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This issue of *Over the Top* was a little painful for me to edit. Like — well, almost all — military history enthusiasts, I just love battleships. My first ship model was the USS Missouri, and one of my all-time great memories was visiting the Missouri in the early 1980s when it was docked at Bremerton, Washington. My heart skipped a beat that day as the speaker system started playing the overture from *Victory at Sea* when I walked onto the bridge.

After digesting a lot of military history over the last quarter century, though, I find that I have developed a strong sense that in the 20th century the importance of battleships in deciding the outcome of wars was oversold. It seems to me that except for fighting an opponent's capital ships and showing the flag (Let me share another memory with you: an Iowa-class battleship sailing out to sea under the Golden Gate Bridge at sunset — you will hardly ever see a more impressive sight), they rarely decided the outcome of any 20th century conflict or tilted the balance in favor of one side. (The Battle of Tsushima is the exception to this rule.) In Pentagon-ese, battleships were not cost-effective and offered limited mission functionality.

In this issue of *Over the Top*, we reexamine an episode in which everyone's "Greatest Man of the Century", Winston Churchill, allowed his battleship infatuation to take command of his judgment. Despite his earlier view that a naval-only effort to force the Dardanelles, which were defended by forts, mobile artillery, and mines, was not feasible, he forced through that exact operational concept in 1915. Our contributor Jonathan Schroden examines Churchill's proposal that 18 battleships might just do the trick, and shows in myriad ways why Churchill’s premises were faulty and the operation was doomed from the beginning.

For the first time, we are dedicating an issue of *Over the Top* to the memory of an individual. Leading Seaman William Thomas, RN, grandfather of David Beer, our literary editor at Worldwar1.com, survived the sinking of the battleship HMS Ocean lost in this operation on 18 March 1915, and later supported the landings at Gallipoli by manning a landing craft carrying soldiers to the beach.

MH
Defeat of the Allied Battleships in the Dardanelles: March 1915
By Jonathan Schroden, PhD, CNA ANALYSIS & SOLUTIONS

Introduction
By December 1914, opposing European forces were largely deadlocked along the Western Front of World War I, as the German march toward Paris had been halted and massive armies stood trench-to-trench, each side daring the other to attempt a charge in the face of withering machine gun fire. By this time, Britain and France had lost more than a million men, casualties that seem unfathomable by today's standards, but were hardly the final toll of the war. Amongst this carnage, and in part due to revulsion of it, the British considered making a bold, strategic move in the east: namely, "an attempt, first by sea and then by land, to pierce and break down the barriers separating Russia from her allies and in so doing possibly to shorten the war." These efforts, known sequentially as the Dardanelles and Gallipoli Campaigns, would become military disasters of the highest magnitude and, as such, the topic of much subsequent study.

Disaster at the Dardanelles
The geography of the Dardanelles was described by Historian Robert Massie in *Dreadnought*: (Photo pg. 4)

The Dardanelles are a water passageway from the Mediterranean Sea and the Aegean to the Sea of Marmara. The mouth of the channel at Cape Helles on the Aegean is two miles wide, but once inside the Straits, the shoreline on either side opens out to a width of four and a half miles, then gradually comes together again at the Narrows, fourteen miles upstream. Above the Narrows, the passage widens again to an average of four miles until, twenty-six miles later, it reaches the Sea of Marmara. The water in the Straits is deep, up to 300 feet at the Narrows. Steep cliffs line the northern side, which is the shore of the Gallipoli peninsula; across, in Asia, where the Trojan plain reaches down to the island of Tenedos, the shoreline is low and the bottom is shallow.

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Our contributor, Jonathan Schroden, Ph.D. is currently the director of the CNA Corporation's Center for Stability and Development. Schroden holds Ph.D. and M.S. degrees from Cornell University and B.S. degrees from the University of Minnesota at Duluth. He has written widely on security matters in the Middle East. This article is excerpted from his longer piece "A Strait Comparison: Lessons Learned from the 1915 Dardanelles Campaign in the Context of a Strait of Hormuz Closure Event".
There is no tide in the Dardanelles; hot water flowing from the Black Sea rivers and from the melting snows of the Caucasus Mountains creates a permanent current of 2 to 4 knots. Three connected bodies of water — the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara, and the Bosphorus — together make up one of the most important water passageways in the world. Linked, they form the only entrance to and exit from the Black Sea; they are a highway for all trade coming from the Danube, the Dniester, the Dnieper, and the Don and the great ports of Constantinople [now Istanbul], Odessa, and Sebastopol. In 1914, an endless flow of steamships carried nine-tenths of Russia's exported grain through the Dardanelles. Control of this channel meant control of Russia's lifeline to the sea, to the West, to her allies. Because the Dardanelles were a Turkish waterway, Germany, Turkey's ally, meant to block them and thereby to isolate and strangle the empire of the tsars.

