Royal College of Defence Studies

The cost and benefits of war:
War aims and the economic consequences for the UK

Dissertation by
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Forward to Godfrey Bloom's Dissertation for the Royal Academy of Military Studies
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The study of military campaigns, the strategy employed by generals who conduct them, and the heroics of the men in battle naturally attract our imagination and stir our patriotism, especially when the campaigns are successful. Of less interest is the study of military affairs as just one part of a nation's foreign relation's repertoire. But as Godfrey Bloom reminds us in this very honest and adult look at three military campaigns, going to war usually means that the nation has failed its people in very substantial ways. Plus he reminds us of other war lessons that we never seem to learn—that the cost of war is always many times higher than the most pessimistic predictions, that the outcome is seldom to our satisfaction, and that the consequences—usually adverse—can reverberate for a century.

Of the three campaigns featured in Mr. Bloom's dissertation, only the Abyssinian campaign of 1867-68 could be called a complete success. And yet the cost of this campaign was over four times that projected, resulting in a tax increase on the British people! I believe that Mr. Bloom is rather hard on the British diplomatic corps when he faults them for being in Abysinnia in the first place and for provoking a mentally imbalanced King Theodore into incarcerating them for an unintended diplomatic slight over a neglected letter of appreciation from Queen Victoria. As a result, the British consul and other of Her Majesty's subjects were clapped in irons for three years until a British expeditionary force secured their release by killing the king. Nevertheless, the military campaign was a masterpiece of logistics, and the British victory did not lead to an occupation of the conquered land. Once the military had secured the release of their fellow citizens, it withdrew and that was that. Well, that really wasn't that at all, as Mr. Bloom explains. The consequences for colonial peace were immense, for the action displayed British resolve at its most advantageous. Throughout its far-flung Empire, British subjects could sleep somewhat easier knowing that the world knew the extent to which their government would go to protect them from injustice. Frankly, anything less than this response would have been intolerable.

Mr. Bloom moves then to more meaty fare. The South African (or Boer) War of 1899-1902 was more complex in its origin, bloodier and more expensive in its execution, and more consequential for the entire world. We Americans are only slightly more confused about the cause of this war than are the British themselves. And, although Mr. Bloom hits the high points of the motives of the various actors, his goal is not to re-examine well-known history for hidden agendas but, rather, to illustrate diplomatic failure. The war solved little, despite the vast expenditure of men and material on both sides, and led to much worldwide turmoil. It certainly was avoidable. If there is any conclusion that can be drawn from this most enigmatic war it is that great nations must never let their resolve backed by military capability be called into question.

Decades of relative peace had, perhaps, made it appear to the Boers that they could win, having twice the manpower, twice the firepower, and the most modern weaponry in the

war zone. However, they failed to appreciate British resolve and failed to understand the importance of the Royal Navy. Nowhere in the Empire did the British military maintain overwhelmingly large numbers of troops or military materiel. But the British Empire was united by the Royal Navy's control of the sea. Britain used the sea as the Romans used their straight-as-an-arrow roads--to move men and materiel to problem spots in the Empire. So, no disaffected colonists or envious colonial neighbors could calculate their chance of successfully tweaking the lion's tail by tallying only what forces the British maintained in the immediate area. They would have to consider that, given enough time, the weight of the entire Empire could fall on their heads. Again, it was really simply a matter of resolve. If Britain were willing to send enough men and spend enough money, it would prevail. Such is the calculus of war.

The Falklands War rounds out Mr. Bloom's thesis that war means government failure, for successful statecraft results in peace among nations. In fact, despite the origin of his dissertation as required for successful completion of a course at the Royal Academy of Defense Studies, Mr. Bloom calls for a renewed study of statecraft by statesmen as much as he calls for a renewed study of war. He desires to place military science in its proper role as the rock upon which the liberal nation deals with its peers. The Falkland War proves one of his points, which is that there is still a need for military preparedness.

Despite claims by the short-live junta, Argentina had no historic claim to the Falkland Islands. The islands had been a British crown colony, like the Shetland and Channel Islands, for a century. But in 1982 Britain was no longer a world power, and, I'm sure, its political leaders felt that maintaining an expeditionary force to protect British citizens in far off lands just wasn't necessary. The modern, post World War II world was supposed to behave differently. Well, the Argentine generals didn't get the memo. Britain did eventually secure the liberation of the Falklands, but in doing so it demonstrated its lack of military preparedness. Britain had opted for small aircraft carriers as appropriate for its Harrier jump jets. Now, Harriers are wonderful at air shows—they can take off and land vertically, hover over the ground, and really wow the crowds. But they cannot stay in the sky with modern front line fighters. As a result, Britain could not provide complete air cover for its invasion fleet. Four ships were sunk to enemy action, proving the need for absolute air superiority for the fleet. As in all conflicts small things made a big difference—many Argentine bombs did not arm properly and failed to detonate. One British admiral said that this was the difference between victory and defeat. Perhaps.

But Mr. Bloom's dissertation should not be read as a call to arms but as a call to statecraft, which may or may not include a call to arms. If arms are required, they are a last resort and an indication of government failure. No nation or its dependents abroad is attacked by a hostile nation that knows it will lose. On the contrary, most wars are begun in the false belief in quick, cheap, relatively bloodless (for one's own forces) victory. As the decades have receded from World War II, every allied nation has spent an ever-increasing share of its budget on social welfare programs at the expense of military preparedness. Even the U.S. has not escaped this trend, having shut down, for budgetary

reasons, the assembly line for its only front line fighter aircraft (the magnificent F-22) before its replacement is in hand (the yet to be proven F-35).

