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**BRITISH FORCES AND IRISH FREEDOM:  
ANGLO-IRISH DEFENCE RELATIONS 1922-1931**

by

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\* Text refers to former title: The Rt. Hon Julian Amery, M.P.

## INTRODUCTION

Anglo-Free State relations between the wars still awaits a comprehensive study ... This is in part a reflection of the larger failure of British historians to work on Anglo-Irish history ... the Right has been ill at ease dealing with Britain's greatest failure, whilst the Left has found tropical climes more suited for the cultivation of its moral superiority.<sup>1</sup>

When R.F.Holland made this apposite comment, just over a decade ago, he may have been adding to the very problems he identified. Writing within the context of the 'Commonwealth Alliance', he was joining a distinguished list of British and Irish historians who have sought to filter inter-war Anglo-Free State relations through the mesh of Empire-Commonwealth development. Beginning with A. Berriedale Keith in the 1920s, this usage continued in either direct or indirect form (by way of particular institutions of Commonwealth) from the 1930s to the 1970s through the works of W.K. Hancock, Nicholas Mansergh and D.W. Harkness, and was still finding favour with Brendan Sexton's study of the Irish Governor-Generalship system in the late 1980s.<sup>2</sup> But herein a contradiction has developed: cumulative study of the unnatural origins and performance of the Free State as a Dominion has moved beyond questions of function to ask whether the Free State was in fact ever a Dominion at all.<sup>3</sup> As such, there seems ever more need to step back from inter-Commonwealth study and refocus on the precise nature of the Free State's central relationship with Britain in this period.

It is of course acknowledged that outwith the established zones of internal Irish and Empire-Imperial study there is no home or forum for one of the most enduring quandaries of modern European history. Even if it is accepted that 'pure' Anglo-Irish history did not end in 1922, the weight of research based on the ten years prior, as against the ten years subsequent, suggests an easy acceptance, on both sides of the Irish Sea, and Atlantic, of the absolute value changes in that relationship. Studies covering the transition to independence, such as those of Joseph M. Curran and Sheila Lawlor<sup>4</sup>, have taken only tentative steps beyond 1922, and may indeed have epitomised an approach that subsequent Irish studies have done little to dispel; in the 1980s, major overviews by R.F. Foster and J.J. Lee have been notably reluctant to evaluate the quality of that new found freedom with continuing reference to Ireland's giant neighbour. Though Foster, and others, have noted that the main aim of the Free State in the 1920s was 'self-definition against Britain', the point is the extent to which Britain was willing to allow the same.<sup>5</sup>

There has then been little impetus for direct Anglo-Free State inter-war study, and although the tide has begun to turn since the mid-1980's, notably through the achievements of Paul Canning, Deidre McMahon and, shortly before his death, Nicholas Mansergh<sup>6</sup>, it is probable that we are still a long way short of being able to produce a comprehensive and coherent review of the period. Apart from the crucial Anglo/Irish-Anglo/Commonwealth dichotomy, there remains the political chasm dividing the Cosgrave years of the 1920s from those of de Valera's 1930s; indeed the overwhelming preoccupation with post-1931 confrontations has often, as in the case of McMahon's fine study, taken as its contrasting starting point the supposedly

compliant 'pro-Treaty' years of 1922-31. It is hard to bridge this gulf when the little direct work on these earlier years, mostly concentrating on the two fundamental issues of Boundary and financial settlement, has tended not to question this divide. Although Irish historians have turned an increasingly sympathetic eye on the internal politics and problems of these early years, the apathetic external image, in contrast to the later period, has been persistent.

Nowhere has this negativity been more apparent than on the, also vital, topic of defence relations. For a subject that has been given more than adequate attention in terms of the 1921 Treaty negotiations and the Treaty Ports issue of the 1930s, the period in between has had little intensive coverage. In this regard the negative response of W.K.Hancock in 1937, stating that Cosgrave did not bother to question British defence imperatives, was still being held some fifty years later by Paul Canning.<sup>7</sup> Thus an enduring and important image has emerged of defence relations re-enforcing the above divide, an image that has had to stand for the lack of new research. This does not mean that the image is necessarily an entirely false one, but it does mean that many of the supposed novelties of the de Valera years have been built on largely unknown foundations.

