy Luigi Dari presented a proposal to the Council of Ministers. The outline of the measure included a complete inventory of the situation of contracts between the state and companies, the authorisation of auxiliary factories to undertake civil production and the establishment of an inter-ministerial committee to coordinate the administrations from a state of war to a state of peace[385]. The measure was approved on 17th November.

[385] P. Hertner, G. Mori, *La transizione dall'economia di guerra all'economia di pace in Italia e in Germania dopo la Prima Guerra mondiale*, Bologna, 1983

PART THREE

Chapter VIII: 1919, all reunited at Versailles

"Every war is ironic, because every war is worse than expected"[386].

P. Fussel.

1. The peace conference

Preceding the meeting for the peace conference at Versailles, the members of the Supreme War Council met from 29th October to 4th November 1918[387]. The three participating countries made different claims: on the one hand, the British, seeking to strike up relations with their American ally, partially accepting the 'fourteen points' proposal drawn up by President W. Wilson, the French wanted to impose tough conditions on Germany, while on the other hand, the Italians were alarmed that American intervention in the conference might restrict the territorial claims negotiated with the British in 1915. At the end of the Supreme War Council meeting, armistice points were addressed to the government in Berlin, which had to accept the terms. The Allies' victory gave them the strength to impose their own solution to the problems on the defeated[388].

On 3rd January 1919, the peace conference was convened to redraw the political map of Europe, shattered by the collapse of four empires: the German, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Tsarist Russia, and to confer on armistice arrangements for the defeated powers. At the summit of the victorious powers there were conflicting demands on the Germans. American President Wilson proposed a plan for the reconstruction of Europe based on public control of international agreements, economic freedom, arms reduction and the creation of a League of Nations. France aimed to

[386] P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford University Press, London, 1975, p. 7, trad. it. *La Grande Guerra e la memoria moderna,* Il Mulino, Bologna, 2000, p. 12)

[387] A. Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris, 1919*, Palgrave, 2018, p. 16

[388] Ivi, p. 18

punish Germany severely. The contrast between democratic peace and punitive peace made negotiations complex. The peace conference[389] began in Paris on 18th January 1919. The protagonists were American President Wilson, French Prime Minister Clemenceau, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and Italian Vittorio Emanuele Orlando. The meeting sanctioned the international political revolution that put an end to secret diplomacy. It proposed the creation of the League of Nations: an international forum that countries would use to resolve disputes peacefully. The long conference encountered two moments of crisis: the first on 7th April for the Saar region, and on 24th April Wilson's refusal to accept the Italian claims. Orlando and his foreign minister, Sonnino, returned to Rome and the outcry continued for several weeks. Despite the difficulties the conference was not interrupted. Important decisions were worked out by the foreign ministers and their experts and approved by the politicians. On 7th May the Germans were convened in the conference hall. The German representatives protested against the harsh conditions imposed. Meanwhile, Lloyd George insisted that the conditions should not be revanchist in nature.

The results of the peace conference were: the Pact of the League of Nations, approved on 28th April, the Treaty of Versailles signed on 28th June, the Treaty of Saint-Germain, signed on 10th September, and finally, the Treaty of Neuilly signed on 27th November.

[389] The peace conference was structured in four phases: the first, from October 1918 to January 1919, in which the Supreme War Council and the meetings of the Allied leaders played an important role. In the second phase, comprising the early stages of the Paris conference, the Council of Ten was the main forum for negotiation. In the penultimate phase, from mid-March to the end of June, the decision-making centre was the Council of Four. This was composed of Lloyd George, Clemenceau, Wilson and Vittorio Orlando. The last phase lasted from July 1919 until July 1923, when uncertainty took over.
Ivi, pp. 19-21; see M. MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that changed the World,* Chapter 5, Random House Trade Paperbacks, New York.

2. Versailles for Italy

"Sonnino will be silent in all the languages he knows; Orlando will speak in all the languages he does not know"[390].

The Italian delegation had two leaders: Vittorio Emanuele Orlando and Sidney Sonnino. The character differences of the two exponents of the Italian delegation, together with an Italian diplomatic deficiency, led Italy to sit without allies at Versailles. The fault lay as much in the political leadership as in the Italian military strategy adopted in the war. Italy entered the war and conducted the conflict in relative political isolation[391].

The one who led the dance at Versailles was the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The objectives of Sonnino's policy from 1917 onwards were the protection of the national territory through territorial cessions and a dominant position in the Adriatic. For this reason, the Foreign Minister refused to recognise Yugoslavia's declaration of independence, distancing himself from the positions of the Allied delegations. On 7th February 1919, Orlando and Sonnino presented the commission with an official memorandum that brought together the Italian claims, the same as those agreed in the London Pact in 1915. The element that unbalanced the situation was the presence of American President Wilson. The latter did not recognise the conditions of the Pact that guaranteed Italy's entry into the war alongside the Entente. Wilson was in favour of granting Italy South Tyrol up to the Brenner Pass, but opposed the question of Istria, the Dalmatian area and Fiume. On 12th February, Yugoslav representatives presented a memorial requesting the acquisition not only of Dalmatia and Istria, but also of Trieste and Gorizia. The discussion culminated on 19th April. The stalemate in the discussion led Wilson to write a message directly to the Italian people, not to the institutions, in which he explained his position and called on the people to

[390] Comment by Luigi Luzzati, former Prime Minister, on Orlando and Sonnino at Versailles. Cit. da I. Montanelli in *Storia d'Italia*, Vol. VI, *1861-1919*, Milano, 2003, p. 600.

[391] See J. R. Rodd, *Social and Diplomatic Memoires, Third Serie, 1902-1919*, London, 1925, pp. 367-370

disavow their governors[392]. Following Wilson's decision, the Italian delegation responded by leaving the conference on 24th April 1919[393]. Italy returned to Versailles on 7th May 1919 to sign the final treaty but there was strong discontent in the more nationalist circles. In June 1919, Orlando handed over the presidency to Francesco Saverio Nitti, flanked by Foreign Minister Tommaso Tittoni.

The famous writer described the peace treaty as a 'mutilated victory'. Following the signing, Italy took possession of Trentino, South Tyrol and the area including Gorizia and Trieste. The issues of the Dalmatian area and the Adriatic were not mentioned. In September 1919, volunteers led by D'Annunzio occupied Fiume, a city under international control, and declared its annexation. Tensions in the Adriatic ended with the Treaty of Rapallo, signed by the Italian and Yugoslav governments.

3. Versailles for Great Britain

In 1919, the staff of the British Foreign Office consisted of the Permanent Under-Secretary, Lord Hardinge, and Sir Eyre Crowe. Sir Henry Wilson handled military discussions, while economic matters were administered by Sir Hubert Llewelyn Smith. Sir Maurice Hankey, Secretary to the Imperial Defence Committee and the War Cabinet, was representative of the British Government to the Secretariat of the Versailles Conference and from April 1919 was Secretary to the Council of Four. Lord Robert Cecil acted as British representative to the League of Nations[394]. This was the first time that Britain, like all the nations involved, found itself rebuilding the broken Europe. The British delegation had not clarified a detailed programme before their departure, but their position was based on a few key principles.

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[392] G. Mammarella, P. Cacace, *La politica estera dell'Italia. Dallo Stato unitario ai giorni nostri*, Laterza, Bari-Roma, 2010, p. 81

[393] Orlando's and Sonnino's policies received expressions of solidarity not only from the Italian people but also from Parliament, which approved the political action by a large majority: 382 votes in favour and 40 against.
Ibidem.

[394] Sir A.W. Ward, G.P. Gooch, *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy 1783-1919*, Vol. III, The MacMillan Company, New York, 1923, p. 526

Firstly, Germany was to be placed in a situation where it posed no threat to other nations, secondly, it was to renounce all its colonies, and finally, it was to pay for its crimes. The action of the British delegation was not free of constraints, on the one hand by the treaties previously signed, and on the other by the presence of the United States with its project of Wilson's "fourteen points"[395].

The British representative at Versailles, Lloyd George, arrived in Paris on 12th January 1919. Before the beginning of the peace conference, a preliminary meeting was held of the heads of government and foreign ministers of the Entente countries: for France George Clemenceau and Stephen Pichon, for England Lloyd George and Arthur James Balfour, the American W. Wilson and Robert Lansing, and for the Kingdom of Italy, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando and Sidney Sonnino. They, together with the Japanese representatives, composed the Council of Ten. To facilitate the work of the peace conference, the Council was reduced to four members - the Council of Four[396] - in March, namely the heads of state of the Western powers. They also controlled the work of the Supreme Economic Council, which had been set up in February 1919 to direct economic measures in the post-war period.

After several discussions and the dispatch of the peace treaty to Germany, the Treaty of Versailles was signed by Germany and the Allies on 28th June. On 2nd July, peace was officially proclaimed. On 10th October, the British government signed the Treaty, which came into force on 10th January 1920. On 28th June, Lloyd George, Mr Balfour, Clemenceau and Pichon signed a Guarantee of Compliance with the Peace Provisions[397].

4. Italian military attachés abroad

> Military attachés can be defined as officers accredited to a diplomatic mission with the threefold purpose of representing the

[395] Ivi, 527-528
[396] *Ibidem.*
[397] Ivi, p. 536.