There needs to be a full-blown discussion of the purpose of government, which, I believe, Mr. Bloom would be qualified to lead. As an Austrian School economist, he understands that a nation's economic base is the foundation of its military might. And, as an upright, self-reliant Englishman, he understands that welfare entitlements are cancers upon that economic base, sucking the budgetary lifeblood from the nation's military preparedness for the dubious benefits of the cradle-to-grave nanny-state. Statesmen and their statecraft are powerless to guide the nation in the absence of a strong military. Military preparedness combined with a non-interventionist foreign policy is the true path to peace and prosperity. A nation that is ready to fight will not have to fight. Such a simple lesson! There is more, much more to statecraft--such as the promotion of just principles through law--but this is its bedrock. Ever diminishing military preparedness in the West is seen almost as inevitable. There is no reason that this should be so. The study of even successful wars yields much wisdom and one can even claim that refusing to go to war requires as much study as picking up the gauntlet. Britain's refusal to intervene in the American Civil War may be the crowning achievement of enlightened statecraft of the nineteenth century. Read this dissertation to learn why.

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Executive Summary

The object of the paper is to show by historic example that a significant number of wars and campaigns are fought with no clear war aim or exit strategy. This leads to enormous economic and social costs.

Governments have very limited means of waging war. Tax, borrowings or debasement of the currency, often all three. Examples are shown of very varied campaigns and the dangers of failure to plan strategically for them both militarily and economically.

The concept of the paper is to help formulate a broad template for the modern politician to enable he or she to avoid the basic mistakes of their fore runners.

Introduction

The traditional amateur, and indeed often professional military historian is prone to devote attention to epic battles, deeds of 'derring do', excitement, glamour and horror of war. Less frequently is there an analysis of the fundamental war aim and its economic or geo political consequences. Although this is more often true of smaller, 'forgotten' conflicts it is sometimes true of the great wars. Professor Norman Stone is one of the few academics who puts a question mark over the necessity of the Second World War and the benefit of its outcome. Yet there is no shortage of those who espouse the futility of World War I. Paradoxically there is significantly greater acceptance now there was one great twentieth century war which came in two parts. Not so much perhaps a single game of two halves but a second test match in the same series. Clausewitz argues "war is an extension of politics by other means"[i]. Yet an argument of more weight might be that war is a complete failure of diplomacy by the political class.

There are few examples of modern warfare[ii] where an economic advantage has been gained by the protagonists. Albeit conflicts arise for other reasons. Ideology, treaty obligation, trade and empire expansion and occasionally pre emptive declarations in defence of the nation state.

Some wars are inevitable. The problem is how often war becomes protracted, more costly in lives and money usually because there is no defined war aim. Much can be learned from history, much is not. Politicians, especially in the twenty first century are not usually men of traditional education. Recently illustrated forcefully when a British Prime Minister did not know when the United States entered the Second World War. This is also true of press and media in modern democracies. It delivers government by sound bite and either support or condemnation by that most shallow of all communication forms, television.

To illustrate the point, regardless of the views of Professor Stone, it might be assumed that the Second World War was fought by the United Kingdom not to free Poland, in

which it failed inevitably and dismally, but to preserve the British way of life, institutions and self government. All these things are simply illustrated in the play 'The Winslow Boy'[iii]. The House of Lords as the final arbiter of English Law based on presumption of innocence, trial by jury, habeus corpus. The mature concept of a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy. The democratic journey started with Magna Carta 1215 embodied in 1689 Bill of Rights has simply been set aside[iv]. Our joint major ally, the United States presided over the disestablishment of the British Empire, so if we had a 'war aim' one might legitimately ask 'what was it?'

Yet there have been noble examples of successful wars, inevitable in the face of aggression who are unrestrained by democratic consideration. The Korean War[v], Malayan "Emergency" and The Falklands War are examples of wars with very specific aims and exit strategies.

The object of this paper is to give examples of wars fought where no war aim or post war strategy was politically defined and their subsequent failure and examples where crystal clear policy objective was in place and their subsequent success. Examples have been deliberately chosen where the politics and logistics have been in extremis and where possible the unusual situation where protagonists have been democracies.

Abyssinia 1867-68

The Abyssinian campaign is close to an ideal standard as an aide memoire for the mounting, prosecution, conduct and exit for an expeditionary campaign. It has all the logistical, political and military problems that have been faced in later years. In short it is relevant. To capture the attention of the modern politician, counsel must be contemporary in its challenges.

Although the original diplomatic failure was arguably British the original incarceration of the consul took place on 4 January 1864. Colonel Merewether, the Aden political officer eventually reported a complete breakdown of communications with Theodore on 16 April 1867.

Diplomacy exhausted, the campaign reconnaissance party left Bombay on 16 September 1867. The objective was to release the hostages and dethrone Theodore and retire immediately in good order. The campaign involved traversing almost impossible terrain, a long supply chain, political interference and delicate local political negotiation.

The outcome was the release of the hostages unharmed, negligible casualties, a clinical exit strategy (Sir Robert Napier embarked for England on 10 June 1868) and the enhancement of British prestige internationally. So successful was the campaign history has almost forgotten it.

The campaign was a result of bungled diplomacy, it involved international hostages, impossible terrain, a long supply chain, attempted political interference[vi], parsimonious government and delicate local political negotiation. The outcome was the release of the hostages unharmed, negligible casualties, a clinical exit strategy and no protracted aftermath or lowering of international prestige. In short, so successful it has been literally forgotten. The mark of a great campaign to the British[vii].

No war is fought in a vacuum, either internationally or domestically. The world stage has many spotlights. This was no exception in 1867-68. The American Civil War was fresh in the memory (1861-65). The Schleswig Holstein question was settled with no great credit to the British[viii], Canada was federalizing and the Franco Prussian war was still two years away[ix]. The British Empire was in mid Victorian, 'mid season' form. Europe had been at peace since the Conference of Vienna[x] and the British enjoyed perhaps their most stable period in modern history. What then of the domestic scene? Some of the shoots of modern Britain were starting to sprout. The debacle of the Crimean war had triggered change. Army reform, civil service reform and electorally the Second Reform Bill[xi]. John Stuart Mill was advocating female suffrage[xii]. India was developing post mutiny under a new system of government and with a railway network under construction which even today is regarded as a 'wonder of the world'[xiii].

Popular sentiment had been fostered, particularly by Lord Palmerston, in matters of foreign policy. This is an aspect of domestic politics which was to have a significant impact on the nuance of Empire strategy in the mid to late Victorian period. For significantly less effrontery than holding consuls hostage had gun boats been despatched on behalf of the Empire's[xiv] sons.