The Treaty Ports issue is also vital to this thesis, but then so are other defence related matters which had an impact specific to the 1920s. In other words, the human and political context of how both countries, but the Irish government in particular, coped with the immediate legacy of centuries of armed occupation, with the recent 1916-21 conflict, and with the smaller scale continuity of British occupation, was bound to cast

old shadows over a new relationship. But how big were these shadows? It was on the basis of placing some detailed flesh on the skeleton of known (and unknown) policies and events that this thesis took shape. Frustrations and resentments could take necessarily quieter forms than those which characterised the 1930s, and in the end be no less significant.

If the first objective is then to make solid the continuity of defence affairs, it is appropriate to begin with a brief evaluation of the Treaty defence negotiations before taking a close look at British operations in the South in 1922 - the year when a reluctant Cosgrave was to inherit a situation where British forces were close to the development of civil war. Despite our growing knowledge of Britain's part in the progress of that war, there is still a general perception that its forces became peripheral to events after the Truce of July 1921, and that its Army was, and had been, the only British Service involved in the struggle against armed republicanism. This is simply not the case, and it is to be wondered whether the proper absorption of Irish historians with the internal dynamics of the period, together with the authoritative quality of Charles Townshend's history of the 1919-21 British campaign, have not produced inhibitions to wider inquiry.<sup>8</sup> In any event, as the Admiralty was to play a central part in later defence relations it seems right to introduce, for the first time, the Royal Navy's important role in the events of 1922. The point here is to establish that the actions and perceptions of both Services were to have repercussions for later attitudes.



After these chapters, the following two aim to look at the cumulative legacy of British involvement and how both countries adjusted to the many unresolved questions thrown up by the Treaty and the unplanned contingencies of 1922. Retaining the theme that neither country could escape the past, nor trust to the future, chapter six returns to the physical and political impact made by the continuing presence of British forces in and around the three Treaty Ports, and along and across the Border. The final two chapters explore how all these factors helped determine the conditions for, and consequences of, one of the most damaging episodes of the later 1920s - the complete failure of the joint coastal defence review scheduled for December 1926. In all, the cumulative emphasis on the politics of defence may illustrate what it was to be a small aspiring country that had little choice but to accept Britain's version of what was an inevitably close relationship, and to endure what Britain claimed as the benign strategic necessity of continued occupation.

As such, this study may also be taken as an example of the contentious subject of British inter-war Imperialism, and of the 'imperial mind'; a collective condition of unthinking superiority, often described if not so named.<sup>9</sup> Given the traditional tensions between the two countries, it follows that this study will challenge the sometimes awkward acceptance that the Free State did enjoy full Dominion status and practice, excepting the matter of defence: defence is not an abstract or marginal issue; it lies at the core of any aspiring country's identity and perception of freedom. By the same token this challenge is extended to the alternative idea that, having been granted disguised republican discretions, the Free State was tied to Imperial demands in name only.<sup>10</sup> Looking at the 1920s, at a time when the Empire did not have

constitutional definition, the question of status, as posed by defence relations, will, in final discussion, be traced back to where this thesis begins - at the nature of the Treaty itself. This is especially relevant if it can be shown, in a way that Ireland's disjointed and disputed Commonwealth participation history cannot, that there was a direct bond of dissent and 'external association' grievance linking the Cosgrave and de Valera years.

While this is far from being a comprehensive review of the inter-war period, nor yet a complete review of the neglected Cosgrave years, it does go to the heart of Anglo-Free State relations and may help towards making such a comprehensive study a feasible proposition. It is not suggested that the inter-Commonwealth perspective can be dispensed with, only that we need first to find out far more about that unique and basic association. It has been a stimulating challenge to try to view this, where possible, through Irish eyes, but it is hoped that a balanced and empathic view of conflicting Imperial concerns has also been achieved; the one is so often reflected in the other.