> armed forces of their country and being the main and direct link for relations with the military technical ministries of the State where they carry out their duties; assisting and assisting the head of mission in the examination, discussion and resolution of all questions of a military nature; studying, supervising and monitoring the organisation, development and military training of the country where they are accredited[398].

In Italy, the first definition - mentioned above - elaborated by the First Secretary of Legation Pier Luigi La Terza, dates back to 1939.

The role of military attaché was established in Italy by Royal Decree No. 6090 of 29th November 1870. In the 19th century, the Chairman of the Committee of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Francesco Giuseppe Ricci, understood the importance of direct and reliable communication of information in a military context. Up to that time, information had been reported from time to time and by military attachés who were then abroad on official business. Following Article 67 of the Royal Decree, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, War and Navy agreed on the destination and rank of the military attaché abroad.

During and at the end of the Great War, numerous officers were sent to conferences with the Entente allies. There were cases where fixed-term military missions were set up and entrusted to general army officers, who were given the same functions as military attachés. After the war, the missions and military attachés were administered by the Foreign Office of the Operations Department of the Supreme Command. Later, in 1921, when the Operations Office absorbed the Foreign Office, the management of the military attachés passed under the direction of the Information Office.

In diplomatic missions, it was necessary to differentiate between civilian and military personnel. The latter included all branches of the Royal Army: army,

[398] See L. E. Longo, *L'attività degli addetti Militari italiani all'estero fra le due Guerre mondiali (1919-1939*), Ufficio Storio dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, 1999; See Laterza P.L., "Gli addetti Militari, Navali ed Aeronautici e la loro posizione nel Diritto Internazionale", Napoli, S.A.E.N., 1939, p. 9.

navy and air force. Subsequently, the title 'military attaché' was changed from 'attachés of the Armed Forces' to 'military attachés'.

Chapter IX: Post-war Italy

1. Demobilisation and the army

At the end of the war, the structures established within the belligerent countries had to be dismantled and pre-war models re-established. Demobilisation, as happened during mobilisation, incorporated different aspects of society, from the army to industry.

In Italy, the relationship between political and military power had to be restructured. The Great War had failed to heal the rift between country and army, disadvantaged by the difficult relationship between government and Supreme Command. Even the Italian parties in 1919 did not know how to deal with military problems at a time of army demobilisation. Another player in the discussion was the press, including the famous 'Avanti'. The latter devoted a section of the newspaper to publishing letters from soldiers denouncing the government and the military leadership for the late demobilisation. Among the magazines, the "*Nuova Antologia*" was the only one to deal with the question of rapid and total demobilisation. The reasons behind the journal's thesis were both moral and economic dispositions[399]. . Newspapers were divided between supporters of the government and military leadership, as was the case with the right-wing press, and opponents, like the Giolittian press.

The Orlando government faced demobilisation as early as December 1918, when the senior classes of the army were discharged, a total of 1,176,300 men[400]. In the first months of 1919, the number of discharges increased to demobilise over a third of the army force, excluding officers[401]. The lack of a well-structured short and long-term plan for demobilisation was evident and was left in the hands of the military leaders, who were incapable of drawing up an action suited to the needs of the situation. The government's

[399] «Nuova antologia», 16-11-1915, *Smobilitiamo!*, pp. 188-97

[400] Ministro della Guerra, Ufficio smobilitazione e ordinamento del Regio Esercito, *Dati e notizie sulla smobilitazione al 1° luglio 1919,* cartella C.S. n° 7454 dell'archivio dell'Ufficio storico dello stato maggiore dell'esercito, Roma, p. 3

[401] *Ibidem*

only public statement was during a speech by Minister Zuppelli in the Senate on the future structure of the army, proposing a return to the pre-war model. The situation worsened due to the bureaucratic disorganisation that accompanied the entire demobilisation. In January, General Caviglia, leader of the battle of Vittorio Veneto[402], took over as Minister of War. Thanks to the new authority, demobilisation was effectively resumed, guaranteeing, not effortlessly, facilities and allowances for those discharged[403]. The three imperative points for General Caviglia regarding military demobilisation were: firstly, the contingent remained under arms until the conclusion of the peace sanctioned by the Paris Conference; secondly, the preparation of social conditions to reabsorb the discharged without increasing unemployment; and lastly, not to burden the transport system. In conclusion, "a simple arithmetic operation is enough to understand how the Ministry of War finds itself unable to proceed with a more rapid demobilisation at the moment"[404]. The halt to demobilisation was not justified by the government and the country did not know about it. It was not until a few months later, in March, that the subject was discussed in parliament and the conduct of demobilisation, and the actions of the army chiefs were severely criticised. From March to June 1919, the military situation was at a standstill and monthly military expenditure reached almost two billion[405].

According to General Caviglia's vision, it was to be:

> Once the organisation of the pre-war army had been re-established, and the discipline, administration and education of the troops had been restored to normal, the changes, reforms and creation of new bodies would be undertaken as the experience of war and new inventions suggested. It was to be

[402] Cfr. per es. «La Preparazione», 21-1-1919, Timone, *I nuovi capi dell'amministrazione militare,* expressing the hope that Caviglia could impose himself on the ministerial bureaucracy

[403] Cfr. «Corriere della sera», 13-2-1919, *Il piano di smobilitazione e la sua attuazione esposti dal Ministro Caviglia.*

[404] *Ibidem*

[405] *Discussioni Camera*, 6-3-1919, Nitti, p. 18638.

expected that there was no shortage of time. Europe was tired of war [...], there was no danger of new conflicts[406].

In February 1919, the Supreme Command drew up a plan for the army[407]. According to the Supreme Command, the army was to be similar to the pre-war army, slightly enlarged and with a few corrections drawn from wartime experience.

The timetable was extended because Orlando and Nitti, leaders of the Italian delegation in Versailles, needed an army mobilised on the border with Yugoslavia. The vision of politicians such as Orlando favoured an increase in army numbers to ensure public order, a number that Italy never had during peacetime. The Demobilisation and Ordering Office of the War Ministry highlighted the problems with Orlando's wishes. Firstly, it had a great impact on state finances: Nitti calculated almost two billion a month for the army and navy[408]. In spite, in mid-June, the government planned the number of leaves of absence for a couple of classes after the signing of the peace treaty[409].

On the other hand, military leaders did not provide a clear plan for post-war reconstruction. The tendencies of the military can be divided into two groups of generals. The first, politically nationalist, advocating an international policy of force, led the expedition towards the annexation of Fiume. The second group was led by Generals Diaz and Badoglio, the exponents of the Supreme Command. This group, characterised by monarchical feeling, had a more reflexive attitude, based on previous knowledge of the bureaucratic mechanism, which distanced them from political discussions within the government, marking the division of civil and military powers. Moreover,

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[406] E. Caviglia, *Il conflitto di Fiume*, Garzanti, Milano 1948, pp. 65-66.

[407] Ufficio storico, Stato maggiore esercito, Ministero della Difesa, *L'esercito italiano tra la 1° e la 2° guerra mondiale,* Tip. Regionale, Roma, 1954, pp. 26-27 e 212-14, alleg. n. 8

[408] Respectively: *Disc ussioni Camera*, 6-3-1919, Nitti, p. 18638; «Corriere della sera», 9-8-1919, *I ministri militari fanno il loro dovere per la ricostruzione economica del paese?* In F.S. Nitti, *Rivelazioni. Dramatis personae,* E.S.I., Napoli 1948, p. 532

[409] "Il Dovere", 21-6-1919, *La smobilitazione del nostro esercito*, where ministerial figures are quoted: in mid-June 75,000 officers and 2,100,000 soldiers had been discharged; this would therefore give 113,000 officers and 1,600,000 soldiers at arms.

they enjoyed the support of the king, which guaranteed decision-making power, thanks to which they set aside territorial aspirations. They sought talks with political leaders such as Nitti and Giolitti; with Mussolini, they distanced themselves, while Giardino's position was more congenial to the Duce. From 1920 onwards, when the right wing regained power at the top of the government, they encouraged Generals Diaz and Badoglio to distance themselves from politics, taking a more closed stance towards policy.

In December, the army strength was 500,000 men and 52,000 officers[410]. Albricci, who became Minister of War by appointment of Prime Minister Nitti in June 1919, decided to replace senior officers by sending student officers to the regiments[411]. At the same time, from July to September, more commands, and divisions[412] were disbanded than had been ordered since the armistice in June[413]. Nitti declared:

> Demobilisation will proceed rapidly. We intend to change everything that the war has made necessary and that is no longer necessary. The calmer and more conscious the foreign policy of the entire nation will be the more moderate and serene the domestic policy, the more rapidly demobilisation will proceed. But we want to give the country the sense that the war, even in its external manifestations, is over[414].