Turkey, which in 1914 was still technically neutral, had nonetheless laid sea mines across the Dardanelles at German insistence, though it left a small channel open for transit of specially piloted ships. This changed, however, after 27 September 1914, when British sailors boarded a Turkish destroyer exiting the Dardanelles and discovered Germans on board, thereby violating Turkey's neutrality. In the wake of this incident, the German colonel in command of the forts at the Narrows ordered the minefield extended and the waterway closed. A month later, in response to this incident and a later one involving the shelling of Russian ports by Turkish ships (which had been donated by Germany), Britain and Turkey formally declared war against each other.

Not long after, the first mention of an attack against the Dardanelles was made in a British War Council meeting, by Winston Churchill. Churchill, who as the First Lord of the Admiralty had helped build the impressive British fleet, also felt the passive role being played by the navy was a waste of capability. With this in mind, Churchill suggested a combined sea and land operation against the Dardanelles and the Gallipoli peninsula. Lord Kitchener, the dominant force in the British War Council, agreed with the merit of the idea but felt he could not spare any troops to support it.

Undeterred, and with a recent request by the commander-in-chief of the Russian Army for Allied action against the Turks to relieve pressure in the Caucasus, Churchill seized on a navy-only plan for the Dardanelles:

The Dardanelles forts, it was believed, were armed mainly with old guns, which could be outranged by heavy naval guns; the bombarding ships need not come in close and would therefore be untouched. Once the fleet had overcome the decrepit Turkish forts, the minefields could be rapidly cleared and the battleships could sail through to the Sea of Marmara.

Churchill's Change of Mind

Churchill's personal position in 1915 represented a dramatic reversal from his 1911 view that "It is no longer possible to force the Dardanelles . . . nobody would expose a modem fleet to such perils."
If this could be accomplished, Churchill reasoned the further strategic implications: Turkey, being considered a weak state, would certainly surrender as battleships approached its capital, and if it did not, those same ships would shell it into submission, as Constantinople was built largely of wood and Turkey's only munitions and primary gun and rifle factories were located within range of naval gunfire from the Sea of Marmara. With Turkey thus pacified, the sea route to Russia would be reopened, allowing materiel and supplies to flow to Russia, and Russian wheat to flow to the Western Front. In addition, the neutral Balkan states (Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria) would be pressed to join the Allies once Turkey was defeated. And, as Massie says, "all of this — the delivery of a masterstroke to shorten the war — would have been achieved by the great weapon Churchill held in his hand, the Royal Navy."

Thus inclined, Churchill sought the opinion of his Admiralty. Admiral Carden, commander of the British East Mediterranean Squadron, replied that he did not think a rush through the Straits was possible, but that extended operations with a large number of ships might meet with success. Asked further to provide an operational plan along these lines, Carden provided a linear scheme of slow progress employing overwhelming force, in which his ships would first silence the forts protecting the Straits one by one, then proceed into the Straits to silence the concealed guns and mobile batteries while providing cover for minesweepers to clear a channel to the Narrows. Once this channel was opened, the ships could advance to demolish the forts protecting the Narrows and into the Sea of Marmara. To do so, Carden requested a force of 12 battleships, three battle cruisers, three light cruisers, 16 destroyers, six submarines, and 12 mine-sweepers. On 13 January 1915, Churchill presented this plan to the War Council, and it was approved with no opposition. The conclusion of the war council, as penned by Prime Minister Asquith, was "that the Admiralty should prepare for a naval expedition in February to bombard and take the Gallipoli peninsula with Constantinople as its objective."

As the preparations and planning for the Dardanelles offensive continued, the First Sea Lord, Admiral Fisher, began to have doubts about a navy-only plan. He voiced these concerns to Churchill and the Prime Minister, but the latter did not circulate them to the War Council (at Churchill's recommendation). Thus, on 28 January 1915, when the War Council was to meet to give final approval for the operation, Admiral Fisher attempted to resign in protest. However, after expressing his views to the Prime Minister in person and finding an unreceptive audience, and after a long talk with Churchill, he relented to remain in his position and to accede to the Dardanelles operation, going so far as to add Queen Elizabeth, the first of a series of new dreadnought battleships with 15-inch guns, and the two latest pre-dreadnoughts as well.