The Abyssinia of 1867 held absolutely no strategic importance for the British Empire, nor was there any value in the land itself, no minerals, diamonds or gold. This begs the question as to why there was a British consul in so remote a place governed by such an unstable King[xv]. The British as the nineteenth century super power felt, perhaps as the United States feels today, there is no remote corner of the world where there is no political interest or potential interest. In any event consul there was in the person of Walter Plowden appointed in 1842. Plowden enjoyed King Theodore's confidence in full measure but was murdered in 1862. His replacement, the unfortunate Captain Charles Cameron, bore the brunt of the Emperor's displeasure in a matter of protocol. A relatively simple matter of a failure to respond to a letter of appreciation concerning a gift of pistols from Queen Victoria[xvi]. The affronted King clapped the consul and other

Europeans in irons and held them hostage. Three years of haggling, bribery and negotiation followed to no successful outcome.

It is not a practicable position for a world super power to yield to this sort of indignity. Foreign despots cannot be seen to continue to tweak the lion's tail with impunity. Certainly not in the Palmerstonian popular perception of the Empire's place in the world order. The incumbent administration of Lord Derby, with Disraeli at the Exchequer pondered a relief expedition. However the Horn of Africa was not a centre of Empire influence. The recaltriant King was in a lair 400 miles from the nearest port, through potentially hostile country both physically and politically. He was clearly unstable, the murder of hostages could be an immediate reaction a logistical failure was all too likely as the insurance companies of the day gleefully predicted. The status quo was not an option, an expedition must be mounted. As so often in British history cometh the hour cometh the man. He materialized this time in the persona of Sir Robert Napier. This extraordinary man was an Indian Army officer of enormous experience, a veteran of the Sikh and China wars and the Indian Mutiny. Fortunately perhaps, he was an Engineer.

This was to be a campaign where battles were not to be the main feature. This was an exercise in logistics. This formidable leader was ideal. Tri lingual and moreover a popular and warm figure.

His strength of character was to be a massive asset before the campaign even started. He came under great political and military pressure from the Indian government. The Viceroy sent a comprehensive letter on logistic, military, political and command matters on August 25th with the exception of political attachments most of which Sir Robert rejected. Democracies are never far away from the 'committee' mentality, just the sort of approach which would have killed the expedition stone dead at the outset. Credit must be given here to the home government. Derby and Disraeli backed the man. Even the Duke of Cambridge weighed in with unqualified support. Notwithstanding some armchair stewardship at the Horse Guards on the value of 'flying columns'.

Napier's grasp on the necessities of this campaign were masterful. He immediately requested a coolie corps of labourers and 20,000 baggage animals, two batteries of 7 pounder mountain guns with 1000 rounds of ammunition, mules, horses, camels, draught bullocks and even elephants. He also ensured there was adequate shipping, including 3 hospital ships. The lessons of the Crimea were well learned.

The advance guard anchored in Annesley Bay in the Red Sea, mainly Engineers who constructed piers, a light railway and campsites. Already the advantages of an Engineer Commander were making themselves felt.

An interesting aspect of this campaign was the special minting of 500,000 Maria Theresa silver dollars (1780) thought to be the only generally accepted currency in Abyssinia. It is this sort of attention to detail that wins campaigns.

It is not the purpose of this paper to record the campaign itself in detail[xvii]. Suffice to relate that the expedition force had to traverse four hundred miles of desolate country populated by potentially hostile inhabitants, attack and capture a natural fortress held by a brave if undisciplined force. As always in these Victorian "small wars" there is no shortage of 'deeds of derring-do'[xviii]. Acts of personal valour which can make the difference between success or failure notwithstanding the most impeccable planning and leadership.

Summary

As always diplomatic and political failure created the conflict. There was no need for a consul on the African side of the Red Sea. The mistake in protocol was the flash point.

Parliament voted £2,000,000 for the campaign a very significant sum for the day. However when the final tally was made the cost was £8,600,000. A formidable sum which required an income tax rise of one penny in the pound (November 1867).

Napier carried out the task with 14,000 men and less than 400 casualties. He had the support of first class political officers, and indeed, some celebrity war correspondents. (H. M Stanley and G T Henty). For those who might argue the enemy was of no great consequence an Italian expedition was thrashed by the same people in 1896 with 6,000 killed and 1,700 wounded. Logistics, particularly water discipline, were exemplary and the expedition restored post Crimean and Mutiny prestige. Much of the expense could have been spared but for significant false economies by the Indian authorities from whence the campaign was launched[xix].

It is imperative to the administration of a global empire, be it Roman or British that the prestige of the administrator remain untarnished. The concept of hostage taking is only viable to the perpetrators if it succeeds. A far flung lightly guarded empire is dependent on certain knowledge that any manifestation of insult or intimidation will be avenged. The whole ethos is based on deterrence. Appeasement is only ever a short term option. The cost of an expedition must always be assessed on what the long term costs of not mounting an expedition would be. There will always be some parliamentarians who will always be against action or intervention of any kind at any time. No expedition has even been endorsed by parliament on a 100% majority.

Interestingly the Chancellor made no apology for the high cost, fully acknowledging in parliament that winning wars was an expensive business[xx]. Future British chancellors might well learn that successful prosecution of wars, if they must be embarked upon, are not won on shoestring budgets. The whole expedition was conceived, mounted, won and exited in 14 months.

South African War 1899 – 1902

The South African war was an extraordinary war by any historical standards. The complexity of the politics that led to its outbreak and the myths that still surround its prosecution make it in many ways the best and the worst of the examples of a defined war aim.

Was it a war of imperial aggression? Was the might of the British Empire held at bay by a few hardy Boer farmers, crack shots and master horsemen? Or was it caused by intransient religious zealots, blinkered, bigoted, stupid beyond measure, nihilistic beyond comprehension?

