

Understanding the challenges to British and French Imperialism, 1900–1939 – An application of the D.I.M.E model.

Introduction

The period between 1900 and 1939 is said to have created the characteristics of modern war and the global order as we know it. This period saw political revolutions, unprecedented innovation and the introduction of a third military service. It also included the preparation for two world wars, the initiation, waging and ending of the ‘Great War’ and an interwar period that was far from peaceful, but rather created the pre-conditions that resulted in the Second World War and the end of western imperialism.

As established imperial powers, both Britain and France were required to balance their imperial commitments with national political objectives and strategic imperatives. There were fundamental differences in the way each country acquired and utilised strategic and material resources and invested in its empire to achieve different aims. The resources available from the colonial empires did not change significantly over the period. What did change was the global economic order and prevailing ideologies, which in turn, impacted how these resources were applied in support of national power, political interest and objectives.

This essay will frame the British and French empires using the following chronological approach: the pre-war period from 1900–1914; the Great War period from 1914–1918 and the inter-war period from 1918–1939. The nature of the empire will be described by an examination of political priorities and strategy, resource advantages and elements of each country’s force structure and capability, including how both Britain and France balanced priorities and interests, that at times compromised or conflicted with each. To contain the potential breadth of discussion the D.I.M.E. model (Diplomacy, Information, Military and Economic)¹ will frame the discussion.

¹ Christopher Wall, Rebecca Lindgren and Shane Quinlan, “Decision Making Analysis (DIME Model)” NSC Decision Making and Operation Allied Force, June 1998 to March 1999, <http://sites.google.com/a/georgetown.edu/nsc-decision-making-and-oaf/decision-types/dime>

This essay argues that the imperial commitments of Britain and France were a key geopolitical and national resource in support of preparing and fighting wars; however, there were constraints and costs associated with these that required agility and compromise. How this was achieved can be shown through the application of elements of D.I.M.E. which demonstrates that both nations were relatively successful in preparing and fighting wars. The Age of Empire ended not because of the constraints of empire or a failure to balance national interests with the responsibilities of empire but because tectonic shifts in global ideology meant that global reach no longer equated to global power² and the ideology of national self-determination was polarised with imperialism.³

The Advantage of Empire

The empires of Britain and France provided access to resources, essential for a nation to operate an industrial base and wage war. These resources included the ability to leverage international relations and establish alliances using trade and aid from the material resources and bases of the empire. The empires also afforded massive geopolitical advantage to both Britain and France due to their extensive ownership of strategic locations that included arable land, oil reserves and primary materials. The utility of these resources to support the preparation for war and its conduct was entirely dependent on capability of each country's industrial and logistic factors of production and distribution. The stability and state of the political and social system domestically and across the empire effected control of these resources and the ability to direct them to achieve political and military goals.⁴

The British interest in its dominions and colonies was almost purely commercial. The approach to administration was where possible, to minimise investment, particularly with the placement of British troops. The empire was made up of constitutional, diplomatic, political, cultural, commercial relationships, global in scale and included colonies that were ruled by protectorates, mandates, naval and military fortresses. This allowed Britain to project power

² Anthony Clayton, *The British Empire as a super power: 1919-1939* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 2.

³ John Darwin, *The empire project the rise and fall of the British world-system, 1830-1970* (Cambridge, UK: New York Cambridge University Press, 2014), 23.

⁴ David Jablonsky, "National Power". *Parameters*, Spring 1997, 34

across every corner of the globe with a grand strategy to promote British commercial interests.⁵ At the heart of this expansive geographical network of ports, was India, in both physical and invisible markets. The importance of this heart of the British empire was the location of the principal garrison where, by 1914, almost 77,000 British troops served there and 240,000 Indian troops were stationed and funded by the Indian taxpayer. Additional resources included Indian government financing of operations from Afghanistan to the Suez Canal and garrisons including China, Singapore and Egypt.⁶

The French approach to expansion of their empire did not have the same commercial driver as Britain but rather was reflective of the ideology and culture of French grandeur and independence. The pre-war period was one of great French imperial prowess including progressive occupation in the early period of Tunisia, Tonkin, Amman and Laos and, later protectorates in Madagascar, Algeria and Morocco⁷. As European rivalries for African territory increased the priority shifted to a more centralised coordination of conquest. France was the second largest empire at the time, spanning west to North Africa, Indochina, the Pacific, Caribbean and Madagascar, with its territories contributing up to the 700,000 soldiers and workers that made up the French force. The colonies and the economic network it facilitated were foundational elements of France's capacity to mobilise and supply on an industrial scale for war. This included cash, loans and materials, but it should not be overstated where an estimated two percent of expenditure came from the colonies, the supply of food stuff was the most significant contribution.⁸

Pre-war: 1900–1914

The political objectives and military priorities of Britain and France were influenced by external features and relationships during the Pre-war period. Key features included: the Boer war, which resulted in significant shift in military doctrine and highlighted the cost and vulnerability of imperial commitments; the Entente Cordiale, signed between Britain and

⁵ John Darwin, *The Empire Project* (Cambridge, 2014), 1.