While on the technical side, demobilisation was an efficient project, quickly concluded and the situation returned to normal, on the political side, the balance was negative[415]. The role of the press was generally neutral, except

[410] G. Rochat, *L'esercito italiano da Vittorio Veneto a Mussolini*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2006, p. 80

[411] *Discussione Camera*, 13 luglio 1919, Albricci, p.19222; e "Corriere della sera", 9 luglio 1919, *Il ritorno alle armi dei militari studenti.*

[412] In total, 4 army commands, 11 corps commands and 24 division commands were disbanded. G. Rochat, *op. cit.,* p. 34

[413] F.S. Nitti, *L'opera di Nitti, op. cit.,* p. 86

[414] *Discussioni Camera,* 14 luglio 1919, Nitti, p. 19312-19313

[415] G. Rochat *op. cit.*, p. 36

for the socialists, who insisted on demobilisation and amnesty, opposing the militarism of the officers and governors[416].

In conclusion, the work of normalisation carried out by Nitti did not achieve the desired results within public opinion: on the one hand, it animated the criticism of the right, which had to diminish its control over the nation, and on the other, it spread the feeling of indifference of the left.

The demobilisation of the Royal Army went hand in hand with the liquidation of war material. For this reason, a parliamentary commission of enquiry[417] was set up to investigate the general situation in which the demobilisation took place. The liquidation of the material was entrusted to Senator Conti, an industrial magnate and under-secretary of Orlando. He assigned the direction of the project to define the question of war materials in the warehouses to the military bodies in their custody[418]. At the end of its analysis of the situation, the Commission severely criticised the demobilisation work: «The bodies set up [...] failed in their purpose and led to a deplorable waste instead of a strict valorisation of the remaining material»[419]. The lack of a general inventory gathering information from all warehouses throughout the country was «the worst system of administration»[420]. According to Mr Gasparotto, «The two biggest post-war scandals in Italy are the reconstruction of liberated land and the disposal of war surplus material»[421]. In the absence of effective control, many of the materials crammed into the warehouses were sold under the counter. Many of the responsible figures were senior officers and generals, who were entrusted with the storage and liquidation of materials[422]. Minister Caviglia tried to evade the task, but with scarce results as no civil commission was

[416] Newspaper article in the Avanti dated 4 July 1919, *Il proletario vuole la immediata smobilitazione*.

[417] Giolitti set up a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry to investigate war expenses on 18 July 1920. It was composed of 15 senators and 15 deputies, chaired by Mr Rodinò, Mr Carnazza and Mr Mazzolani. The work was not continued due to the advent of the Fascist regime. The report presented on 6 February 1923 can be found in Atti Camera, legislazione XXVI, documento XXI.

[418] G. Rochat, *op. cit.,* p. 35

[419] *Relazione*, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 777.

[420] Ivi, p. 779.

[421] *Ibidem.*

[422] G. Rochat, *op. cit.,* p. 37

set up to take over from the military one. Those who suffered the consequences of this situation were the soldiers of the army, penalised by the irregular behaviour of the officers, the new bureaucratic organisation, which was as inefficient as it was powerful, and the obstacles of demobilisation[423].

The reorganisation of the army was entrusted to people who had held command roles during the war, such as Diaz, Badoglio and Albricci; but they had the idea of rebuilding the army based on the 1914 organisation. While the government was picking up the pieces to rebuild itself stronger to face the reconstruction of the country, newspapers published articles claiming the choice to enter the war. The first one, on the anniversary of Italy's entry into the war, the "Avanti" published a severe article against the institutions:

> Four years ago, the Italian nationalist crowd, waving flags and singing war hymns, was singing the praises of the war of national "sacred selfishness". The war was to be short, glorious and victorious. Then - as the years passed and the sacrifices increased - the aims of the war changed. And then it was redemptive war, democratic war, war for human brotherhood in the universal League of Nations. The war is over. For seven months, in secret, the leaders of the states have been plotting the most perfidious peace. And the peoples feel all the horror of the blood that has been needlessly spilt[424].

The decision to enter the war, a war that bent the country on many fronts, was harshly criticised and accused, supported by the difficult balances of four years of conflict. The enquiries that arose from 1918 on the decisions and the course of the war animated the country's general controversy. The Caporetto Inquiry Commission, officially called the Regia Commissione

[423] *Relazione, op. cit.,* Vol. II, p. 778.
[424] Article published in 'L'Avanti' on 24 May 1919.

d'Inchiesta sul ripiegamento dall'Isonzo al Piave[425] (Royal Inquiry Commission on the retreat from the Isonzo to the Piave), was set up by Orlando in January 1918 and directed by General Caneva, an exponent of the military world. The Commission was made up of three military members, divided into an admiral, a valorous general - who had returned in the torpedoes of General Cadorna - and the head of military justice, and three interventionist parliamentarians[426]. The commission worked for seven months and on 24 July 1919 presented its final report to Nitti[427]. The report was presented in three volumes[428]. The key aspect to note is the commission's refusal to place the responsibility for the defeat at Caporetto on the military authorities and Generals Cadorna and Capello. However, during the analysis, the Commission overshadowed important aspects for the purposes of evaluation, committing the error of judgement: they devoted little space to the study of the fighting and the responsibilities of the government and political circles. The Commission's final report was not satisfactory.

For this reason, an attempt was made to analyse, for the first time, the conduct of the war, which until then had been based on the impressions of the veterans and the bulletins of the Supreme Command. No official report on the events of Caporetto was produced[429]. On this subject, the "Stampa" published an article requesting that its own enquiry into the war be undertaken: "it is now time, therefore, to see what appalling series of errors has pushed us into the abyss where we have fallen; it is time to remove all the veils, rip off all the bandages and place the Italian people in the presence of the truth"[430]. The scope of the enquiry was limited to the military errors

[425] G. Rochat, *op. cit.,* p. 41

[426] *Ibidem.*

[427] Article *L'inchiesta su Caporetto è quasi finita*, published by 'La Stampa', on 5 April 1919.

[428] The second volume appeared around 10-11 August is entitled: Le cause e le responsabilità, Poligrafico Ministro della Guerra, Rome, 1919. The first volume dealt with the reconstruction of the events of October-November 1917, the second brought together the judgements of the Commission, and the last was composed of graphs and maps.

[429] Many magazines, such as the *'Rivista d'artiglieria e genio'* (Artillery and Genius magazine), published reports on military operations, but all of them lacked the chapter on Caporetto.

[430] La Stampa", 27 luglio 1919, "*L'ora di parlare"*

committed. Considering that General Cadorna, as head of the General Staff, had centralised all decision-making power in his person, it was clear that he was the starting point of the enquiry[431]. The accusations made expanded to include General Cadorna's political and military supporters, from Salandra to Albertini. Public opinion, after the publication of the report on the military conduct of the war, demanded that Salandra, as political leader, and Cadorna, as military leader, pay for their decisions.

"*You waged the war against our will, you waged it [...] against the people. Now it is over. The light is regaining its rights: and you thought we were silent?*"[432]. These harsh words were published by "La Giustizia" (Justice) and included the people's demands for redemption, understanding and justice. After years of censorship, people now took up their pens to recount the terrible experiences of war on both sides. The "Avanti" collected most of the letters written and made them public, fomenting popular agitation after the war. The masses raged against the war[433]. The war and the post-war period intertwined to become a single issue: "the war, which began in 1915, is not over yet. It continues in other forms. The external war for salvation has become an internal war for the reorganisation of the country"[434]. Starting with the reorganisation of the army, Minister Albricci issued a royal decree on 21 November 1919. It stated: 'the progress of demobilisation has made the definition of an army order even more necessary and urgent [...] in order to meet the various needs that will continue to exist until a stable order of peace is achieved in all areas of national life"[435].

The Albricci order ordered a reduction in the number of soldiers but an increase in the number of officers on permanent active service (Servizio Attivo Permanente - SAP)[436]. The army's post-war structure had to meet 'the

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[431] *Ibidem.*

[432] "La giustizia", 25 agosto 1919, "*Illusi*"

[433] Istituto Feltrinelli, *I periodici di Milano. Bibliografa e storia*, tomo II, Feltrinelli, Milano 1961, p. 119.

[434] "L'Unità", 21 agosto 1919, *La guerra non è finita.*

[435] Ufficio storico, Stato maggiore esercito, Ministero della Difesa, *L'esercito italiano la tra 1° e la 2° guerra mondiale*, Tip. Regionale, Roma, 1954, p. 216

[436] By the summer of 1914 there were 15,858 officers in the SAP divided into 178 generals, 2,200 senior officers, 5,300 captains, 4,200 lieutenants and 4,000 second lieutenants. By the armistice

various needs that will continue to exist until a stable peace settlement is achieved in all areas of national life'[437]. The army had to resume its historic task of guaranteeing public order, but the reorganisation had to take into account the lessons learned from the Great War: the mobilisation system had to be more efficient, and battalions had to take into account the experience of the trenches. Another problem was the high ranks conferred during the war by the military[438], without any political opposition, which made the question of displacing them urgent. This differed from other countries, such as England and the United States, which limited promotions to the wartime period and conferred the rank they were entitled to and not always the highest rank[439]. The manoeuvre of revising the army ranks had great success within public opinion, supported by newspapers such as "La Preparazione", a military, nationalist and conservative newspaper, which considered the revision as a necessary operation for the reduction of cadres[440]. The Special Auxiliary Position (Posizioni Ausiliari Speciali - PAS)[441] was established on 7 November 1919, filled by fully physically and professionally fit officers with at least ten years of active service. Thanks to this measure, together with the Royal Decrees of December 1919 and February 1920, 250 generals, 1250 senior officers and 100 captains were removed from the army[442].