Finally, the conscious omissions in this study have to be declared. It is fully realised that while there was a general cross-party unity on Irish policy in Britain, the views of Sinn Fein, Fianna Fail and other republican bodies would offer a different slant to this largely inter-governmental study. It may be significant that little organised republican comment on British defence measures has been found for this period, but the point has anyway been to discover just how far the Cosgrave governments did abandon their earlier roots. Even then it has been difficult to trace archive defence

material specific to the 1929-31 period, a situation which can be explained partly in terms of the terminal events of the crucial 1924-28 period (detailed here), and partly in terms of the known lack of defence initiatives by the Labour and National governments of 1929-31.

And yet, while these might be seen as self-evident omissions, that of the Ulster dimension certainly needs explanation, if not excuse. On one level the Free State could hardly ignore the position of the North, and it is hoped that some new and intriguing insights into cross-Border defence relations have been touched on. On another level, however, an emphatic point is that a re-emergent nation could have more than enough British related defence problems to contend with in the South, without continuous reference to a distinct Northern situation it could do little, directly, to affect. Contentious though the politics may have been, the Free State was an entity in itself. It is quite certain that Northern Ireland archives could shed further light on several aspects of this thesis, but that is for future study and consideration; in the interim enough challenges are contained in this study of a much neglected period and topic.

## CHAPTER 1 : BACKGROUND - DEFENCE AND THE TREATY

As in the case of the Dominions in 1914, our peril will be her danger,  
our fears will be her anxieties, our victories will be her joy.

Lloyd George on the Treaty - House  
of Commons, 14th December 1921.<sup>1</sup>

The London negotiations which led to the signing of the December 1921 Treaty (more properly the Articles of Agreement for a Treaty) between 'Great Britain and Ireland' formed one of the great political dramas of the twentieth century. The subject of defence, however, though looked at in some detail, has been held by most historians to have played only a minor part in that two month drama. In comparison with passions aroused by the abstract concepts of the Crown and 'essential unity' of Ireland, it has even been held that the Irish conceded Britain's strategic wants 'without much argument' or real concern<sup>2</sup>; a reflection, no doubt, on the Irish having to pay heed to Britain's early warning that this question was beyond negotiation<sup>3</sup>. According to Lord Longford's (then Frank Pakenham) classic account of the talks, this particular issue was so basic and one-sided that within a couple of weeks of their arrival in London the Irish delegates had surrendered the argument; by the end of October: 'Britain had won on Defence'.<sup>4</sup> In all, it seems that little had changed from the position of July 1921, when London had first informed Sinn Fein of its basic proposals for peace negotiations; these had included (beside the implied removal of all armed troops from the South - at that time amounting to over 50,000 men) the Admiralty's continuing control of all coastal and naval defence.<sup>5</sup>

But within this framework of events lies a more intricate story, and one which illustrates, as perhaps no other Treaty topic could, just how far the Irish were forced to march between expectation and achievement. No matter how self-evident it might seem that Britain's defence proposals did not imply deliberate subjection and exclusion from Dominion practice, the fact remains that the Irish delegates arrived in London knowing that if they accepted them they would lose even the pretence of a desired 'external association'.<sup>6</sup> According to Nicholas Mansergh, it was telling that at the beginning of the talks the Irish were arguing generally within the scope of British proposals, rather than their own counter-points, and that by time they had formulated coherent 'external association' responses the British could claim that it was too late to backtrack. Arguably, however, defence was the one vital exception to this rule, vital in the sense that the force of Irish visions on neutrality contained its own clarity, and may have forewarned the British side of what to expect of later discussions.<sup>7</sup>