In some measure it was all these things. In two and a half miserable years, what started as a small colonial campaign sucked the most powerful empire of modern times into an unbelievably damaging and expensive conflagration[xxi] leaving the United Kingdom isolated in Europe, almost irreversibly damaged in international prestige and worse still drawn into an apocalyptic realignment of European politics and alliances from which the world has still not yet recovered.

To re-emphasise, it is not the purpose of this paper to pursue arguments as to which wars are 'just' or 'unjust', although to the superficial student of Victorian wars this might seem a prime example of unjust. Perhaps only the causes of the Great War are more complex, indeed the Boer War is arguably part of that story.

What of the prevailing international scene. European powers were engaged in what is now referred to as 'the Scramble for Africa'[xxii]. Portugal, Belgium, France, Germany and Italy were keen to acquire a slice of Empire. Only Africa as a continent was still 'up for grabs'. Africa was to be where 'the place in the sun' was to be competed. In the main other disputed parts of the world outside Europe were largely reserved for strategic coaling stations for navies with global ambition. The United States was emerging as an industrial power, Germany was poised to overtake the United Kingdom in GDP. Jealousy of the British Empire ate away at the very soul of the European powers,

republican or monarchist. None more so than Kaiser Wilhelm II for whom the woes of the 20th Century has much to answer[xxiii].

The actual start of the war was triggered by the Boer government's ultimatum to Britain of October 9th 1899. The massive build up of arms post the abortive Jameson raid had put the Boer republics in a position of significant military superiority. At the outbreak of war the Boers had twice the number of men in the field (35,000) and the most modern artillery. They were armed with Mäunlicher and Mauser rifles all acquired from Germany, paid for by the tax on disenfranchised foreign workers who had petitioned Downing Street as another prelude to hostilities[xxiv].

The campaign has been covered in detail by historians and needs no further recital here. However to learn from the experiences of 100 years ago it might help to break down the strategic perceptions of the day, the failure of diplomacy and misunderstandings that brought the war about and unnecessarily extended it by 17 cruel months which so damaged the British Empire.

The primary cause of conflict on the British illustrates a classical study in geo-political strategy.

In 1899 the British Empire was at its zenith. In terms of sheer scale it was historically unprecedented. Historians are probably another hundred years from an objective view[xxv] of the Empire. In Africa the Boer republics, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State together with German south west Africa to the west and Portuguese Mozambique to the east virtually cut the British African Empire in half. Until just five years before the outbreak of war, notwithstanding racial and cultural differences Southern Africa was a fairly homogenous live and let live cooperative under a fairly 'light touch' British 'suzerainty'[xxvi]. Not for the first time colonial government was more hawkish than the British government and London colonial office[xxvii]. Wars are expensive and politically risky, politicians have to relearn this periodically[xxviii].

The ambition of the day was a Cairo to the Cape railway, a free trade area and a Federated South Africa. An ambition still not quite dead 120 years later.

On the Boer side, led by President Paul Kruger in the Transvaal and President Steyn in the Orange Free State, was the desire for an agricultural protestant state based on limited enfranchisement but democratic in concept. Their political and economic goals were not isolationist, but certainly protectionist. The discovery of gold in Johannesburg and diamonds in Kimberley led to an astonishing development the equal of anything in the United States fifty years earlier. Mass immigration together with the cultural strain that it confers on small nations gave rise to the breakdown in the pragmatic approach to Cape politics. In the Transvaal nearly half the population were 'Uitlanders' mainly but not wholly British. They produced 99% of the government's revenue but had no right of representation[xxix].

Arguably the sheer number of senior contributors to the negotiation process, certainly on the British side increased the complexity. After the war had started, as is often the case, the senior military personnel became politicized. This was to become a frequent phenomenon in the 20th Century[xxx].

One of the natural disadvantages of democratic government is the inconsistency in foreign policy. Gladstone had let the indignity of Majuba go unpunished in the first South African 'war'[xxxi]. To the Boers this was, and still is regarded as a splendid victory in the same league as their Blood River victory over the Zulus. Understandably so. Both are still places of pilgrimage.

This produced the political impasse that eventually led to hostilities.

So what were the war aims, what were the political objectives, could war have been avoided, what was the eventual outcome and who were the main players?

On the Boer side Kruger and Steyn were the main protagonists, representing the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The emergence of one of the most extraordinary figures of the 20th Century, Jan Smuts was several months away[xxxii].

On the British side the Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, Joseph Chamberlain at the colonial office Lord Landsdowne as Secretary of State for war, and Sir Garnet Wolsely Bt. Army Commander in Chief. There was, as so often in Great Britain's imperial past, the added complication of local colonial authority. Here in the shape of Sir Alfred Milner.

Unlike the clear cut Abyssinian campaign the South African war was complex. Complex wars fought by democracies are difficult to sustain but an approach, by perhaps 'first principles' even the most complicated conflicts can be assessed and responses and aims measured.

Most open minded historians would probably agree the British Empire was something of an enigma. On the two wings of the argument there are those who believe it was the result of a ruthless pursuit of profit motivated Imperialism, on the other that it was acquired in 'a fit of absence of mind'. Again probably a little of both depending on the administration of the day in Westminster or colonial office and the local plenipotentiary.

The understandable deep felt desire for self government, in the heart of every free man of spirit was as strong in the Africander as the Englishman. This fellow feeling gave the British public in the South African War a crisis of conscience. The natural sympathy for the underdog met the genuinely held faith and support from the man on the Clapham omnibus[xxxiii] for the Empire. Salisbury and Chamberlain knew there was no great stomach for this fight which is why the military were so unprepared at its outset[xxxiv]. Was the support for the Uitlander a principled stand for no taxation without representation or the more likely removal of an impossible strategic block to the Empire in Africa. Or even an imperial preference economic ideology.

Was the Boer republic's all or nothing policy the only option. Enter now the main protagonists. Paul Kruger and Sir Alfred Milner. There is no shortage of material on these two men. Their rather simplistic outlook was slightly reminiscent of that of Sir Bartle Frere and Cetewayo in the preceding months before the Zulu war[xxxv].