The Turkish defenses at the Dardanelles were constructed in three layers (map page 6). The entrance was guarded by four old forts, containing a total of sixteen heavy and seven medium-range guns. Past the entrance where the Straits widen, the second layer of defense consisted of numerous permanent batteries of 6-inch guns. Following an ill-advised preliminary shelling of the forts by British ships in November 1914, this second layer was fortified with mobile 6-inch howitzer batteries of four guns each along with numerous searchlight batteries. At the Narrows was the third layer of defense, consisting of two huge ancient fortresses armed with 72 guns of various calibers. Even more important, though, was the inclusion of 324 mines laid in ten lines across the Narrows. Thus, the Turks had in place a complex, integrated defense: the mines blocked passage of the Straits; the mobile howitzers prevented sweeping of the mines; and the larger guns of the forts protected the howitzers by keeping the ships at bay. Unraveling this defense would prove more difficult than Carden could imagine.

When Admiral Carden's attack began on the morning of 19 February 1915, he had been given all the forces he requested and more: Queen Elizabeth; the battle cruiser Inflexible; 12 pre-dreadnought battleships; four light cruisers; 15 destroyers; eight submarines; and 35 fishing trawlers converted into minesweepers. He also had two battalions of Royal Marines to serve as a temporary landing force if needed.
The original lines of naval mines are numbered 1 to 10. The 11th line was laid in Erin Keui Bay by the minelayer *Nusrat* on 8 March. The 26 mines of line 11 brought the total to 402 in the strait. At the time naval action had broken off only one line of mines had been cleared.

**Battleships vs. the Forts**

Major forts are indicated with blue boxes and the Turkish name and equivalent British number for the fort is given, if known. In all, of 176 guns along the strait, the fleet had destroyed only four with no more than 150 defenders killed. In return the fleet had lost almost 700 men with three battleships crippled and three sunk out of a total of 18. Even more significantly, only one line of mines had been swept from the Straits and there seemed little chance of the minesweepers making any more progress with the mobile howitzers still as persistent as ever.
A recent analysis of Turkish sources suggests the Turks may have laid as many as 402 mines in the Straits. On the first day of attack, the battleships fired 139 12-inch shells at the Turkish forts, but although they hit the forts many times, at the end of the day the forts were still firing. As the ships retreated for the night, the lesson learned was that it was exceedingly difficult for the ships to destroy the Turkish guns — a direct hit was required. However, it was noted that the ships could suppress the enemy gun crews, thereby potentially allowing the ships to move in ever closer and eventually pound the forts at close range. This knowledge was applied at the next opportunity, which did not come until 25 February when the weather cleared again. On this day, Carden's ships resumed shelling the entrance forts, scoring several direct hits on Turkish guns and forcing the abandonment of the forts. The next day, the Royal Marines were put ashore and went through the still-abandoned forts, blowing up at least 50 guns of significant caliber by hand.

This initial success played well in the War Council, which began discussing what to do after the fall of Constantinople. It perhaps played too well. Admiral Carden, apparently realizing the utility of having troops ashore to act as spotters for naval gunfire, requested 10,000 men to be landed on the Gallipoli peninsula, since the forts had been silenced. Lord Kitchener declined this request, and, as Admiral Carden had claimed only a few weeks earlier that he could force the Straits alone, he now had to prove he could do it.

With the outer forts silenced, the ships began several days of attacks on the second and third layers of defense. Here, geography took an opposing hand. In the Aegean, the ships had plenty of maneuver space and could fire from outside the range of Turkish guns. The narrowness of the Straits, however, confined the ships and put them in the range of artillery fire from both sides. Although this was not enough to sink the bigger ships, it was nonetheless disconcerting.

And it made the next task at hand, namely the clearing of the minefields at the Narrows, even more difficult. To do this, Carden had been given a set of fishing trawlers, equipped with minesweeping gear and steel plating and manned by fishermen who were designated naval reserves. These fishermen, already disheartened knowing the draft of their ships was deeper than the minefields (exposing them to the mines), were further discouraged by the howitzer fire their battleship protectors were unable to silence. To circumvent this, Carden put the minesweepers to work at night, but Turkish searchlights were powerful enough to illuminate the slow-moving sweepers, and at night the battleships were even less effective at silencing the howitzers. These attempts were repeated several nights in a row, with predictably disappointing results.