That the Irish should claim that an international and/or Commonwealth guarantee of neutrality or 'integrity' would meet British requirements, and preclude the need for bases and coastal control, did indeed indicate that what was being sought was a 'republic within the Empire' - to Britain a totally unacceptable concept.<sup>8</sup> But to Irish eyes, and particularly to those of the much maligned Erskine Childers, there was much to defend in this stance: if, as he believed, simple geographic distance and historical sentiment would make it difficult for Britain to respect Dominion independence, then it was logical to assume that the granting of harbours and coastal waters would epitomise and enlarge the problem. Nor was it the case that the

supposedly 'fanatical' Childers held only the tentative support of his more moderate colleagues; to begin with he was more than ably supported on the question of neutrality by Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins, and the sequence of events in London suggests that it was only the agreement to remove defence matters to a sub-conference committee that prevented an early breakdown on principle. In this committee it was notable that Collins supported Childers to the extent that Churchill and Lord Beatty were soon forced to direct talks back to the main conference; by mid-October Churchill believed that the *joint* Irish stance comprised a direct rejection of Imperial defence interests.<sup>9</sup>

This position could not, of course, last. Britain's dominance in negotiation could not be denied, particularly when her demands had domestic and international credibility and Ireland's own wider security was at stake. And yet the received idea of Irish indifference probably stems more from the speed of their about-turn than the position finally agreed. It is true that in less than two weeks the Irish moved from a position of almost total obstruction to one of almost complete capitulation, but in the interim they did offer some coherent and consistent resistance. By the end of October they had prepared a fallback solution, by which the British could have 'under licence' from the Irish government all coastal facilities 'agreed to be necessary', this pending the Free State's ability to take responsibility for the same. It seems that Childers supported this compromise, and in essence it did still protect the principle of external association by claiming, at least, ultimate control over British naval and military activities. It also provided a realistic framework for further negotiation, in that it observed Dominion practice and answered Britain's technical demands.<sup>10</sup>

The essential point, however, was that this offer could not meet Britain's political demands, and in the final days of October the full weight of Imperial divide-and-rule experience was brought to bear on defence.<sup>11</sup> As in other areas of the talks, the breakthrough came when Griffith was consulted in private (in this instance by Lloyd George himself), and where Griffith led the other principal and moderate, Collins, soon followed. It was during this period that Childers began to despair that the two senior men were conceding unconditional control, a defiance that then left him isolated and which has produced little subsequent sympathy from historians.<sup>12</sup> But a question that has never been raised of this time is the extent to which the other delegates, and even de Valera himself, ever fully appreciated Britain's clinical separation of coastal defence from coast defences - the one to be covered by Article 6 of the proposed Treaty, the other by Article 7 (see Appendix 1). Even as late as the 3rd December, when the full Dail Cabinet met to consider its final position, it was thought that the latter could also be brought within a comprehensive five year transfer, instead of the simple ten year 'review' of the former that was actually on offer. As the only military and strategic expert on the Irish side, Childers must have known that this was a forlorn task and that the damage was already done.<sup>13</sup>

And so it proved: on their return to London, for what was to be the final session of talks, the Irish team did attempt to rescue some partial claim to sovereignty from the defence measures, but in the event Britain would grant only details. It was significant that Collins, in private session with Lloyd George, indicated that agreement could be reached if Britain conceded that *all* coastal defence would be transferred in the stated ten years. The latter dismissed this, although it is again far from clear that Collins