In November 1919, General Diaz was appointed as Inspector General to administer the Supreme Commission for the Defence of the State and

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the number had increased to include: 556 generals, 6,400 senior officers, 8,250 captains, 6,000 lieutenants and 800 second lieutenants. Altogether, the number of SAP in 1919 was 21,926 officers.

Ufficio statistico del Ministero della Guerra, *La forza dell'esercito. Statistica dello sforzo militare italiano nella guerra mondiale*, Provveditorato gen. dello stato, Roma 1927, p. 3 e 19.

[437] Ufficio storico, Stato maggiore esercito, Ministero della Difesa, *L'esercito italiano la tra 1° e la 2° guerra mondiale*, Tip. Regionale, Roma, 1954, p. 216

[438] In 1914 the infantry had 148 colonels for 116 regiments, while in 1918 it had 680 colonels for a smaller number of 300 regiments.

G. Rochat, p. 80

[439] Ivi, pp. 84-85

[440] "La Preparazione", articles by I. Chittaro, under the heading Military discussions, from 7 April to autumn 1919.

[441] "Giornale militare ufficiale", 1919, circolare 649.

[442] "Giornale militare ufficiale", 1919, circolare 653, e 1920 circolare 144.

became a member of the Army Council. Diaz did not want to take on an onerous task in leading the army, so the post of Chief of Staff was given to General Badoglio.

On 3 January 1920, before embarking on a trip to London, Prime Minister Nitti sent Albricci a letter to amend the previously approved measures for the army. He asked for a reduction in the number of generals in service and a limitation on the pay granted to officers in PAS. Nitti's position did not meet with the approval of the Council of Ministers, which met on 4 January and approved an increase in the number of senior officers[443], nor did it meet with the approval of Albricci, who was surprised by Nitti's request as he had helped to draft the provisional measures. Albricci resigned as Minister of War, which was entrusted to the Honourable Bonomi on 14 March 1920. Bonomi was the second person in the history of the Kingdom of Italy to hold the post of Minister of War as a civilian[444]. The military rejected the idea of entrusting the ministry to a bourgeois. In fact, the choice of a civilian served to divide the spheres of influence between politicians and the military, between administration and military training, rather than civilian control over the military sphere. The new order passed on 20 April 1920, known as the Bonomi order, followed the lines of the Albricci order. The Albricci order made significant cuts: there were 10 army corps, all inspectorates were abolished, the force was reduced from 210 to 175,000 men and the budget was cut to 1,200 million a year[445]. The two figures in command of the army were supported by the opposing forces: on the one hand Bonomi was well received by the military, and on the other Badoglio enjoyed the support of the government. But the delay in demobilisation was due to Bonomi, who paralysed the situation by setting up a parliamentary commission. The only aspect of the reorganisation on which they all agreed was to leave control of the army to the military[446].

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[443] *Fondo Albricci*, cart. 120/52.

[444] The first was Mr Casana in the period from 1906 to 1908.
L'esercito italiano nell'estate 1914, in «Nuova rivista storica», a. XLV (1961), fasc. II, p. 307

[445] A. Gatti, *Tre anni di vita militare italiana (novembre 1920—aprile 1924),* Mondadori, Milano-Roma, 1924, p. 312

[446] *Discussioni Senato,* 31 marzo 1920, Giardino, pp. 704-705.

The military demobilisation ended in the summer of 1920. The strength of the army amounted to 300,000 men[447]. Such a force guaranteed protection both outside and inside the country. The military structure of the Regio Esercito was based on the Bonomi order until 1923. Between 1920 and 1921, the reform of the army command affected the figure of the commander, who had become too authoritative. The general staff was therefore incorporated into the ministry. He retained the task of study and organisation but lost the large degree of command autonomy he had acquired during the Great War. From then on, the most successful generals gave up the position of Chief of the General Staff[448]. Command was taken over by the renewed Army Council, chaired by the minister and consisting of nine generals, including a general as vice-president, four army commanders and the chief of staff. The decisions taken in the Army Council only became enforceable with the approval of the minister. However, the political power did not always supervise military decisions: with the figures of Bonomi, keen to impose decisions on the army chiefs, and Badoglio, tending to satisfy the wishes of political circles, there was no tension between the two powers[449].

The reorganisation model, with the general staff incorporated into the ministry and the establishment of the Army Council, was proposed on 6th November 1920 by Bonomi, who suggested adopting the French model for Italian command. The most senior figures in the army, such as Diaz, Badoglio, Giardino, Caviglia and Tassoni[450], responded positively to the proposal, clashing only over the question of appointing the supreme commander, who for some was to be appointed already in peacetime and others who preferred to appoint him only in the event of imminent war. However, thanks to the general consensus of military figures to limit the power of command in Badoglio's hands, the Army Council was established. The chief of staff, seeing his powers limited, decided to abandon the post,

[447] G. Rochat, *op. cit.,* p. 108
[448] Ivi, p. 157
[449] "Il Secolo", 7 marzo 1919, *La crisi militare della civiltà occidentale*.
[450] N. Papafava, *Appunti militari 1919-1921*, STET, Ferrara 1921, pp. 175

which was entrusted to General Vaccari. On 22nd February 1921, the Army Council was established, consisting of Diaz as vice-president, Aosta, Pecori Giraldi, Giardino, Badoglio, Caviglia, Morrone and Tassoni[451].

2. Government change

On 23rd March 1919, Benito Mussolini founded the *'Fasci di combattimento'* movement in Milan. The distinctive feature of the new movement was its aggressive and violent approach[452]. In the early post-war years, Italy experienced a period of social unrest and profound changes in the political context. The first consequence of the political fractures was the general elections held in November 1919, in which the liberal-democratic forces lost a substantial number of seats in parliament. The weak balance of the Nitti government survived until June 1920 and was then succeeded by the new Giolitti government. In those years, Italy experienced a period of deep economic crisis caused by the post-war period. Popular protests culminated in two events: the first in the summer of 1919 due to the increase in the cost of living (*caro viveri*), and the second in September 1920, when metal workers occupied the factories. This period came to be known as the Red Two Years and was "the watershed between the revolutionary and reactionary phases of the post-war crisis"[453].

In the early 1920s, Mussolini took the first steps towards legitimising his party within the political structure of the Kingdom of Italy. In August 1922, a large number of people joined the Fascist party: the road to power was short, without yet knowing by what means. The idea of the march on Rome, proposed some time before by D'Annunzio, was born. Unlike the takeover of Fiume, the leader of the Fascist party[454] attempted to contact politics. On 16th October 1922, the party leadership met in Milan to discuss the operational organisation of the march. In October, the leading figures of the

[451] Ivi, p. 181

[452] G. Sabbatucci, V. Vidotto, *op. cit.*, p. 317

[453] Adrian Lyttelton, *The seizure of power: Fascism in Italy, 1919-1929*, New York, Charles Scribner's Son, 1973, p. 36.

[454] It became a party during the third congress of the Fasci, and Fascism was founded on 9 November 1921 in Rome.

party met in Naples. The political leadership underestimated the Fascist intentions. On 26th October, Mussolini invited leading industrialists, who confirmed their support for fascism. At the same time, the fasci organised themselves for the march. On 26th October, the *squadrists* from all over Italy marched towards Rome. Facta wrote to the king that he opposed any fascist attempt to seize power, but at the same time presented the idea of a government with Mussolini. In the night between 27th and 28th October, the fascists began to gather in the established centres: the situation was clear. The Ministry of War prepared a draft of the Italians' manifesto containing repressive measures against the march on Rome. This measure had no effect, and the demonstration of the National Fascist Party followed the march to Rome. The demonstration ended on 30th October 1922 when King Vittorio Emanuele III entrusted Mussolini with the task of forming a new government. For more than twenty years Fascism, which had become a regime, ruled the Kingdom of Italy.

From the March on Rome to the Second World War, there was an agreement between the Fascist regime and the army whereby the military enjoyed full control of the army and in return provided support for Fascist policy. The Bonomi Order was replaced by the Diaz Order, published in January 1923. The new reorganisation granted full freedom to the military in the organisation of the armed forces[455]. During the first years of the regime, there was no military policy outlining the basic principles of the forces' operations. In 1922, the Fascist movement had its own armed force, the Arditi group, and the national militia. For this reason, it did not initially require army support but rather a position of neutrality. Under Fascism, the figure of the army regained importance in the national milieu. During propaganda, Mussolini often praised the army: 'I always have at the forefront of my thoughts, the army, which is considered by me to be the living, beating, immortal expression of the Italian people. The nation can count on the army. But I solemnly declare here that the army can count on

[455] G. Rochat, *op. cit.*, p. 259

the government and the nation"[456]. In fact, he often received army and navy commanders. The support of the armed forces of the party and the nation for the regime contributed to the establishment of close cooperation between politicians and the military[457].