On the seventh night of minesweeping, Carden took a different approach. The minesweepers, which could only make 2-3 knots going against the current of the Straits, were to steam past the minefields, turn, and sweep them coming back downstream. Seven trawlers set out to do this: four of the crews were so agitated by the surrounding gunfire that, when the time came to begin sweeping, they did not even extend their gear; one pair swept and then exploded two mines; and the last struck a mine and was destroyed.

All the while, 6-inch howitzer shells rained down around them. The next night, the trawlers were sent completely unprotected, in an attempt to "surprise" the Turks. This time, all the trawlers turned and fled the instant they took fire. On 13 March, Carden made his last attempt to sweep the fields at night. Having replaced the fishermen with navy volunteers, he sent seven trawlers up the Straits again, this time preceding...
them with two hours of naval gunfire directed at the searchlights and howitzer batteries. The Turks, having seen this tactic before, trained searchlights on the trawlers and rained gunfire upon them. The result was again predictable: two trawlers had their gear shot away; one had its entire crew killed; two rammed into one another and became one, drawing concerted fire while drifting powerless; while only a few mines were swept. In the meantime, the battleship Amethyst was hit in her steering gear and then in the mess deck, killing 24 and wounding 36. Thus ended Carden’s attempts to sweep at night, and indeed his attempts altogether. The Admiral fell ill and was diagnosed with a dangerous ulcer; he was also proclaimed to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown, due to constant worrying about the mines, the weather, the howitzers, and the Admiralty. On 17 March, Carden resigned his post, and his deputy, Rear Admiral John de Robeck, was put in charge.

De Robeck, who had accepted Carden’s plan to force the Straits, launched his attack on the Narrows the next day. As attempting to sweep the mines at night did not work, de Robeck decided to eschew the element of surprise and rely instead on brute force. As Massie describes, using his armada of (now) 18 battleships, his plan was:

. . . to silence the Turkish forts and big guns at the Narrows by long-range bombardment. Once these guns were subdued, the battleships would advance up the Straits and engage the batteries protecting the minefields. As soon as the Narrows forts and the mobile batteries were suppressed, the minesweeping trawlers would advance and, in broad daylight, sweep a passage 900 yards wide.

The battleships would then advance through this swept channel up to the Narrows forts and complete their destruction at close range. If, as the admiral hoped, he could batter the forts into silence by the evening of the first day, then his fleet might complete its other assignments and enter the Sea of Marmara the following day.

De Robeck organized his ships into three lines: Line A consisted of his four most powerful ships (to include Queen Elizabeth) along with two pre-dreadnoughts; Line B consisted of the four old French battleships flanked by two more pre-dreadnoughts; and Line C was made up of four old British battleships. The plan was for the ships in Line A to sail to within 14,000 yards of the Narrows forts and open fire on them (with the two pre-dreadnoughts focusing on silencing the howitzer batteries on the shores). Once the Narrows' big guns had been silenced, the ships from Line B would advance through Line A to within 10,000 yards and add their fire to that of Line A. As the bombardment continued, both Lines A and B would advance another 2,000 yards. Line C was to wait outside the Straits until called by de Robeck to relieve Line B. Once this massive display of firepower had suppressed the forts, six mine trawlers would advance under the protection of two more old battleships and sweep a channel, through which the battleships could then proceed to pound the Narrows' forts at point-blank range.
The attack began around 1030 hrs. on 18 March, with the Line A ships reaching their position and beginning their barrage about an hour later. Within a half hour, a huge explosion was seen at one of the forts, and de Robeck judged this the time to advance the Line B ships through Line A. They did so, bringing a total of eight 15-inch and 32 12-inch guns to bear on the forts.

The combination of this amount of naval firepower with that contained in the forts, confined to the narrowness of the Straits can only be imagined, but must have been a truly awesome sight to behold. The firing continued for several hours, with only one of the French battleships suffering serious damage (Gaulois was hit by a 14-inch shell and had to beach on a small island just outside the Straits). Around 1400, de Robeck ordered Line C to come forward, and, as Line B withdrew, Bouvet was "rocked by a tremendous explosion...heeled over, capsized, and vanished — all within sixty seconds." Ninety percent of her crew went down with her. Nonetheless, the ships of Line C came forward, and the pummeling of the forts continued.

By 1600, the forts had stopped firing and de Robeck counted the damage: Bouvet, Irresistible, and Ocean were lost; Gaulois was beached; Suffren was so damaged it had to go into dry dock; and Inflexible had to retreat to Malta for extensive repair. Initially in low spirits, de Robeck's second-in-command Roger Keyes cheered him up by pointing out that the three lost battleships were destined for the scrap heap anyway, and his fleet still had enough power to punch through the Straits.