The South African Journal of Sir Garnet Wolsely 1879-80[xxxvi] is one of the most astonishing guides to the mindset of the individuals involved. The complete and total misunderstanding of the others' point of view coupled with a complete misreading of the potential military strength and determination beggars belief. Kruger, Milner and Wolsely were perhaps three of the most undiplomatic, obstinate, prominent commoners in public life.

The war started as might be expected with The Boers outnumbering the British and with greater fire power. The Boers made all the running, gained all the ground and won all the battles. Not only were the Boers better armed and more numerous they were significantly better led. Even when the British arrived in strength led by brave, popular, hopelessly unimaginative Sir Redvers Buller VC "Black Week"[xxxvii] befell the British Force where every engagement ended in disaster for the British. The government brought Lord Roberts out of retirement to speed to South Africa with re-enforcements and take command. (To the almighty chagrin of Sir Garnet Wolsely who was an old Africa hand and was itching to get into action).

Lord Roberts (Bobs)[xxxviii] soon cleared up the formal opposition, occupying the Boer Capitals, lifting the sieges, winning the set piece battles, job done. He sailed home to yet further acclaim in an already much acclaimed career.

This is when it started to go wrong, badly wrong for everyone concerned. The guerrilla phase to the campaign.

Sadly there was yet another complex piece of the political jigsaw in the shape of the Cape Colony Dutch. Kinsmen of the Transvaal and Orange Free State Africanders in the main

they remained loyal to the crown. There were exceptions. Sir Alfred Milner was against a blanket pardon for the renegades which was a major feature of a proposed settlement. Lord Kitchener, paradoxically the supposed villain of the following year was in favour of such a pardon. The guerrilla war dragged on with all the appalling consequences for the Boer Commanders and their families and the reputation of the British Empire, which by historical standards was both benign and enlightened.

The jury was out at the time, even in England as to the legitimacy of a guerrilla campaign[xxxix]. Arguably it is still out. What is sure it served no one's interest.

From a grand strategic perspective, again see map appendix I some options were available to those who wanted to see them.

A summary therefore of what they might have been. The leaders of the republics wanted an agricultural independent state based on the teachings of the Dutch reform church. This meant limited enfranchisement and a broadly protectionist economy. The British had limited enfranchisement (admittedly not quite so limited) a parliamentary democracy a constitutional monarchy with the Queen as the head of the Church of England. (Both churches incidentally protestant). The British economy was a loose mix of economic compromises, the ebb and flow of imperial preference and international tariffs being at the heart of Joseph Chamberlain's political reforms.

Gold in Johannesburg and diamonds in Kimberley were at the root of problems (modern politics is always about money in some format). The British people were certainly not going to lose sleep at night as to the 'Uitlanders' becoming enfranchised after fourteen, seven or five years residency. Nor indeed the much overlooked and conveniently forgotten British preference for limited native enfranchisement to build a black stake in the federation and a potential native property owning middle class. The quiet shelving of those radical ideas left a festering sore for the next 100 years. Was it impossible to reach an agreement on a customs union and free corridor for a Cairo to Cape Town railway? An accommodation with Portuguese territory was always viable as an historic ally and

pragmatically with the Germans, notwithstanding the Kaisers' awkward mentality. A residency qualification, enfranchisement for taxpayers on specific issues (perhaps referendum based). To what purpose did the Boer administration need such tax revenue in the first place if a 'plough and bible' are all you need?

On 8 May 1896 Joseph Chamberlain told the House of Commons "A war in South Africa would be one of the most serious wars that could possibly be waged. It would be in the nature of a civil war. It would be a long war, a costly war, and as I have pointed out already, it would leave behind the embers of a strife which I believe generations would be hardly long enough to extinguish".

This brilliant and prescient assessment was firmly discarded three years later for no apparent reason. It is perhaps here that phenomenon of the ideological civil service zealot first appears. Milner, of German descent, educated in Germany then London was a fervent imperialist. A brilliant organizer and administrator he believed God chose the British as a natural ruler caste. Seen from the perspective of the 1890s it was not an unreasonable belief. He had deliberately not chosen politics as a career, he was short on personal charm, diplomacy and a public persona which would endear him to a post reform bill electorate. He chose to advance imperialistic doctrinal fervour by influence with those who shared his goal with either political power or influence.

He managed to persuade his immediate superiors war in South Africa was the only option. Chamberlain dragged Salisbury and Landsdowne with him into this disastrous and expensive debacle. Extraordinarily when the dust had settled, the treasure and blood expounded it was he who was selected to administrate the new order in the republics. A task he set about with the same brilliance and fervour he brought to the waging of the war in the first place. The rebuilding of a vanquished foe was not seen on this scale again until the 1945 Marshall plan. There is no shortage of modern analogies for those who want to see them.

The famous "Helots Dispatch"[xl] is a wonderful example of "sexing up" a reason for pulling a reluctant House of Commons, press and electorate into a dubious conflict with no immediate or apparent reason.

Of course once the war had started the country, quite naturally pulled together. Rudyard Kipling and Sir Arthur Sullivan captured the spirit of the hour well enough[xli].

The Boer Republics were legitimate states in their own right. When the battles had been fought and won and the dust settled an Armistice, a sensible, equitable and long lasting peace could have been negotiated. As indeed it eventually was. No better proof of this than the support from South Africa in two world wars. The action at Delville Wood on the Somme followed barely fourteen years after the battle of Spion Kop. Campbell Bannerman and Jan Smuts showed what could be achieved with a little pragmatism, goodwill and trust.

The map in Appendix I is not without interest from a strategic perspective. An 'ungelded' Zulu land would have brought Steyn and Kruger to the negotiating table in a much more cooperative state of mind

Appendix I

The genre is alive and well in the Foreign office of today. Note the type. Formative education usually abroad, brief university education in England a professional life almost entirely abroad. Not a player of team sport, a zealous life devoted to another 'ism'. A substitute for imperialism today is globalism. An overwhelming mistrust of democracy. An almost religious faith in the natural intellectual ruling class. Not this time British by definition, but élite fonctionaire. They shun the limelight for they play the long game. Like Milner they are not motivated by personal advancement in the traditional sense. They are to be found at the World Bank, United Nations, European Commission, IMF and their innocent sounding satellites like WWF.