accepted that the proposed Articles 6 and 7 were not just sub-divisions of a negotiable whole. His official report on this private discussion notes that he moved on to insist on a definition of 'care and maintenance parties' (to be retained at named harbour defences), but Collins does not specify that with this the two had moved to a separate subject entirely. Nevertheless, the urgency with which Lloyd George pursued Collins's demand for tighter definitions suggests that the British side still feared that their counterparts might rebel on both Articles.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, given the intensity of the 5th December, when so many last minute dramas were played out over the status of the North and the Oath of Allegiance, the time devoted to re-arguing defence issues was both remarkable and telling. According to the Irish records, both sides 'argued at great length' over Irish concerns (which were strangely prophetic) that as the terms stood the promised coastal defence review 'might never be held if the British did not wish to consider the subject.' At this the two sides 'went over all the arguments again', with Churchill expressing the blunt opinion that the Irish would never be allowed a navy. All this referred to Article 6, but once again the key question is whether, in the heat of argument, the British made clear, or the Irish understood, that Article 7 did not overlap. It seems not: the Irish records state that when the British finally conceded a five year review (instead of ten), Churchill refused to extend this to the facilities required in wartime; in other words, it was believed that in accepting this amended coastal review date the named peacetime defences in the first part of Article 7 might be included.<sup>15</sup>



That final argument did range over both Articles, and British peacetime requirements, is known; Churchill and Lord Beatty had never tried to explain, at least to the satisfaction of Childers and Collins, why the Admiralty needed to hold both Queenstown and Berehaven in the south west, but a last plea that the former be removed from the Treaty list was refused.<sup>16</sup> Irish objection was rational, given that Haulbowline naval dockyard at Queenstown had already been declared redundant, but perhaps the real point is that too much emphasis can be placed on the strategic objectivity of British defence demands. It would not have been lost on either side that Queenstown formed the impressive gateway to the South's second city, and that it was the first sighting that many international visitors and tourists beheld of Ireland. As such, it might have been that the real argument revolved around whether it was to remain a prestige symbol of Empire, or an equally imposing symbol of Irish independence.<sup>17</sup>

In all, by the time the Irish delegates had signed the Treaty, in the early hours of 6th December, the defence arrangements must have been a bitter, if not in themselves politically fatal, pill to swallow. From a starting point where it was thought that a guaranteed neutrality was feasible, it ended with Britain retaining, in large measure, the status quo. Ranged against some of the most skilled and experienced political tacticians in modern Imperial history, the outcome was never really in doubt; Birkenhead had long warned the Irish side that his country would not concede that an independent Ireland could escape an Imperial war, and the Treaty had to reflect this concern.<sup>18</sup> In the circumstances, it is interesting that some recent historians, notably Paul Canning, should hold that Irish indifference led to better terms being

overlooked.<sup>19</sup> This implies a level of British flexibility and Irish resignation that is hard to detect, either before, during, or after the negotiations. During the Dail Treaty debates in December 1921, even the most ardent pro-Treaty supporters doubted the defence terms, as was made plain when Kevin O'Higgins was attacked by Childers: the former could only beseech Childers to remember that even he, as a military expert, had been unable to advise on how to 'break' the British military might that bound them. Interestingly, whereas the Pro-Treaty camp alone accepted, albeit reluctantly, the potential longer-term benefits of the general agreement, on defence there appears to have been an embarrassed consensus that the argument with Britain had been merely deferred. Childers, with his extreme 'logical correctitude', alone refused to believe that this was the case, but it remained to be seen whether the man who best understood the imperial mind was in fact correct.<sup>20</sup>

.....

In Britain generally, the signing of the Treaty was greeted with a relief bordering on euphoria; it was seen that Lloyd George, the 'Welsh Wizard', had pulled off his greatest feat so far - peace with country still loyal to Crown and Empire, and with the essential security of Britain and Northern Ireland preserved. Only Whitehall knew what a frenetic thing it had been at the last, and that 'peace' had been obtained only by an ultimatum of immediate war. In these circumstances, it was not surprising that a show of good faith was urgently required, and when General Macready, G.O.C. in C. Ireland, returned to London on the 6th December he found the subject of troop withdrawals already under discussion.<sup>21</sup> Churchill, in particular, wanted

all the troops home 'as quickly as convenient', noting: 'We should even make a parade of this, and in particular remove all troops from Dublin at the earliest'<sup>22</sup>. Doubtless it was going to be quite a show, and, even as these words were written, moves were afoot to give them effect; by mid-January the battalions were leaving the South as fast as transport and home reception depots could be arranged.<sup>23</sup>