Keyes later wrote of this day:

*Except for the searchlights, there seemed to be no sign of life [inside the Dardanelles]. I had a most indelible impression that we were in the presence of a beaten foe. I thought he was beaten at 2 p.m. I know he was beaten by 4 p.m. — and at midnight I knew with still greater certainty that he was absolutely beaten. It only remained for us to organize a proper sweeping force. . . . to reap the fruits of our efforts. I felt that the guns of the forts and batteries and the concealed howitzers and mobile field guns were no longer a menace.*

The battle could not be continued the next day due to weather, but Keyes had no doubt it would resume soon. Indeed, reinforcements in the form of five battleships and 62 minesweepers to be manned by crewmen of the lost ships were on the way. Even the War Council, at its 19 March meeting, told de Robeck to continue operations if he saw fit to do so. But, as the bad-weather days went by, de Robeck brooded on what had happened, and, although it was true the battleships lost were destined for the scrap heap, he still did not know exactly what caused their loss or whether he would lose more to the same unknown cause. For while mine-spotting planes had identified the main mine lines in the Narrows, what de Robeck would not know until after the war was that, ten days before his attack, a Turkish mine expert, having analyzed the fleet's tactics, laid another line of 26 mines perpendicular to the ten lines already in place (Map page 6). This line of silent killers damaged both de Robeck's fleet and his enthusiasm for the operation.
On 22 March, at a meeting of senior commanders on Queen Elizabeth, de Robeck announced that he now felt the fleet could not force the Dardanelles on its own. In agreement with him was the recently arrived General Sir Ian Hamilton, who had been sent to command the troops that were waiting to take control of the peninsula following the navy's success. (These troops had recently become available as a result of developments on other fronts.) Hamilton, who had witnessed the attack on the Narrows, had reached the same conclusion and communicated his views back to Lord Kitchener.

With de Robeck and Hamilton of the same mind, it was settled to wait until the latter could assemble his forces for an amphibious landing, which was estimated to take three weeks. This decision was sent to the War Council, and, although Churchill strongly opposed it, it had the support of the Admiralty, Lord Kitchener, and the Prime Minister, and so was approved. But Hamilton's troops were not ready to begin their assault until the end of April, and, when they did, so began a second disaster at the Dardanelles. This one was to be orders of magnitude more costly. By the end of the eight and-a-half month Gallipoli Campaign, more than a half million Allied men had been landed, with more than half becoming casualties. A full 50,000 of these were killed. On the other side, the Turks suffered between 250,000 and 350,000 casualties of their own. The magnitude of these disasters led to the downfall of Prime Minister Asquith's government and the end of many careers — though not Churchill's, who later wrote of the campaigns, "Searching my heart, I cannot regret the effort. It was good to go as far as we did. Not to persevere — that was the crime."

Lessons from the Dardanelles
Given the magnitude of the disasters that occurred at the Dardanelles, it is no surprise that much has been written about them. Thorough study of the academic literature, as well as official documents such as the reports of the British Commission appointed in the wake of the events, shows a multitude of lessons that could be learned. The list below attempts to capture these lessons, along with several we have identified, and is organized into three categories: operational, strategic, and cross-echelon lessons.

Operational Lessons
When it comes to operating in mined waters, one should not discount the impact of fear that surrounds these operations.

Generally speaking, navy ships are expensive and nowadays significantly less expendable than they were a hundred years ago. Thus, those responsible for these ships rightfully fear the damage a sea mine can do. When it comes to clearing mines, any crew attempting to do so is at risk, and, if they are forced to do so while under fire, that risk is greatly magnified both in reality and in the minds of the crew. As Roger Keyes said regarding minesweeping operations in the Dardanelles, "I did not think the fire from the concealed howitzers and field guns would ever be a decisive factor. I was wrong. The fear of their fire was actually the deciding factor..."

Ways and means must be properly aligned with ends, if ends are to be reached at minimum cost.
Naval gunfire is not generally very effective against land-based artillery, especially when unsupported by spotters. Traditional wisdom, even at the time of World War I, was that ships should be used in battles against other ships for supremacy of the seas, and not against forts. As Massie states, "Ships are more vulnerable than forts: a battleship 500 feet long is a large target; any part of it can be hit, sometimes with drastic consequences for the entire vessel. A fort, on the other hand, cannot be greatly harmed except by hitting the guns themselves."