They inspire this sort of classic volte face.

"We'll negotiate a withdrawal from the EEC which has drained our natural resources and destroyed jobs" Tony Blair Sedgefield election address 1983.

Such are their persuasive powers to the non conviction political journeyman.

Appendix II

One of the great myths of the Boer War was their Army was a group of hardy rustics and horny handed sons of the soil. Well, only up to a point, arguably it was an army of lawyers:

Jan Smuts - Cambridge educated lawyer
Denis Reitz - Son of the Attorney General
General Byers - Stellenbosch University educated lawyer and Rugby International
Commandant 'Koos' Boshoff`- Son of the Transvaal Treasurer General
General Johannes Celliers - Clerk in a Kimberley Trading Company
Johannes De Boer - Civil Magistrate & Inspector of offices – Johannesburg
Jacobus De Villiers - Amsterdam University and London Johannesburg lawyer
Nicholas de Wet - Cambridge University Lawyer
General Jan Kemp - Transvaal Department of Education – Clerk
Emil Krause - Cambridge educated lawyer
Petrus Krige - Land Surveyor
Pieter Potgieter - Mayor of Pretoria
Elias Thuynsma - (Artillery Commando) Customs Official
Ben Viljoen - Commando Leader – Journalist

Not a comprehensive list of leading participants by any means but the sort of backgrounds typical if mixed with landowners that the Imperial Yeomanry put in the field to deal with the Commandos.

The Falklands War

The Ethiopian Campaign and the South African War are examples of Great Britain and its Empire as a world power the first went right, the second went wrong. The first was unavoidable the second 'post invasion' was.

As an example of sheer political incompetence the Falklands war has few equals. The Argentinean junta, a deeply unpleasant regime responsible for the murder of a significant number of its own people, was formed on the political platform of annexing the Falkland Islands.

It is important to clear up the embarrassing lack of knowledge around the chattering class dinner table, then and now. The Falkland Islands were discovered by an English navigator Captain John Davys in 1593. In 1764 they were taken by the French and yielded three years later to the Spanish. Spain yielded them to Britain as a crown colony in 1883. They have never been part of Argentina, administrated by Argentina nor is Argentina the nearest land fall (it is Chile). The Islands hold the same status as the Channel Islands, Shetland Islands and the Isle of Man. There was no conceivable lawful or moral argument for annexation[xlii].

It is important to establish the legal and moral ground because Great Britain was no longer a world power. The lessons learned from this short (100 days) but bloody war were many fold, for the British, their allies, neutrals and foes alike[xliii].

Again it is not the intention of this paper to recount the campaign, but learn the geo political strategic lessons it offers already forgotten it would seem by our current administration.

The concept expounded by Palmerston that Britain has no permanent allies but perpetual interests are underscored heavily in this campaign[xliv]. It shows the value of personal relationships, 'soft' power and even ethnic roots. It also emphasises there is no true friendship between countries as there is between people. It also reminds us how expensive in blood, treasure and human suffering diplomatic failure is especially for servicemen. The Falklands war rescued the people of the islands from an oppressive regime, saved the Conservative government exposed endorsed Palmerston's view, and exposed the century long failure of naval procurement policy.

The diplomatic failure was a classic even by foreign and commonwealth office standards, a Gilbertian institution then as now, whose assumption foreign diplomats went to English public schools, play cricket[xlv] and a handshake is all you need. The European Union (the EEC then), the United States and arguably now NATO will breakdown into its political component parts as soon as any serious pressure is applied. This should never be a matter of diplomatic surprise. It is the norm.

That the Argentinean regime ordered the invasion of the Falklands for domestic political reasons is a matter of accepted fact. It is a common pattern by politicians failing domestically to unite the nation with a winnable, low risk military adventure. It relies on the premise that a family will forget their differences and bond together to fight a common foe. Which indeed they do, and for a time it worked in Buenos Aires.

That the war was perceived to be winnable and low risk was promulgated by the British FCO. The United Kingdom at the time of invasion had reduced the defence of the islands to one marine platoon ashore and one survey ship. The equivalent of an embossed formal invitation to thugs like Galtieri to take up residence. In Margaret Thatcher's book, The Downing Street Years, she claimed the invasion was 'unforeseeable'. Well sadly only to the FCO to which almost everything is unforeseeable. Carrington had the decency to resign. Only to be replaced by Francis Pym, an arch appeaser in the war cabinet[xlvi]. The underlying international dislike and lingering jealousy of the British Empire was alive and well in all the usual places. i.e. The UN, the EEC and in the US Congress. How did this manifest itself?

The Irish, still politically locked into the seventeenth century could not resist a stab at the old enemy by doing everything at the UN to undermine the British position[xlvii]. The Italians completely abandoned any thought of EEC solidarity, forgot the significant 19 Century political support from Britain[xlviii], the reinforcements of the British divisions on the Piave and Isonso of 1917/18 and British magnanimity in victory in 1939-45 war. Italians and Argentineans are 'Latins', and Latin blood is thicker than water.[xlix] They lined up completely on the Argentine side. The fluffy minded Low Countries forgot Ypres and Arnhem and any debt of honour and prevaricated. The Japanese reneged on their promise of UN support a mystery to this day[l]. The Commonwealth, notwithstanding

the appalling treachery of Edward Heath in 1972 proved British blood is thicker than water.

The UK's most important ally, the United States became diplomatically schizophrenic. A word here about the 'special relationship'. It does not exist between countries but only between individuals. The US ambassador to the UN was Mrs Kirkpatrick. Irish American with all the baggage that brings and an emotional attachment to South America. (Reagan was Presbyterian not simpatico with Irish nationalism like the Kennedy clan but had a political eye for the Irish vote. Clinton's roots were Ulster, interestingly). No friend of the United Kingdom. The charming, avuncular President Reagan generally agreed with the advisor or diplomat with whom he last spoke[li]. A NATO ally had been invaded by a fascist junta responsible for over 16,000 deaths of its own citizens with absolutely no moral, historical or political claim. Yet they still equivocated. Still tried to broker a compromise even when the British land forces were fighting on the Island. The remarkable and great friend of the United Kingdom Caspar Weinberger, with a clarity of thought usually absent from the US State Department realised a British defeat would spell the collapse of NATO. Laurence Eagleburger Assistant Secretary for European Affairs was aware of the potential disaster of failure to support an ally with Suez still very much in the national memory. See Freedman Official History Vol II. It was he who almost single handed drove through the military and naval cooperation vital to success. Was there ever a better earned honorary knighthood[lii]?