⁶ Hew Strachan, *The first World War Vol 1: To Arms*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 762.

⁷ Ian Beckett, *The roots of counter-insurgency: armies and guerrilla warfare, 1900-1945*. (London: Blandford Press, 1988) 41.

⁸ Hew Strachan, *The first World War Vol 1: To Arms*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 112

France reconciled competing the imperial interests, particularly in Africa, where the threat of Germany's rise was shared by both; the global naval arms race; and, the resolution of imperial aspirations in Asia between Britain and Russia forming the 'Triple Entente' of France, Britain and Russia.⁹

Britain was an advanced industrial nation and played a central role in the world financial system, with no rivals for maritime or colonial superiority. Britain's advantage stemmed from the spread of industrialisation, a distinguishing and important influence on international politics in the pre-war period. Geopolitically, its strategic position was unrivaled, with territories and interests in every corner of the globe. But with great power comes other challenges and these included much to lose and less to gain from changes in global order. As a result, the pre-war years were characterised by a preference for retaining the status quo.

Diplomacy and protection of national economic interests, of which the empire was central, was Britain's priority, thus minimising differences with France—although considered an imperial rival—was critical. British obligations to France were via less formal agreements than alliances and were driven by imperial-related strategies.¹⁰ The 1904 Entente Cordiale was significant and focused not on the German threat and war, but rather on relations between two of the world's most expansive empires, particularly in Africa.¹¹ Through discussion between General Wilson and General Foch prior to the First World War, the importance of alliances beyond the continent, the extent of global commitments, the over reliance on the Royal Navy for defence, and the need for force structure to reflect a land-based war scenario developed into a commitment between France and Britain to support a land battle in France. This lacked sufficient detail on military strategy and planning¹² and at the outset of war Britain's force structure was directed to preparations for the naval blockade to cripple the German economy. As result the British standing army was not sufficiently mobilised by comparison to the French, with approximately 150,000 British forces compared to several million mobilised French.¹³

⁹ http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/timeline/worldwars_timeline_noflash.shtml

¹⁰ Zara S. Steiner, *Britain and the origins of the First World War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillon, 2003), 33

¹¹ Peter Hennessey, *How Britain went to War*.

¹² David Owen, *The hidden perspective: The military conversations 1906-1914*. (London: Haus Publishing, 2014).

¹³ Peter Hennessey, *How Britain went to war*.

Pre-war preparation by the French army was fraught with civil-military disagreement around terms of service and, training requirement and practice achieved.¹⁴ The last manoeuvre training of 1913 described as ‘intolerable insufficiencies’, an offensive decisive battle was the operational dogma, with bloody sacrifices expected. In 1911, when the Moroccan crisis occurred and a potential military encounter with Germany was averted through diplomacy, Joffre advised that the French military was in no position to be assured of a good chance of victory. In 1914, the French Army was relatively new and evolving. West Africa and Algeria were used for the first time in official conscription in preparation for war, as the French continued to exploit its colonies on a massive scale for manpower and economic aid.¹⁵ As a result, the professional army of the pre-war period was replaced by a conscript army. By the end of the war the extent of learning and adaption and command and leadership of Foch meant that it was this French General who received the German signature of armistice as victors of a modern and industrial war.¹⁶ The extensive manpower provided by the French on both fighting fronts could not have been achieved without the supplementation of manpower resources from the breadth of its empire, clearly demonstrating the value of empire to expand capability.