Also, ships are generally not useful for taking land. As the Dardanelles Commission asked in its examination of the purpose of the campaign as stated by the War Council, "How could a fleet 'take' a peninsula? How could it occupy Constantinople?"

Operational art consists of space, time, and force factors, and, in the case of closing a maritime strait, these factors tend to favor the actor attempting to close it.

*Death of a Battleship*

Finally, the Allied fleet applied its least capable set of assets, that of fishing trawlers turned minesweepers manned by civilian crews, against the most difficult part of the campaign, that of clearing minefields under fire. Had the Allies used naval minesweepers (e.g. destroyers fitted with sweeping gear) manned by navy crews, the results of their mine clearing operations might have been dramatically different.

*Death of a Battleship*

The Demise of French Battleship Bouvet

Straits by their nature result in reduced maneuver space; Carden and de Robeck learned this lesson the hard way during their assault on the forts in the Straits and the minefields at the Narrows. The lack of maneuver space for their ships likely contributed to their repeat tactics, which the Turks exploited by planting the eleventh, perpendicular mine line shown on page 8. The aspect of time initially favors the closing actor, since the initiative to close a maritime strait is strictly his, and the longer the countering forces wait, the stronger the closer's defense can be made. In the case of the Dardanelles, the Allies routinely sacrificed the element of time, to detrimental effect. Finally, in part as a result of the inherent advantages of space and time, the closer also enjoys the ability to confound the countering force using smaller forces than the latter requires. Asymmetric and low-cost options such as sea mines can be very effective multipliers of the space-time advantages, as the Dardanelles example amply illustrates.

*Quality operational leadership is critical.*

Admiral Carden, prior to being assigned as commander of the East Mediterranean Squadron, was on the verge of retirement from his post as superintendent of the Malta dockyard after an otherwise undistinguished career. Carden was described by one contemporary as "very second rate — no 'go' in him, or ideas, or initiative." Even Admiral Fisher, the First Sea Lord, commented during the Dardanelles Campaign that he "had a sort of feeling that the thing was rather too much for Carden." Given that Carden nearly had a nervous breakdown during the campaign, it would appear Fisher was right. Similar criticisms have been levied against General Hamilton during the Gallipoli Campaign, despite his later behind-the-scenes attempts to keep his name clear.
Strategic Lessons

If there is the possibility of conducting an operation against an enemy's weakness, it is generally advisable not to bring attention to that enemy's weakness beforehand.

Prior to the Dardanelles Campaign, Churchill, angry at the Turks for formally siding with Germany, ordered Admiral Carden to bombard the outer forts of the Dardanelles as a show of displeasure. The latter did so for 20 minutes, and, although some destruction was visited on the forts, this action highlighted the weakness of the Straits' defenses at that time. In response, the Turks and Germans linked the fortresses via telephone; added range finders, range buoys, and more searchlights; brought in additional mobile howitzers; and, most important, doubled the number of mine lines in the Narrows. Obviously, this made the subsequent campaign at the Dardanelles significantly more difficult.

Joint operations tend to be more effective when conducted in parallel, versus in sequence.

Similarly, it is not advisable to "cherry pick" aspects of a coherent plan and expect their implementation to achieve the objectives of the plan as a whole. The original suggested plan for the Dardanelles consisted of amphibious assaults on both sides of the Straits, naval action in the Straits, and land assaults toward Adrianople and Constantinople. Because Lord Kitchener felt he could not spare troops from the Western Front for the amphibious assaults, Churchill seized on the naval portion of the plan alone. And, even when the former eventually relented and gave the 29th Division in support, his orders precluded the use of that force until the navy had failed.

At strategic-level meetings, presence is often taken as participation and silence is often taken as consent.

Admiral Fisher, the First Lord of the Admiralty, tried several times to convince Churchill and others that the Dardanelles Campaign required support from ground troops — but he never raised these objections at an actual War Council meeting. Thus, his silence at the War Council was taken as consent for Churchill's position, which was contrary to his own. When asked by the commission why he felt his only options in disagreement were to remain silent or resign (which he eventually did), he replied that he was not a member of the War Council, but merely an expert on hand to answer questions when asked. And when it came to the Dardanelles, he maintained he was never asked.

During planning, it is crucial to make critical assumptions clear and to revisit them as operations unfold, especially when plans run counter to prior wisdom.