In the light of the recent naval agreement with the French it is worthy of note that President Mitterand of France was completely supportive[liii]. Was this European Union or personal? How could he resist an opportunity to make life awkward for 'perfidious Albion'? No great mystery, the French have far flung islands all over the world, from the West Indies to the Pacific. Enlightened self interest, as reliable an encouragement to a Frenchman as a packet of crisps is to a Jack Russell.

The battle for the Falklands itself was horribly bloody with casualties commensurate with the Second World War[liv]. Thanks also to the usual utterly incompetent procurement of the Ministry of Defence the Royal Navy found themselves with some of the most unreliable ships since Jutland[lv].

Only the extraordinary bravery and professionalism of British servicemen with a little help from the Americans with weapons that actually worked paved the way to the subsequent victory. Perhaps the most significant cold war battle[lvi].

The war was over in 100 days, six months later it could not have been fought. The defence cuts of 1982 went so deep the hardware would have simply been unavailable. The dismal second division banker John Nott was typical of the genre that post war administrations throw up as Ministers of Defence. A complete failure at the FCO ensured it turned into a shooting war imbeciles at the MOD and the BBC abrogated any need for Argentinean Naval and Military intelligence our plans were transmitted to them by the World Service[lvii].

The lessons learned or more probably not learned is firm diplomacy can stop shooting wars. Significant global defence capability cannot be dismantled for a global trading power even if no longer a super power. Procurement is not a matter for short sighted second rate politicians interested in deal making which always end in service lives being lost. And most importantly, when a country's national defence is threatened there are rarely allies but neighbours, good, indifferent or bad. No matter how cooperative President Mitterand was during the conflict would he have sent a French carrier had the UK lost Hermes or Invincible?

Conclusion

The three case studies used here show an unfailing pattern that wars are the result of diplomatic failure. The consequences impact primarily on servicemen, their families, in the case of total war all civilians and politically and economically rarely advance the protagonists cause beyond, at best, the status quo.

It is too easy to argue foresight is a more valuable commodity than hindsight. Defence spending is primarily a deterrent. Commitment of defence resources to war is, by its nature, a failure. Wars start because there is a perceived prospect of relatively inexpensive victory, low risk and much to gain. Yet this is almost never the case.

Modern warfare is expensive but not necessarily more expensive than the wars of yesteryear. Whereas the Napoleonic wars saw, for the British, the introduction of income tax, and the subsequent increase for the Abyssinian campaign, the modern campaign brings no opportunity for 'loot or booty'. Indeed the trend for post war reconstruction falls upon the victor.

For the sake of example on war costs Germany's total war expenditure (1914-18) was 164,000 million marks. This sum was raised by borrowing and debasement of the currency (a complete abandonment of the gold standard). The natural outcome was the inflation of the Weimer Republic, doubly fuelled by the Poincaré French government's insistence on reparations.

It may be worth quoting here a shadowy but important 20th Century historical figure Dr Hjalmar Schact, President of the Reichsbank and organizer of Hitler's financial power in the 1930s.

"Germany tried to meet the colossal costs of the war by an appeal to the self sacrificing spirit of the people. Invest in war loan ran the appeal. This transformed private fortunes into paper claims on the state."

Wars won or lost have to be paid for. The state can tax, borrow or debase the currency, often all three. It is as true today as it was in 1914 add the enormous loss of personal freedoms rarely fully restored post war. Rarely is the military option the most effective.

The failure of post war reparations policy in 1919 led to the Second war. So the expense is spread over many years in both tax and borrowing. More dangerously recent wars

have been financed with 'quantitative easing' or more accurately printing money, thus debasing a nation's legal tender.

There is no fiscal advantage to war, or indeed preparation for it. If the end product is a warship, tank, weapons system or standing army it is simply a destruction of the nations' wealth.

Such spending should be part only of a nation's security policy. In the same way the prudent family spends money on window locks and burglar alarms in a high crime risk city. The prominent display of an electronic alarm system will often deter the thief.

Military interventionism with no aim or exit strategy is doomed to persistent failure. Indeed even where the aim is clear, the position of an alien political system, the success record outside total global war is poor.

Richard Cobden (arguably the equivalent of the modern aristocracy) is the new 'political class'.

"The middle and industrious classes of England can have no interest apart from the preservation of peace. The honours, the fame, the emoluments of war belong not to them; the battle-plain is the harvest-field of the aristocracy, watered by the blood of the people."

Bellum nec timendum nec provocandum.

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[i] Der Krieg ist nichts anderes als die Fortsetzunq der politik mit anderen mitteln – [Von Kriege] Karl Von Clausewitz. Clauswitz Roger Parkinson Wayland 1970

[ii] For the purposes of this paper 'modern' is understood to be post industrial revolution in the Anglo sphere

[iii] The Winslow Boy Terence Rattigan

[iv] The Lisbon Treaty/Maastricht Treaty. The Destruction of the Nation State – R Atkinson and Norris McWhirter

[v] The Truman/MacArthuur conflict nearly lost the war aim but it was quickly restored by the American President. 'Liberal' TV & Film in the shape of 'MASH' made a good job of inaccurate portrayal of the war aim

[vi] Viceroy's letters 25 August/31st September

[vii] The British love to dwell on disaster. Compare books/articles/essays/films on the charge of the Light Brigade. Whoever heard of the Charge of the Heavy Brigade? Successful and the same campaign