[456] "Il Popolo d'Italia", 30 ottobre 1923, *Bologna esala in Mussolini il salvatore e il ricostruttore della patria*
[457] "L'Esercito italiano", 7 novembre 1922, *Al di fuori e al di sopra!*

Chapter X: Post-war Britain

1. Demobilisation of the British Army

> The army cannot be got rid of so summarily. In the first place the troops cannot be instantly withdrawn from all the various territories they are occupying. [...] There will be problems of settling accounts, dealing with clothing and equipment, civilian clothes, transportation. [...] It is calculated that the disbandement cannot take place at a greater rate then 5.000 per day. At that rate it would take over six months before even one million men could be released[458].

The problem with demobilisation was that at the end of the war, in November 1918, the number of soldiers in the British Army amounted to 3.8 million men. The BEF soldiers were deployed not only on the European continent, but also in the Middle East. The willingness of the soldiers to return to civilian life was not only present in 1918, but already in 1916. Fisher, President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, wrote to the Army Demobilisation Committee in September 1916: 'With the declaration of peace an incalculable reaction will overcome our army [...] The obsession of the army is to get home'[459]. In the last months of 1918, the Reconstruction Committee[460] answered the question concerning demobilisation with the following words: 'The estimated daily rate is a high one, and there is no intention of keeping any man in the Army longer than is absolutely necessary'[461]. The various institutions, the Reconstruction Committee, the War Office and the War Council, were already considering how to

[458] IWM 66(41), *The Problems of Demobilization.*
[459] TNA, RECO 1/832, September 1916
[460] The Ministry of Reconstruction was established in August 1917 by Lloyd George. Its main task was to administer the reconstruction of Britain once the war was over.
[461] M. Senior, *The Soldiers' Peace. Demobilizing the British Army 1919,* Pen&Sword Military, 2018, p. 24

demobilise such a large army in 1916. The key issue was the reintegration of the soldiers into civilian life without increasing the unemployment rate exponentially. For this reason, various bodies were set up to provide the government with solutions regarding employment and pensions[462].

On 18th March 1916, Prime Minister Asquith set up the Reconstruction Committee, "*a body for the organisation of British post-war reconstruction*"[463]. The Committee consisted of Asquith, the Colonial Secretary Andrew Bonar Law, the President of the Board of Education Arthur Anderson, the Secretary for India Austern Chamberlain, Lord President of the Council Lord Crewew, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Edwin Montagu, President of the Board of Agriculture Lord Salbourne, and the President of the Board of Trade Walter Runciman. In addition, Vaughan Nash was appointed Secretary of the Reconstruction Committee. One of the aims was to coordinate work in the post-war reconstruction phase. The newly formed Committee met for the first time on 24th March[464]. The following year, Lloyd George through the passing of the New Ministries Act of 1917, the Reconstruction Committee became a Ministry. Its institutional task was to coordinate the efforts of several government departments to implement reconstruction plans. It worked in close contact with the War Cabinet. The implementation of the measures issued by the Ministry of Reconstruction was entrusted to the relevant state department. The Ministry was officially closed on 31st August 1923, although it had already been dissolved in August 1919[465].

In 1919, Wilson wanted a portion of the British army to remain deployed on the Rhine until the end of the Armistice Conference. For six months, the Army of Occupation, as the deployed British army, led by Sir William Robertson, was named, stood ready to attack Germany if it did not sign the

[462] The National Association of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors was establisehd in September 1916, the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized soldiers and Sailors (NFDDSS) was established in April 1917, and the Comrades of the Great War (CGW) in August 1917.
Ivi, p. 28

[463] TNA, CAB 37/144/44.

[464] TNA, RECO 1/655.

[465] BT 67, *Ministry of Reconstruction, 1917-1923.*

peace treaty. On 5th December, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff presented the Cabinet with an estimate of the troops needed until international stabilisation was achieved: according to his analysis, 14 to 20 divisions were needed in Germany, one brigade to one division in Italy, one division in the Bosporus area, and one division in Russia; for the Middle East, 19 to 25 divisions were estimated[466]. The problem pointed out by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Wilson, in his diary of 6th January 1919, was that "the war is not over, we are demobilising quite fast enough"[467].

Once Winston Churchill became Secretary of State for War in January 1919, he drafted a memorandum, 'Note on Armies of Occupation', further defining the division of the army deployed after the war. "*The Armies of Occupation will be as follows - Home Army, Army of the Rhine, Army of the Middle East, Detachments of the Far North [Russia], and Garrisons of the Crown Colonies and India*"[468]. For six months, the British army deployed had the task of ensuring international stability with a view to peace. The risk that enemy powers, especially Germany, might retreat and counterattack remained high in such an unstable context. With the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919, the situation changed radically. The threat of a German counter-offensive ceased and in August part of the divisions deployed in Germany were sent to the United Kingdom. In October, some 75,000 soldiers withdrew from Germany. In the following two months, the five divisions in Germany and the British Army of the Rhine were demobilised[469]. On this issue, the Minister of Reconstruction wrote in August 1919 that the number of soldiers was considerably reduced. In October 1919, the British regiment consisted of 1,064,743 men[470].

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[466] Ivi, p. 166

[467] See *The military Correspondance of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson 1918-1922,* ed. Keith Jeffery, Army Records Society, Bodley Head, London, 1985, p. 69

[468] W.S. Churchill, *The Aftermath,* Thronton Butterworth Ldt, London, 1929, pp. 57-59

[469] Brigadier General Sir James Edmonds, *Official History of the Great War: The Occupation of the Rhineland 1918-1929*, Naval and Military Press Ltd and the Imperial War Museum, London, 1918, pp. 165-167.

[470] General Annual Reports on the British Army 1913-1919, Also TNA, WO, 73/111, General Military Returns of the British Army.

Churchill presented the different phases of the demobilisation of the army during his speech on 3rd March 1919:

> The first period is covered by the end of the war in which we maintain our great national armies. The second period covers the demobilisation of those great national armies and the constitution "out of their remains' of our present armies of occupation. The third period covers the creation of a standing Regular Army and the ultimate disbandment of the Armies of Occupation. [...] The fourth period will cover the institutions of the military system to be adopted in the future[471].

Consequently, another Military Act was passed and in February 1922, when Wilson left the War Office, the government signed an Anglo-Irish treaty to grant the independence that had been promised but suspended because of the war.

2. Change of government and relations with Ireland

Already in the early years of the 20th century, Britain experienced a period of strong internal tensions over the Irish question. From 1916, when the Eastern Rising broke out, Britain granted independence, but this process had to be suspended until after the war. The need for a strong home front during a world war side-lined the issue until that war was over. In 1919, Irish claims to independence again became an important issue for the British government. In November 1920, six groups of men belonging to the Irish Republican Army (IRA) attacked a group belonging to MI5 and SIS. The British administrations in Dublin chose to ignore the growing turmoil. The Commission of Inquiry into the Irish Question to analyse the 1916 uprising, wrote in its report “the main cause of the rebellion appears to be that lawlessness was allowed to grow up unchecked and that Ireland for several years had been administered on the principle that it was safer and more

[471] TNA, RECO 1/876.

expedient to leave the law in abeyance if collision with any faction of the Irish people could thereby be avoided"[472]. The Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC)[473] from 1918 became the target of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), led by Michael Collins. The British government thus decided to set up two more auxiliary forces, the Black and Tans and the Auxiliary Division, recruiting soldiers from the First World War. But the warnings of souring relations did not alarm the RIC. This factor was an indicator of the gradual loss of political interest in keeping Ireland under British control. For some years there had been a desire in Ireland for assertions of national identity, even with bloodshed. In 1917, after the annual IRA congress, the national IRA co-ordination was established. The National Executive consisted of Brugha as President, Collins as Army Director, Mulcahy as Training Officer and Rory O'Connor as Engineering Officer. The National Executive was supported by a brigade military force spread across the counties of Ireland. The headquarters of the Irish General Staff were in Dublin. The target of the Irish revolutionary forces were the RIC and Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP)[474]. A second target for Collins was informers and spies[475] for the British government. Out of fear, RIC and DMP action was reduced to mere traffic control, so as not to risk repercussions. The IRA intelligence service controlled by Collins was developed on two levels: the military and the civilian. The first operated through the cells of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), under the direct control of Collins. The goal of the IRA was an Irish-led government and thus independence from the British Empire. After two years of fighting, the Irish War of Independence ended in December 1920 and the Government of Ireland Act was signed, through which Ireland was divided into two: Southern and Northern Ireland. Thus, the Irish Free State was born.

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[472] T. Bowden, *The Irish Underground and the War of Independence 1919-1921*, p. 6

[473] The RIC, established by the Irish Constabulary Act in 1836, was one of two police forces in Ireland. The task of the British Empire force was the maintenance of peace in Ireland by quelling internal unrest. The RIC was disbanded on 30 August 1922.

[474] T. Bowden, *op. cit.,* p. 17

[475] H. Talbot, *Micheal Collins' Own Story*, London, 1923, p. 79.