For the Dardanelles Campaign, as recently as the decade prior (1906), the General Staff of the British War Office, in conjunction with the Director of Naval Intelligence at the Admiralty, considered a joint sea and land operation against the Gallipoli Peninsula, and concluded "military opinion. . . will be in entire agreement with the naval view that unaided action by the Fleet, bearing in mind the risks involved, is much to be deprecated." This memo was brought before the War Council in February 1915, and the latter decided to ignore its conclusion, based on a set of five assumptions related to Turkish strength and recent developments in naval gunfire. This decision was made before the naval attack; the subsequent failure of that attack largely nullified the assumptions on which the memo was ignored. However, these assumptions were not revisited prior to decisions to land amphibious forces on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

Cross-Echelon Lessons

In kinetic warfare, incremental learning may not be fast enough.

An examination of the minesweeping attempts of the Dardanelles shows the Allies tried to change their tactics based on lessons learned: they switched from sweeping upstream to downstream; they attempted sweeping at night to better protect the trawlers; and they replaced the civilian fishermen crews of the trawlers with navy volunteers when the former proved unwilling to sweep under fire.

That said it took many sweeping attempts to learn these lessons, during which time the Turks could observe the repeat tactics and adjust to them. At the operational level, this could also be attributed to poor analysis and understanding of the problem at hand and/or poor planning to address it.

Observe - Orient - Decide - Act

Process this cycle more rapidly than an opponent and you can "get inside" your opponent's decision cycle and gain the advantage.

From Col. John Boyd, USAF
A common understanding of risk across echelons is critical.

The Dardanelles Campaign provides two examples of this:

· Roger Keyes, who oversaw minesweeping operations during the campaign, was flabbergasted by the retreat of the trawlers under fire. In his mind, the mines had to be swept, and even if he lost the seven trawlers conducting operations on a given night, he had reserves to replace them. His thoughts were echoed by Churchill, who wrote, "I do not understand why minesweepers should be interfered with by firing which causes no casualties. Two or three hundred casualties would be a moderate price to pay for sweeping..." Unfortunately, these assessments were not shared by the trawlers' crews who were repeatedly sent into harm's way with little protection and no way of defending themselves.

· Churchill, who realized that 16 ships in the British fleet were scheduled for scrapping in 1915, saw these as expendable and therefore worth the risk inherent to the Dardanelles operation. In the words of a telegram from the Admiralty to Carden before the campaign, "The importance of the results would justify severe loss." In contrast, Admiral Carden was so worried over the threat to his ships that he departed the scene on the verge of a nervous breakdown, and, after the 18 March attack at the Narrows, even de Robeck was distraught over the total loss of three battleships (all of which were due to be scrapped) and the operational loss of three more. His assessment of further risk appears to have stood in direct contrast to Churchill's, as the latter had already dispatched two battleships as replacements and had four more in line to follow. De Robeck's subsequent decision to yield the campaign to the army left Churchill at a loss, saying, "It never occurred to me for a moment that we should not go on within the limits of what we had decided to risk, until we reached a decision one way or another [emphasis added]." Unfortunately, the "we" to whom Churchill refers does not seem to have included Carden and de Robeck.

Churchill sent Admiral Carden the following telegram on 3 Jan 1915: "Do you consider the forcing of the Dardanelles by ships alone a practicable operation... Importance of results would justify severe loss. Let me know your views."

In planning an operation consisting of multiple stages (and/or branches), it is worth incorporating deliberate decision points along with the stages of the plan to prevent unchecked escalation from occurring.

Carden's plan for the Dardanelles consisted of several stages, the first of which was the destruction of the outer forts. Once this was accomplished, the War Council was enthusiastic about the next stage. However, when it became clear the second stage would be more difficult to accomplish than originally thought, the War Council did not deliberate on what to do next; rather, the decision to halt the naval assault and wait for the army was made at the operational level by de Robeck and Hamilton. Had a deliberate decision point been included in the plan, the War Council might have been forced to meet and discuss the way ahead. The two deliberate options on the table at that time were: to call off the attack once it appeared that a large ground force would be necessary to support the navy, and weather the loss of prestige; or, to make a determined effort to force the Straits by a rapid and massive joint operation. Yet the Council did not formally consider these courses of action — instead it vacillated for several weeks, eventually "drifting" into acquiescence of de Robeck's and Hamilton's decision. The end result was a significant escalation of the efforts against the Straits, one that was unchecked by strategic decision-makers. A more obvious example of "mission creep" may be hard to find.
If strategic communications are not thought through in detail prior to the launch of a major operation, the media can seize the opportunity to shape the narrative and constrain options available to decision-makers.