Military spending increased dramatically from 1900 to 1911, with the Royal Navy quadrupling and Army doubling from the twenty years prior. The British government, responsible for strategic force structure decisions, concentrated military investment resources on the Navy with the expenditure on army capped. In reaction to the British blockade against Germany during the Boer War Germany initiated a naval expansion program. The British reacted with a massive expansion of their own including building the HMS Dreadnought. Europe, and in particular Britain and France, dominated global defence spending and world economic outputs as war broke out in 1914. The access to capital for investment was a direct result of the overseas holdings of both countries, which, combined with industrialisation the capacity to invest in capability, was a significant advantage for Britain. Growth in world trade

¹⁴ Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *The French Army and the First World War*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2014), 18

¹⁵ Ibid., 111

¹⁶ Ibid., 3

reached 33 percent per annum in 1913.¹⁷ But by 1914 Germany was well in advance of France in population size and industrial production.¹⁸

The value of resources of the Empire also impacted other logistical preparations for war during this period. Investment in railways was central to British mobilisation with mileage growing exponentially with numerous technological advances.¹⁹ A strategic report into the importance of rail for mobilisation and food supply recommended government takeover of privatised railways by August 14. The government initiated treasury underwriting of insurance merchant shipping companies to keep ships at sea during the war. The benefit was two-fold, including continued supply of food and materials from trading partners and colonies and it also protected the financial system by securing trade payments and providing some protection from the cost of the war, thus increasing capability. In addition, the Treasury created a specific new currency to ensure trade could continue and avoid a financial crisis.²⁰

The distinction between the French approach to its empire and Britain's in the pre-war period is attributed to geopolitics, social structure and technology²¹, including gunned long-range sailing ships and well-organised nation states that understood trade. Britain had a greater ability to concentrate greater resources to global reach because it was protected from land invasions.²² A powerful navy doubled as protection from invasion and a tool for trade and domination of shipping lanes. This security from invasion assisted the establishment of an ordered society and legal system. A large portion of society was involved in trade and the benefits of imperialism and a system of financing grew stronger. The economic and military sectors had a mutual interest in commercial expansion and colonial exploitation, and maritime trade specifically was a catalyst for the industrial revolution. This maritime preeminence was in decline during the prewar period but the connection of industrial wealth to military and political power was more significant than elsewhere. In addition, the naval arms race was a source of instability and uncertainty, "War was bad for business".²³

¹⁷ David Stevenson, *1914-1918: The history of the First World War*. (London: Penguin, 2012), 76.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁰ Peter Hennessey, *How Britain went to war*.

²¹ Paul Kennedy, *The realities behind diplomacy: background influences on British external policy, 1865-1980*. (London: Fontana, 1985), 17.

²² *Ibid.*, 18.

²³ *Ibid.*, 27.

Ideologically, France demonstrated indifference to the colonies, considering these as peripheral to concerns of the metropole, while the British government saw empire as central to foreign policy. France's dominant political objective was homeland defence from Germany. The same was true of economic interests, where the French had greater foreign investment in the Russian empire than its own.²⁴ Similarly, French industry and society was not largely involved in the commerce and benefits of the empire as with Britain. This was largely a result of weakness of its merchant navy, whose the function was heavily reliant on British ships. By 1917, half of French imports were on British ships.²⁵

By the end of the pre-war period, both Britain and France had superior access to all key elements of national power, to varying degrees individually and directly attributed to their empires. Britain and France's diplomatic achievements resulting in the Entente and global alliances were a significant advantage over the central powers. Both experienced national prestige as a result of their imperial prowess, and global connectivity through trade and relations, a world-dominating navy and merchant fleet, a huge standing army, powerful industrialised and wealthy economies as a result of their empires. These would be significantly depleted through the course of the First World War.

1914–1918: The First World War

The British and French geographical threat realities differed, and this required a difference in strategies and associated resourcing. France had been invaded and had lost valuable coal and steel production capacity, capability and force structure to deliver an effect to drive the invader out and supplement the lost resources was required. France's objectives were continental and capacity to focus force structure and capability externally to the colonies was constrained. Britain on the other hand had no such constraint and a significantly superior Navy to address its dispersed geographical possessions and also target the colonial possession of Germany.²⁶ For both France and Britain, colonial territories were a vast reservoir of vital

²⁴ Christopher M. Andrew and A.S. Kanya-Forestner. *France Overseas: The Great War and the Climax of French Imperial Expansion* (London: Thanmes and Hudson, 1981), 14.

²⁵ Ibid., 15.

²⁶ Ibid., 64.

raw materials which could fuel their industrial war efforts. More importantly, their empires provided manpower on such a scale as to offset their quantitative disadvantages on European battlefields.²⁷