At the same time, Britain experienced a period of turmoil within the government. From Asquith to his successor Lloyd George, governments were made up of a coalition of the Liberal, Conservative and Labour parties. When Lloyd George's government collapsed in the autumn of 1922, the government was overthrown. After the Great War and the conclusion of the Irish War of Independence, the government agreed on elections. The two most influential parties were the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, which in its later years gained great popular support. From 1922 to 1929 there was a succession of Conservative and Labour governments: between the autumn of 1922 and the autumn of 1923, the Conservatives came into government, headed by Bonar Law and Baldwin. The British experience of government was a far cry from the experience of European governments in the 1920s and 1930s, which saw authoritarian regimes come to power on the back of popular discontent with the consequences of the war.

CONCLUSION

For both countries, the challenge of industrial and total war involved the intertwining of different levels of leadership, both political and military, on a level never experienced before. During the Great War, military power managed autonomously for the first time. On the one hand, political decisions were expected to have a continuum in military action in a situation of complete subordination, while on the other, space for manoeuvre was sought that had never been experienced before. The nineteenth-century United Kingdom and Kingdom of Italy came up against revolutionary force, such as that of the Great War. The kingdoms found themselves fighting an all-out war that challenged both army commands and the political environment. The English and Italian history of the First World War began at two different moments. The former experienced total war as early as 1914, while the latter declared neutrality until, without any discussion with the military, a small number of political leaders committed themselves to war on the side of the Entente. Unlike the Kingdom of Italy, in the United Kingdom the figure of Chief of General Staff, entrusted to military posts, did not seek an extension of its military power. In Italy, the figure of Cadorna changed not only the structure of the Army High Command, but also the civilian leadership of the state. Furthermore, in Italy the army's representative in the government was a general, except in a few cases, whereas in England the position was held mainly by civilians. The subordination of military power was a structural element of the English organisation, while in the Italian case, thanks also to the influential figure of Cadorna, military power always sought its own independent space for action.

The different way in which the war was conducted had different consequences. The United Kingdom, thanks also to the support of the United States, which intervened in the Great War in 1917, maintained its influential international role. The history of the Kingdom of Italy, which fought on its own territory to conquer land from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was different. One can also understand the different reasons why the two

countries entered the war: on the one hand to respect the European balance of power in the British case, while on the other to acquire a role within the international concert and conquer the lands that belonged to the Kingdom. The distinction between the weight of the two countries became clear at the peace conference in Versailles.

The war also had a great impact on post-war political leadership. In Great Britain, fighting with the Irish Home Front, the Conservative Party under S. Baldwin won. In Italy, after 1918, there were many generals who regretted not only the high degree of autonomy they had enjoyed during the conflict, but also the enormous amount of power they had managed. Nostalgia for this privileged status made many of them particularly susceptible to the seduction of radical regime changes - the hypothesis of a military conspiracy flourished in the immediate post-war period - but it was also at the origin of the alliance with the recently born *Fasci di combattimento* movement. An alliance that would continue throughout the history of Fascist Italy until 1943.

PRINCIPAL MINISTERS, ETC., IN WAR-TIME GOVERNMENTS

	LIBERAL GOVERNMENT (*as on Aug. 6, 1914*)	FIRST (ASQUITH) COALITION *formed May 1915*	SECOND (LLOYD GEORGE) COALITION *formed Dec. 1916*
Prime Minister	H. H. ASQUITH	ASQUITH (L.)	LLOYD GEORGE
Lord Chancellor	HALDANE	BUCKMASTER (L.)	FINLAY
Chancellor of the Exchequer	D. LLOYD GEORGE	MCKENNA (L.)	BONAR LAW
Home Secretary	R. MCKENNA	J. SIMON (L.)	G. CAVE
Foreign Secretary	E. GREY	GREY (L.)	BALFOUR
First Lord of the Admiralty	W. S. CHURCHILL	A. J. BALFOUR (U.)	CARSON (to 17.2.1917) E. GEDDES
Secretary for War	KITCHENER	KITCHENER (to 5.6.1916) LLOYD GEORGE (L.)	DERBY (to 19.4.1918) MILNER
Secretary for India	CREWE	A. CHAMBERLAIN (U.)	CHAMBERLAIN (to 10.7.1917) MONTAGU
Colonial Secretary	L. HARCOURT	A. BONAR LAW (U.)	LONG
President Local Govt. Board	H. SAMUEL	W. LONG (U.)	RHONDDA (to 28.6.1917) W. H. FISHER (to 4.2.1918) A. GEDDES
President Board of Trade	W. RUNCIMAN	RUNCIMAN (L.)	A. STANLEY
President Board of Education	J. A. PEASE	A. HENDERSON (Lab.)	H. A. L. FISHER
Lord President of the Council	BEAUCHAMP	CREWE (L.)	CURZON
Lord Privy Seal	CREWE	CURZON (U.)	CRAWFORD
Chancellor of the Duchy	C. F. G. MASTERMAN (to 1.2.1915) E. MONTAGU	CHURCHILL (L.) (to 12.11.1916) SAMUEL (L.) (to 1.1.1916) T. MCKINNON WOOD (L.)	CAWLEY (to 11.2.1918) BEAVERBROOK (to 21.10.1916) DOWNHAM
Attorney-General	J. SIMON	E. CARSON (U.) (to 9.10.1916) F. E. SMITH (U.)	SMITH
Minister of Munitions		LLOYD GEORGE (L.) (to 7.7.1916) MONTAGU (L.)	C. ADDISON (to 17.7.1917) CHURCHILL
Minister without Portfolio		LANSDOWNE (U.)	MILNER (to 19.4.1918) CARSON (from 17.2.1917) HENDERSON (to 11.8.1917) BARNES (from 11.8.1918)

WAR CABINET 1917–1918

LLOYD GEORGE
BONAR LAW
CURZON
MILNER (to 17.2.1917)
CHAMBERLAIN
HENDERSON (to 11.8.1917)
BARNES (from 11.8.1917)
CARSON (from 17.2.1917)
SMUTS (from 18.6.1917)

FIRST SEA LORDS

LOUIS OF BATTENBERG (to 30.10.1914)
FISHER (to 17.5.1915)
H. JACKSON (to 29.12.1916)
J. JELLICOE (to 27.12.1917)
WEMYSS

CHIEFS OF IMPERIAL GENERAL STAFF

C. DOUGLAS (to 25.10.1914)
WOLFE MURRAY (to 19.10.1915)
A. MURRAY (to 15.12.1915)
W. ROBERTSON (to 16.2.1918)
HENRY WILSON

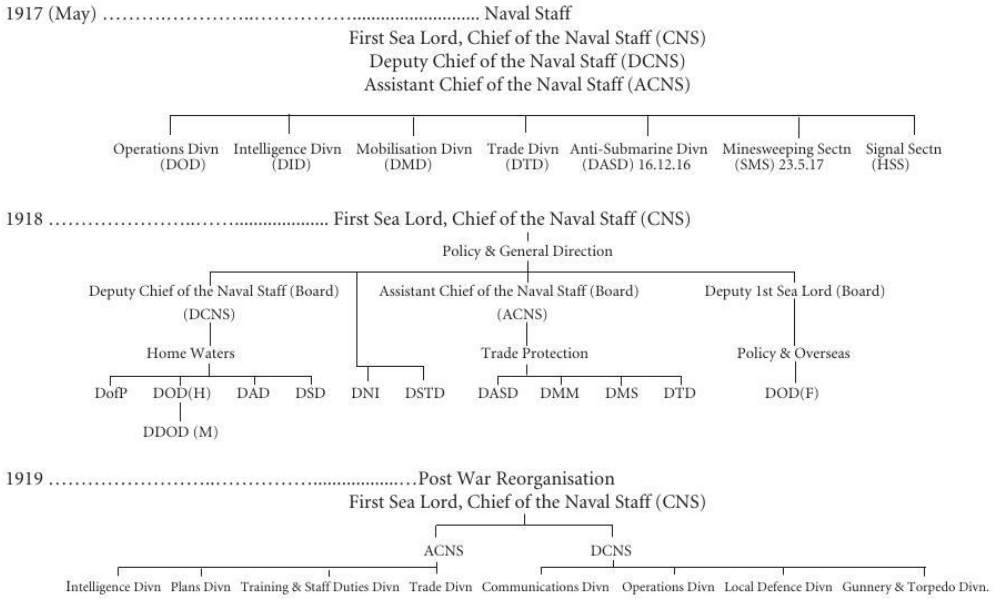


Diagram adapted from *The Naval Staff of the Admiralty: Its work and development, p. 151*