[viii] Philip Guedella - Palmerson

[ix] History of England G M Trevelyan

[x] Ibid

[xi] Ibid

[xii] The History of Western Philosophy – Bertrand Rssell
[xiii] The India we served & Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian John Beames Chatto & Windows 1967
[xiv] Palmerston sent a Royal Naval squadron to Greece to enforce a dubious debt owed to a Gibaltarian Jew Don Pacifico, a somewhat dubious case for gun boat diplomacy
[xv] King Theodore, son of an Abyssinian nobleman, educated by Coptic monks became unstable after the death of his adviser Plowden and his wife close to the same time
[xvi] Capt H M Hozier The British Expedition to Abyssinia MacMillan 1869
[xvii] For a detailed account Major T J Holland & Capt H M Hozier record the Expedition of Abyssinia HMSO 1870 or a brilliant essay by David Chandler Victorian military campaigns, Tom Donovan Books edited by Professor Brian Bond
[xviii] The 33rd Foot (Duke of Wellington's Regiment) won its first two VCs in the final action in Magdala
[xix] 4,000 mules were 'lost' in Bombay. Further mules had to be bought in theatre at inflated prices. Also only 3 barges had been allocated for unloading. Again they had to be locally sourced.
[xx] E T Raymond-Disraeli – Alien Patriot London Hodder & Stoughton

Addendum
Holland & Hozier Vol I page 34-5
Surely the most delicately phrased footnote in the history of the British Army. "No swarthy damsel was subjected to any rude gallantry on the part of the redcoats."

[xxi] Cost of war in money and casualties and in addition the cost of reconstruction
[xxii] Thomas Pakenham Scramble for Africa Phoenix Press 1991
[xxiii] The Best of Enemies Richard Milton Icon Books 2007
[xxiv] The Great Boer War Byron Farwell Pen & Sword
[xxv] Perhaps with the exception of Niall Ferguson Penguin Books 2002 who appears free of post empire middle class liberal 'angst and guilt' irrationality of the modern historian. The first British Empire (North America) collapsed but the 'New World' founding fathers and subsequent constitutionalists were of British stock. The Second Global Empire bestrode the world like a colossus. Today's global commercial lingua franca is English because of the British Empire's position throughout the global industrial revolution. It is not, as the rather perverted American view, because Bill Gates and Alan Dell marketed computer software in the 1980s
[xxvi] Impressions of South Africa, James Bryce Macmillan 1900, South Africa, People, Places and Problems William Harbut Dawson Longmans Green & Co 1925
[xxvii] Eyewitness in Zulu Land Ian Bennett Greenhill Books 1989 & others. Sir Bartle Frere's determination on war against the express wishes of the Colonial Office
[xxviii] What experience and history teach is this – that people and governments never have learnt anything from history or acted on the principles deduced from it – Georg Wilhelm Hegel 1770 - 1831
[xxix] Managing the South African War Keith Terrance Suridge Royal Historical Society. Neil Ferguson Empire
[xxx] Managing the South African War. See biographies Haig, Eisenhower, MacArthur, Kitchenar, Hindenburg et al
[xxxi] Byron Farwell
[xxxii] Jan Smuts Memoirs of the Boer War Edited by S B Spies & Gail Nattrass Cambridge University Press 1994 (a 'must' for the student of the Boer War)
[xxxiii] Enoch Powell's Joseph Chamberlain – Thames & Hudson
[xxxiv] Thomas Packenham Scramble for Africa
[xxxv] Eyewitness in Zulu Land Ian Bennett Greenhill Books 1989 & others. Sir Bartle Frere's determination on war against the express wishes of the Colonial Office
[xxxvi] Sir Garnet Wolseley's South African Journal AA Balbema Cape Town 1973 edited by Adrian Preston
[xxxvii] A week of disaster and set back including the battle of Colenso and the death of Freddie – Lord Robert's son, dying bravely in an attempt to recover the guns
[xxxviii] The Times History V 1 page 183
[xxxix] Enoch Powell's Joseph Chamberlain – Thames & Hudson

[xl] Described by L S Amery as "One of the most masterly State documents ever produced"
[xli] The Absent Minded Beggar

[xlii] Alan Bloom – Once there was an Empire 1983
[xliii] 250 dead, Royal Navy 87, Royal Marines 26, Merchant Navy 9, Royal Flat Auxiliary 7
[xliv] Palmerston Philip Guedalla Hodders & Stoughton 1926
[xlv] The Truth About the Treaty www.euinfo.ie. The Destruction of the Nation State 1994 Norris McWhirter CBE
[xlvi] The Downing Street Years Margaret Thatcher Harper Collins 1993
[xlvii] Ibid
[xlviii] Empire Neil Ferguson
[xlix] Ibid
[l] This unexplained volte face was all the more extraordinary given the trading status of the UK in 1983 with Japan
[li] The Downing Street Years. Prime Minister Muldoon of New Zealand offered naval support day one of the crisis
[lii] Ibid One Hundred Days Admiral Sandy Woodward Harper Collins
[liii] "We are side by side with you" Charles Hernu, French Foreign Minister, Lawrence Freedman – The Official History of the Falklands Campaign
[liv] Ibid
[lv] Ibid
[lvi] Sidewinder Missiles - air to air
[lvii] 23 May 1982. The BBC announced on World Service that one of the Argentinean Bombs in Carlos Water had not exploded. Information given to them by the MOD. The Parachute Regiment ran into strong resistance after the same source had announced their advance to Darwin. The MOD/BBC Moron combo also announced the battle group and amphibious Group had joined up. An early warning of invasion. One wonders what information Germany would have been given in June 1944 if these people had been in charge.

Addendum
The campaign would never have got off the ground without the estimable First Sea Lord Sir Henry Leach whose support for the Prime Minister was immediate and constructive. (See the Downing Street Years). The appointment is vital to the nation. It must never be a 'Buggin's turn' or 'politically correct' appointment. Interestingly Falklands experience was rumoured to be unacceptable as a promotional criterion so as not to 'disadvantage' officers not fortunate enough to have taken part in the campaign. A logical retrospective application of this view could have ensured that the Prince of Orange instead of the Duke of Wellington commanded at Waterloo. One must assume there was an 'intellectual' involved in the thought process.