But there was something missing in the daily press reports on troop departures; instead of pomp and celebration there was more a sense of haste and tribulation. By the beginning of February there were those in London who, having trusted the celebration of settlement, began to ask why the rush of returning troops were being greeted 'without one word of recognition of their services'.<sup>24</sup> It was telling that such a question could be asked at a time when the political news from Dublin could no longer be disguised, but the reality was that display was a provocative luxury when the Treaty had, almost from the moment of signing, threatened to split Sinn Fein and the I.R.A. down the middle. It was perhaps implicit in London's reactions, and in Churchill's above words, that a rapid troop evacuation might be the best way to 'buy' complete acceptance of the Treaty in Dublin, but by the beginning of February it was clear that the gamble had failed. There was as yet no indication that the military truce of July 1921 was about to be broken, and yet by the same token the hopeless division of both the Dail and Dail Cabinet promised a political fragmentation that made further troop withdrawals a liability.<sup>25</sup>

That liability was only furthered by the associated post-Treaty violence that had erupted in Belfast and on the Border. With pressure being applied by the Irish

Unionist Alliance, Bonar Law and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (C.I.G.S.), Sir Henry Wilson, it seemed that the situation in the North was beginning to dictate a mood that evacuation had gone too far too soon. But serious though this situation was, it can be argued that concern for the North was to be a deciding factor only insofar as it reflected on the loyalty and stability of the newly formed Provisional Government; the Treaty was all, and its fate lay in Dublin, not Belfast. If removing the troops could not buy trust and stability, then they would have to stay put and help enforce the Treaty.<sup>26</sup>

Thus by the beginning of February the basic tenet of the Treaty's defence terms was being undermined by force of circumstance. There was already enough evidence to suggest that while the Treaty might define the future relationship between Britain and Ireland, it would not necessarily define the future of Ireland itself; in other words, and despite possible British delusions to the contrary, the much disputed articles and clauses could not in themselves create a Dominion. This was especially so when a vital element of the Treaty - defence - had set out to preclude that status and obscure one of the first expressions of sovereignty that any newly independent country seeks. The coming months and years were going to test whether this was a tenable position.

## CHAPTER 2 : THE BRITISH ARMY IN THE SOUTH - 1922

### 1. Macroom and the Road to Dublin.

Then what are our troops in the 26 counties for? Are they there at the request of Mr Collins? If so will the Government say so? Will Mr. Collins say so? If they are not, why are they there?

Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson:  
Commons debate, May 1922.<sup>1</sup>

When troop withdrawals from the South were suspended, in mid-February, the 'sole' reason, as given by Churchill, was the deteriorating situation on the Border.<sup>2</sup> Certainly there was merit to this claim, although by this time no amount of specific justification was going to hide the fact that the real problem was the Imperial government's all too eager faith in the Treaty itself. Only days before the suspension was announced, Lord Cecil had led a commanding Commons attack against the received idea that the newly nominated Provisional Government in Dublin had been invested with true authority; he appreciated that the increasing strife was making the Provisional Government's position 'almost intolerable', but the point was made that it was 'in law, nothing but a series of private individuals who were carrying out perfectly unsanctioned acts.' The game was up: forced into helpless agreement with this argument, Churchill had then to demonstrate that he still accepted full Imperial responsibility for the South. It seemed that until the Irish Free State (Agreement) Act was ratified the troops were going to have to stay, regardless of the situation in the North. Furthermore, events were to show that Churchill was under no illusion that

this might be just a temporary halt.<sup>3</sup>

The actual level of trust that the Imperial government still placed in its own creation can be judged by the Provisional Government's complaint that it was not notified of the evacuation halt until '24 hours after it was a fait accompli.' British Army G.H.Q. in Dublin was left in no doubt that the Irish believed the suspension to be 'the biggest blow struck at their prestige', and yet it was notable that Michael Collins, much to London's surprise, did not make an official protest.<sup>4</sup> There was, however, good reason to be cautious: the pro-Treaty Dublin establishment had become alarmed at the pace of the evacuation, and the political imperative for the British to go was creating added social and economic distress in many areas. In mid-January, for example, a petition had been received which detailed the future plight of an estimated 3,000 people in the area of the Curragh (garrisoned since 1855) whose livelihoods were dependent upon the garrison.<sup>5</sup>