307

Naval Staff 1917-1919

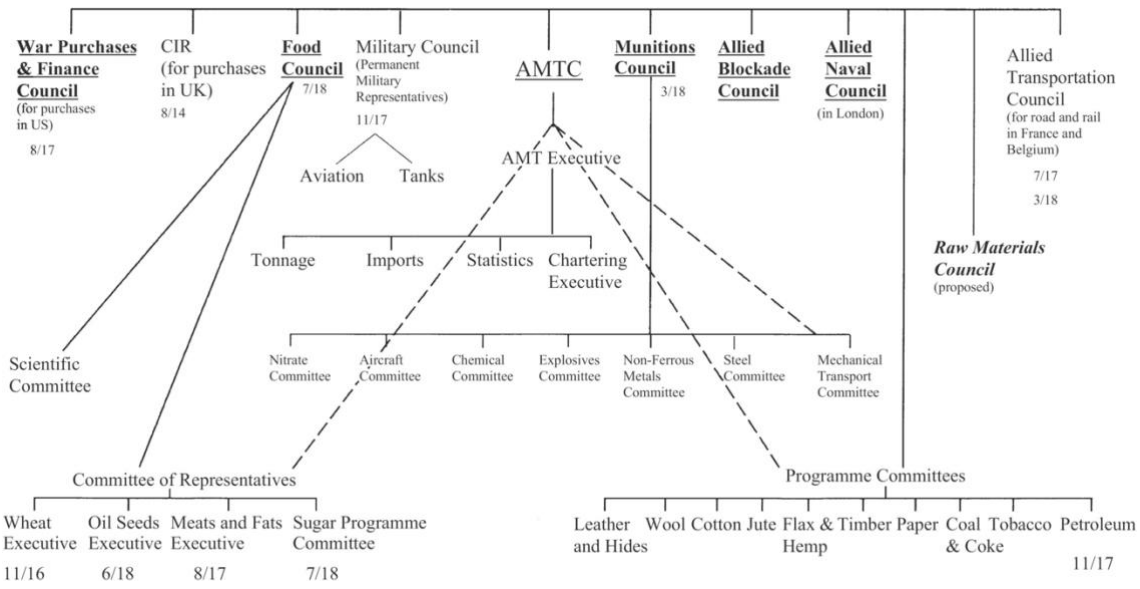
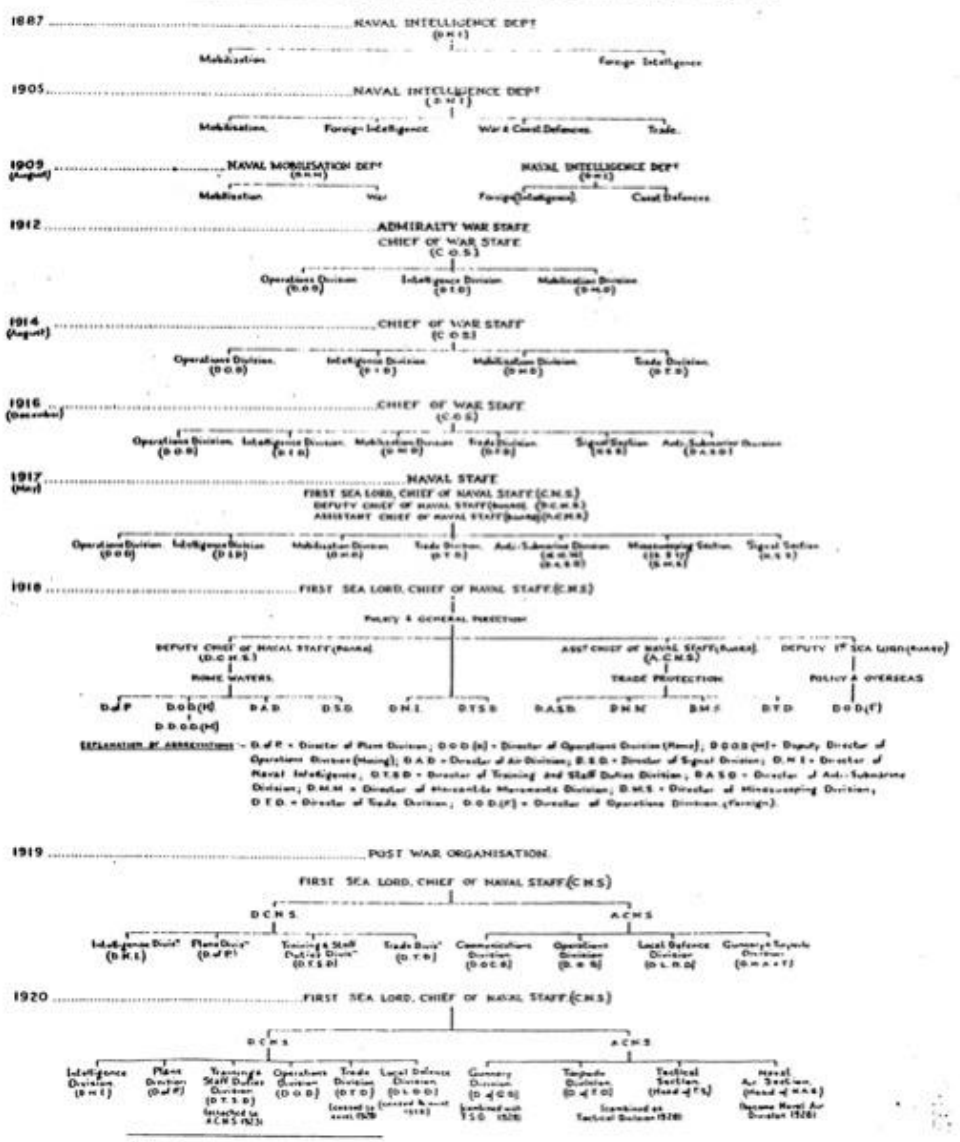


Diagram of Supreme War Council 1917

Appendix D: Administrative Development of the Admiralty War Staff, 1912 – 18.[2]

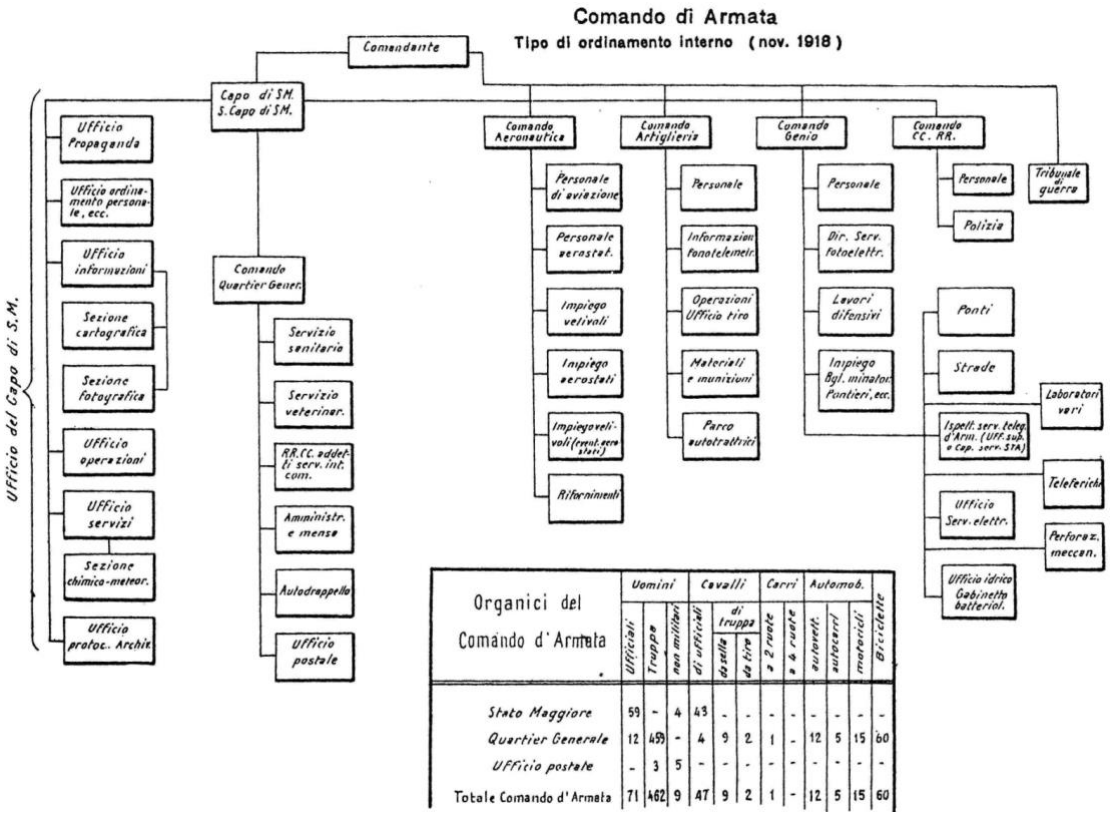


[2] *The Naval Staff of the Admiralty: Its work and Development*, 151

Admiralty War Staff

Ordinamento del 1910

UFFICIO DEL CAPO DI STATO MAGGIORE DEL REGIO ESERCITO	Ufficio Mobilitazione	
	Ufficio Difesa dello Stato	
	Ufficio istruzioni e manovre	
	Comitato di Stato Maggiore	
	Riparto intendenza	Segreteria del Riparto. Ufficio contabilità. Ufficio servizi. Ufficio trasporti.
	Riparto Operazioni	Uff. Informazioni
		Ufficio coloniale
		Uff. scacch. Orient.
		Uff. scacch. Occid.
		Segreteria del Riparto



Organici del Comando d'Armata	Uomini			Cavalli		Carri		Automob.			
	Ufficiali	Truppa	non militari	di ufficiali	di truppa: da sella	di truppa: da tiro	a 2 ruote	a 4 ruote	autovett.	autocarri	motocicli	Biciclette
Stato Maggiore	59	-	4	43	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Quartier Generale	12	459	-	4	9	2	1	-	12	5	15	60
Ufficio postale	-	3	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Totale Comando d'Armata	71	462	9	47	9	2	1	-	12	5	15	60