Britain's real contribution was to be economic and maritime, with force structure to include only a small expeditionary force relying on the conscript armies of France and Russia with a small contingent of reinforcements early on as an act of solidarity²⁸. The economic position of Britain at the outset of was far superior to France. The national income of France and Russia was significantly smaller than that of central powers however with the inclusion of Britain the national income was 60 percent greater. Similarly, the manufacturing output was a third greater and even greater in manpower, significantly enhanced by colonial resources and alliances.²⁹ Once diplomatic options had been exhausted, Britain mobilised for war against Germany as an empire, calling on approximately seventy of its colonies, dominions and protectorates as part of the imperial force, using diplomatic protocols rather than permission. These resulting figures clearly demonstrate the manpower resource value: from the British empire India mobilised over one million men, Canada close to 500,000, Ireland 200,000, Australia over 300,000 and New Zealand 100,000. South Africa marshaled 100,000 for fighting on the African continent and also sent contingents to Europe. The massive demands of 'total war' and the impact of an already protracted war led to the introduction of conscription for Britain in 1916, some four years after the 1912 introduction of conscription by the French.³⁰ Both faced the challenge of balancing manpower resourcing for military and industrial production. Attrition continued, manpower and all resources increasingly depleted. The colonies also functioned as garrisons in India, Burma, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Similarly forces from what would later become Palestine, Egypt, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere in the Middle East were crucial to campaigns in Middle East.³¹

²⁷ James Kitchen, "Colonial Empires after the War/Decolonization". *1914-1918-online, International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, last modified October 08, 2014, 7. https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/colonial_empires_after_the_wardecolonization.

²⁸ Darwin, *The empire project*, 309.

²⁹ Niall Ferguson, *Pity of War*, (London: Allen Lane, 1998), 432.

³⁰ John Turner, *Britain and the first world war*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 179.

³¹ Strachan, *The First World War*, 155.

France mobilised eight million troops from 1914 to 1918; half a million of which were colonial subjects.³² This included both volunteers and conscripts. The methods of recruitment ranged, but the punitive and coercive methods used fueled existing grievances and resulted in often violent resistance.³³ For both France and Britain, the empires became a vital source of supplies, equipment, manpower, intelligence and industrial production to create its war fighting capability, economic security and sustainment of the home front. This came at a price and the issue of public order and dissent was a one of increasing concern for colonial governments. The result of this attempt to mobilise troops from the colonies often only exacerbated underlying unrest for administrators. The 1916 rebellions in Algeria and, to a lesser extent, Western Volta were examples. Regardless some 270,000 French troops were drawn from West Africa with 31,000 French African deaths in World War One. The Dardanelles operation demonstrated once again the inadequacy of France's cabinet control over policies affecting colonial interests.³⁴ Similarly, the Styarits agreement of March-April 1915 shows the peripheral approach of France compared to the British full cabinet decision regarding the Russian demand for Constantinople.³⁵

For Britain, the ability to draw material resources from colonies, particularly India and South Africa and Australian wool too was a primary safeguard.³⁶ The role of Canada was vital; its economy was the most industrialised in the empire outside of Britain's. India's contribution was from a wealth of manpower rather than production.³⁷ At the end of the war, Britain remained a global economic superpower in both shipping and foreign income, but its civilians had suffered and the relationship between economics and government control had changed. Further afield too, the mechanics of free trade were different, and a new world order came about.³⁸ In this climate, the benefits associated with empires and their expenses were increasingly questioned.³⁹

³² Richard S. Fogarty, 'The French Empire' in *Empires at War: 1911-1923*, ed Gerwarth, Robert and Manuela, Erez. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 120

³³ Fogarty, 'The French Empire', 122

³⁴ Andrew and Kanya-Forestner, *France Overseas*, 71

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 73

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 324

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 325

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 328

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 329

Overall the contribution of the colonies to the final stages of the war exceeded expectations, and a new-found regard for the utility of the empire emerged. The victory of Britain and France in the First World War shows that the capacity for collective action and effective resource distribution to create war fighting capability were essential. The supply and supplementation of troops, equipment, supplies and modernised doctrine created the winning combat power.⁴⁰ The victors leveraged all elements of national power; diplomacy: the right alliances; information: access to intelligence and influence of war time morale both on the battlefield and at home; military: imperial and American troops, evolved doctrine, modernised equipment and a supply chain leveraging the last element; economic: where, though drained and indebted the wartime economy of the entente and its alliances could endure a prolonged war and used a superior naval capability to strangle that of its enemy. The strength of these forms of power, specifically the naval superiority were a direct result of the British Empire's prior national objectives of commerce and global trade throughout its empire, an invaluable geographical and resource asset. Although the French were much more continentally focused and did not have the same foundation and established prewar benefits resulting from its imperial policies, it did have access to manpower, primary resources and strategic locations that proved of high value during the First World War.⁴¹

Inter-War: 1919–1939

The First World War erased the conditions that enabled British and French colonisation and imploded the global economy as it stood.⁴² Imperial overstretch and the stimulation of anti-colonial nationalist movements set the tone for the colonial relationships of the interwar years, during which imperial rule was scrutinised as never before.⁴³ The reality was that both nations faced a crisis in managing imperial wartime gains, with unrest in Egypt, the Irish insurgency and then tribal rebellion in Mesopotamia, which resulted in a large expansion of the imperial remit. The approach taken, to manage these by force, was increasingly out of step with the liberal direction favored by their allies. Both governments prioritised domestic affairs

⁴⁰ Peter Turchin, *War Peace War the life cycles of imperial nations*. (New York: Pi Press, 2006), 320.