It seemed, however, that the good people of the Curragh were due a reprieve. The timing of the evacuation suspension had also to take account of the disposition of General Macready's (G.O.C.in C.) forces in the South: when announced, Stage 1 of the two part evacuation plan - withdrawal from outlying areas to the main military centres of Cork, the Curragh and Dublin - was nearing completion, and consolidation would present few problems. That consolidation at these three strategic centres was the immediate object, was made clear at a meeting of the Provisional Government of Ireland Committee (P.G.I.- Cabinet Sub-Committee) at the end of February, when Churchill overruled General Macready's appeal that the planned Easter target for

complete withdrawal be kept on line. It was agreed that any further movement would depend on Michael Collins's personal assurances in interview with Churchill.<sup>6</sup>

This meeting was not about to take place, even though it was to become obvious that the more Collins lost control of events, the more he would have to identify with Churchill's own doubts. In the early spring of 1922 it was the pivotal importance of Limerick that threatened to lock pro and anti-Treaty forces in immediate civil war, and when Macready pulled out his remaining 'two weak battalions' from there, at the end of March, he was to incur the wrath of both men for destabilising the position. It was no secret that Macready and the War Office resented the open ended nature of the suspension order, but the ability of politicians to bend their own directives now threatened a serious row. Indeed, had Churchill not refrained from sending a prepared letter to Macready, in which he noted that 'the wish of the Provisional Government to delay the evacuation of Limerick should have been brought to the notice of the Cabinet before it was decisively over-ruled', then a confrontation may have been inevitable.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from having nothing to gain by undermining Macready's position, the reason why Churchill had to tread carefully can be understood in terms of the resources actually available to the former. There were only 15 battalions left in the South - 4 based at the Curragh, 6 at Dublin and 5 at Cork - and of these several, since the Truce of July 1921, had been reduced to less than 50 per cent of establishment strength because of detachments to other theatres of Empire security. In short, Macready could afford to consolidate, but otherwise had no room to manoeuvre.<sup>8</sup>

Since the evacuation suspension, the concern for Northern Ireland's security had seen General Cameron (G.O.C.- Northern Ireland) increase his forces from 13 to 16 battalions (and shortly to a total of 23), but while Macready retained a nominal policy control over these forces, they were of little immediate benefit to his predicament in the South.<sup>9</sup> The essential point, however, was that in extricating the last two isolated battalions from Limerick, Stage 1 of the overall withdrawal plan was at last complete, as per the standing P.G.I. Committee directive, and a coherent and defensible deployment attained.

As such, when on the 4th April Macready confronted Collins and General Eoin O'Duffy, then Deputy Chief of Staff, with the news that British troops were likely to stay put, he could do so with relative confidence. Already alarmed at the number of evacuated barracks in the hands of anti-Treaty forces, British suspicions could only have been strengthened as Collins again took a defensive posture, admitting that he did not yet have the capacity to take over the Cork barracks; it was noted, in particular, that the evacuation of the main Cork barrack at Ballincollig might have to wait until after the promised general election.<sup>10</sup> But unknown to Collins, events in London were about to overtake even his own concerns: dating also from early April was the first meeting of the newly formed Irish Sub-Committee of the C.I.D., whose task was to detail economic and military contingencies should Collins falter and a Republic be declared. The central theme was to occupy and secure the principal ports of the South and create an economic stranglehold, and in this regard Dublin and Cork would have held priority.<sup>11</sup> Clearly then, the short term coherence of staying put in Cork, the Curragh and Dublin, was being enhanced by a middle to, perhaps, long