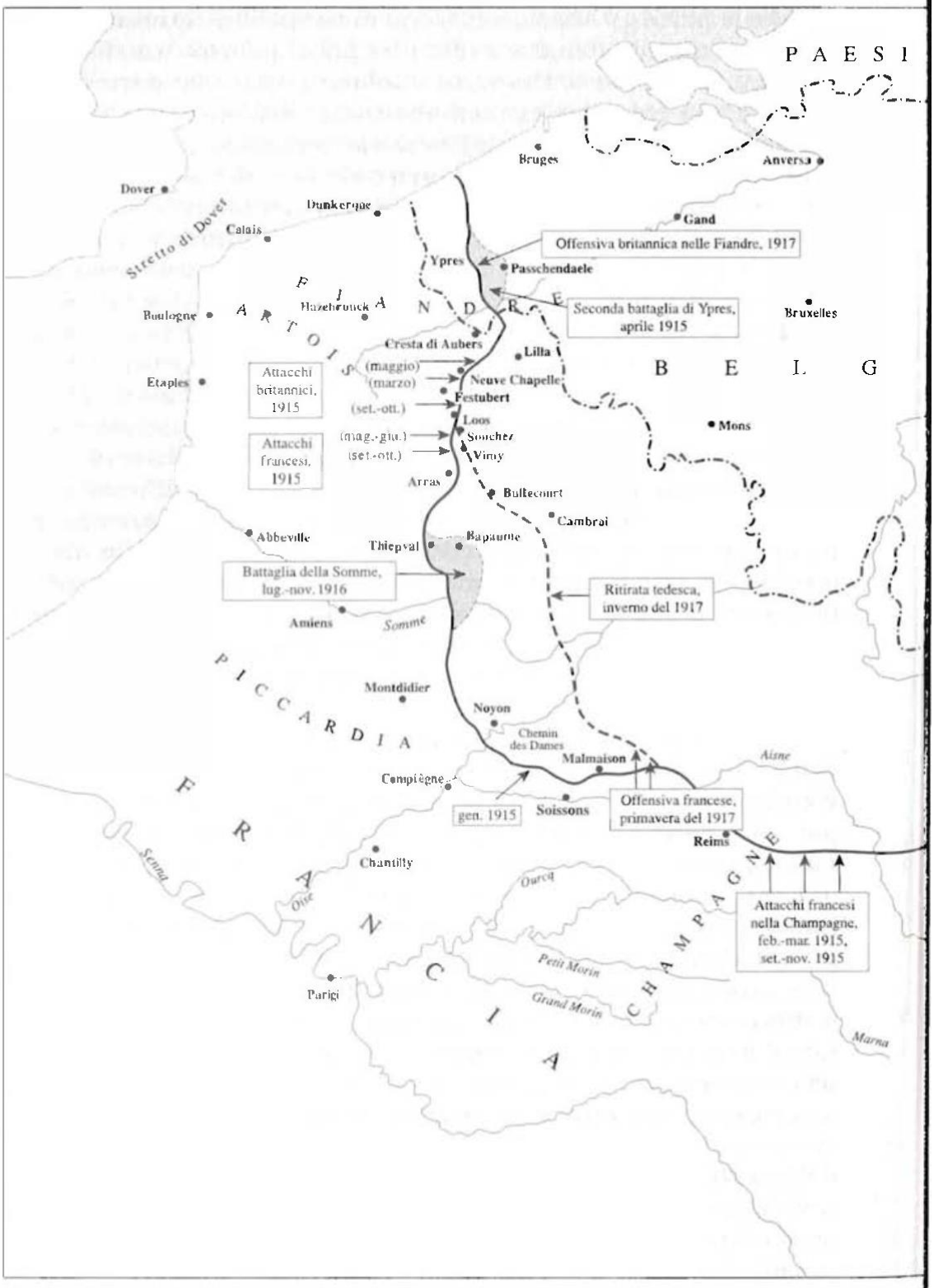


Fig. 8. *Il fronte occidentale nel 1915-1917.*

Anno 39 Num. 216 — Milano — Venerdì 7 Agosto 1914 — Edizione del mattino

CORRIERE DELLA SERA

L'Austria tronca le relazioni diplomatiche con la Russia

La missione del Duca d'Avarna a Roma

(Servizio particolare del "Corriere della Sera,")

La rottura austro-russa

Anche il Montenegro in guerra con l'Austria

La guerra in mare

Voci di scontri navali - Navi affondate o catturate - Viborg bombardata? - Il "Goeben,, e il "Breslau,, lasciano lo stretto di Messina

Irruento attacco tedesco ai forti di Liegi respinto dalle truppe belghe

LA GUERRA AEREA

Duello a 500 metri

Sette ufficiali uccisi di uno stato maggiore tedesco?

L'Olanda in guerra

Viborg bombardata da una squadra tedesca?

Nave tedesca affondata da un incrociatore inglese

Cattura di navi tedesche

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Italy</td><td colspan="2">Great Britain</td></tr>
<tr><td>Chief of General Staff</td><td>Ministry of War</td><td>Secretary of State for War</td><td>Chief of General Staff</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="6">Tenente generale Tancredi Saletta
(1/6/1896 - 27/6/1908)</td><td>Enrico Morin
(27/4/1902 – 14/5/1902)</td><td rowspan="2">H.O. Arnold-Foster
(6/10/1903 – 4/12/1905)</td><td rowspan="3">Generale Sir Neville Lyttelton
(12/2/1904 – 2/4/1908)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Giuseppe Ottolenghi
(14/5/1902 – 3/9/1903)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ettore Pedotti
(3/9/1903 – 24/12/1905)</td><td rowspan="4">Richard Haldane
(10/12/1905 – 12/6/1912)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Luigi Majnoni d’Intignano
(24/12/1905 – 29/5/1906)</td><td>Feldmaresciallo Sir William Nicholson
(2/4/1908 – 22/11/1909))</td></tr>
<tr><td>Giuseppe Ettore Viganò
(29/5/1906 – 29/12/1907)</td><td rowspan="2">Feldmaresciallo Sir William Nicholson
(22/11/1909 – 15/3/1912)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Saverino Casana
(29/12/1907 – 10/12/1909)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Tenente generale Alberto Pollio
(1/7/1908 - 1/7/1914)</td><td>Paolo Spingardi
(11/12/1909 – 19/3/1914)</td><td>J.E.B. Seely
(12/6/1912 – 30/3/1914)</td><td>Feldmaresciallo Sir John French
(15/3/1912 – 6/4/1914)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Domenico Grandi
(21/3/1914 – 10/10/1914)</td><td>H.H. Asquith
(30/3/1914 – 5/8/1914)</td><td>Generale Sir Charles W. H. Douglas
(6/4/1914 – 25/10/1914)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Tenente generale Luigi Cadorna
(10/7/1914 – 8/11/1917)</td><td rowspan="2">Vittorio Italico Zuppelli
(10/10/1914 – 4/4/1916)</td><td rowspan="2">Conte Kitchener (5/8/1914 – 5/6/1916)</td><td>Tenente generale Sir James Wolfe Murray
(25/10/1914 – 26/9/1915)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Generale Sir Archibald Murray
(26/9/1915 – 25/12/1915)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Paolo Morrone
(4/4/1916 – 16/6/1917)</td><td>David Lloyd George
(6/7/1916 – 5/12/1916)</td><td rowspan="2">General Sir William Robertson
(25/12/1915 – 19/2/1918)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Gaetano Ettore Giardino</td><td>Conte di Derby</td></tr>
</table>

	(16/6/1917 – 30/10/1917)	(10/12/1916 – 18/4/1918)	
Tenente generale Armando Diaz (9/11/1917 – 24/11/1919)	**Vittorio Luigi Alfieri** (30/10/1917 – 21/3/1918)	Visconte Milner (18/4/1918 – 10/1/1919)	**Feldmaresciallo Sir Henry Hughes Wilson** (19/2/1918 – 19/2/1922)
	Vittorio Italico Zuppelli (21/3/1919 – (19/1/1919)		
	Enrico Caviglia (18/1/1919 – 23/6/1919)	**Winston Churchill (10/1/1919 – 13/2/1921)**	
Generale d'esercito Pietro Badoglio (24/11/1919 – 3/2/1921)	**Alberico Albricci** (24/6/1919 – 14/3/1920)		
	Ivanoe Bonomi (14/3/1920 – 21/5/1920)		
	Giulio Rodinò (21/5/1920 – 15/6/1920)	Sir Laming Worthington-Evans (13/2/1921 – 19/10/1922)	
Tenente generale Giuseppe Vaccari (3/2/1921 – 16/1/1923)	Luigi Gasparotto (4/7/1921 – 26/2/1922)	Conte di Derby (24/1922 – 22/1/1924)	**Feldmaresciallo Frederick Lambart** (19/2/1922 - 19/2/1926)
	Armando Diaz (30/10/1922 – 30/4/1924)		

Italy-Great Britain comparative table: Chief of General Staff and Military for War/Secretary of State for War.
Bold: military

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