In the Dardanelles case, following the 19 February bombardment of the outer forts, an article appeared in the *Times* emphasizing the importance and supposed brilliance of the campaign to force the Straits, but also commenting that military support to the naval attack would be required. Even more important, the article stated, "the one thing that the Allies dare not risk in a persistent attack on the Dardanelles is failure." Several similar articles appeared in major outlets around the same time, and the net effect of these articles was to frame the initial attack on the outer forts as a resounding success and any attempt thereafter to break off the campaign as a slight on British national prestige. Thus, although Lord Kitchener had earlier stated, "we could leave off the bombardment if it did not prove effective," it would have been difficult for the War Council to call off the remainder of the naval attack without losing face. Indeed, the commission concluded "the argument based upon the loss of prestige...exercised so predominant an influence as practically both to nullify the intentions which had been originally formed and to obliterate the recollection of the considerations which were advanced prior to any definite action having been taken."

"There was the obvious but crucial question of what to do with a fleet once it had forced its way into the Sea of Marmara. Although no plans were made by the Admiralty, Churchill seems to have hoped that, once it had dealt with the Goeben, Breslau, and the Turkish fleet, its appearance off Constantinople would promote mass panic in the capital and cause the government to fall. He failed to consider the frightening alternative that the Fleet might become bottled up in hostile territory, without support, its lines of supply cut, and powerless to influence events."

Lt. H.K. Ackland, RN, January 1998 Article in *The Naval Review*

**Was the Strategy Sound?**

What does history have to say about the potential of the strategy for the Dardanelles Campaign to actually work? Recall that, although the operational objectives were to destroy the Turkish defenses and clear a path through the minefields, the strategic objectives were to reopen this line of communication for Russia and, more important, to pacify Turkey and get the neutral Balkan states to join the Allies’ cause — all in the hopes of shortening the war. But did this "shortcut to victory" have a chance?

History gives a mixed answer to this question. Some believe that, although British ships had inflicted relatively minor damage on the forts at the Narrows (destroying only eight of the 72 big guns), the Turks had fired such a large fraction of their available ammunition as to be running short. If this was true, the Allies had only to attack again, draw fire until the Turks ran out, and send the minesweepers in to open the Straits relatively unhindered. Churchill was among the first to advance this possibility, writing in his memoirs, "And yet if the navy had tried again they would have found that the door was open." However, a recent study of Turkish sources has called this into question, suggesting the Turks had enough ammunition remaining to continue contesting the Straits and that any further naval assault would have resulted in further losses for the Allies. Thus, the ability of the Allies to achieve their operational objective of opening the Straits via navy action alone seems questionable at best and dubious at worst.
Recall also Churchill's belief that if the Straits could have been forced, the arrival of Allied gunships within range of Constantinople would have caused Turkey's capitulation. This, too, is subject to debate. Massie writes that even the initial naval attack on the Straits caused a mass exodus from the Turkish capital; that state archives were hidden; and that banks were emptied of gold. Such actions suggest Turkey was afraid of the Allies breaking through, but was this enough to cause capitulation? As the Dardanelles Commission pointed out, the Allied navy could not take the capital — only an army could do that. Because the Allies' initial strategy relied on the navy alone, their only hope for an army in Constantinople relied upon a revolution in the Turkish military.

As Gerald Ellison wrote in 1926, Turkish orders were, in the event of Allied success, for the government and the central reserve of the army to withdraw into Asia Minor. As he says:

In these circumstances a revolution depended on the Turkish army mutinying and refusing to obey orders. But a mutiny in the presence of an enemy is an unlikely event, especially when a nation, as was the case with the Turks in 1915, knows it is fighting for its national existence. History records very few examples of such a breakdown of military discipline. Accordingly the underlying idea of the whole plan was Utopian in the extreme.

Thus, although Allied success in opening the Straits would have accomplished one of the strategic goals (opening the passageway to Russia), it seems doubtful it would have achieved the second, that of causing Turkey to submit. In the interest of fairness, however, it is worth pointing out the two "beneficial effects" of the campaign cited by Prime Minister Asquith: it postponed Bulgaria's joining the Central Powers and it kept a Turkish force of about 300,000 occupied for nine months, when that force would have been a much bigger asset to the enemy if employed elsewhere.

But as the Commission concluded, "whether those advantages were worth the loss of life and treasure involved is, and must always remain, a matter of opinion."

Looking at the position which existed on 13 January, we do not think the War Council were justified in coming to a decision (on the naval plan) without much fuller investigation.

_Dardanelles Commission Final Report_