⁴¹ Eugenia C. Kiesling, *Resting Uncomfortably on its laurels: The Army of Interwar France*, in *The challenge of Change: Military Institutions and New Realities, 1918-1941*, Harold Winton and David Mets, eds. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 3.

⁴² Darwin, *The Empire Project*, 307.

⁴³ Kitchen, *Colonial Empires after war/decolonization*, 19.

over imperial matters, recognising the connection between political survival, the economy, and the military.⁴⁴ This changed force structure considerations and disrupted traditional military approaches to investment, training and sustaining systems and both Britain and France enter a period of leveraging diplomacy and information power.⁴⁵ The need to scale down global responsibilities became increasingly obvious.⁴⁶

Trade security remained Britain's priority but this created a requirement to position troops to protect these. The reality was that complex commercial interdependencies across the empire still existed and apprehension of American industrial growth was increasing. Diplomacy was a primary form of power used by Britain to ensure sufficient peace and stability for the trade advantage to recover and be maintained in a climate of burgeoning globalisation. The appeasement policy was a key policy tool to achieve this effect.

From a military perspective, both Britain and France could not afford to defend or manage their post war empires. In 1922 Boney Fuller recommended that the size of the empire be reduced to fit the size of the army with two options; reduce the empire or increase the military's speed of mobility. Air power was seen as a cost-effective projectable form of military power. Despite significant economic constraints, its advocates in both Britain and France managed to advance an investment program to establish an air power capability and associated changing technology, such as radar, and integrate this service in support of both land and sea capability. Driven significantly by economic constraints and the need to minimise the costs associated with administering an expansive, and increasingly restless empire, air policing was seen as unattractive solution.⁴⁷ During the interwar era, led by Air Marshal Hugh Trenchard, the RAF expanded capabilities focussed on strategic bombing and island defence. Britain's approach to sea power still included a balance of competing requirements regarding global commercial interest and the Royal Navy's advantage at sea. Significant changes in Britain's force structure occurred as a result; the army became responsible for this policing role while the Navy was far less engaged.

⁴⁴ Ferguson, *Pity of war*, 160.

⁴⁵ Ferguson, *Pity of war*, 162.

⁴⁶ Keith Jeffery, *The British army and the crisis of empire, 1918-22* (Manchester, England: Dover, N.H., USA: Manchester University Press, 1984), 159.

⁴⁷ John Ferris, 'The Fog of Peace and War Planning: *military and strategic planning under uncertainty*.' ed Imlay C. Talbot and M.D. Toft, (London: Routledge, 2006), 147.

The French approach to its colonies was more hard-line and resulted in more homogenous administration. The French policy for its empires is described as one of rational economic exploitation of manpower and economic resources.⁴⁸ Enhanced mobility was seen as a solution and allied to a degree of success in Egypt, Trans-Jordan and Iraq. India was no longer an unquestionable source of troops or cheap garrison solution for large proportions of British troops, a cost born by India rather than Britain. The introduction of air policing in places like Mesopotamia addressed to some extent but it was clear that without the Indian resource Britain could not retain its Middle Eastern empire.⁴⁹ Despite the gains in territory the price they paid was great and this cost would impact both Britain and France's ability to retain an empire.⁵⁰

In France, the size of the army was reduced and comprised of active conscripts and reservists. This structure had huge effects on fighting doctrine as there were numerous practical issues regarding training and doctrinal reform for new technology, which could not be applied to the very different force elements.⁵¹ Infantry and cavalry become mobile and motorised, but this consumed a disproportionate amount of army budget expenditure. Limited resources were left to protect imperial territories, limiting the empire's ability to assist in a war effort with material and manpower.⁵² These territories were a distant priority to the rising German threat in an economically constrained environment. Similarly, despite the massive contribution of African troops to World War One, planning for the future force saw a much reduced reliance on colonial troops, with the focus on mobile and mechanised French troops. The navy and air-force remained significant but were focussed on continental defence, a clear distinction from British policing of colonies. French naval strategy was also very different to British with limited investment in colonial establishments nor was the empire used as a network resource of information communication and trading architecture.⁵³ The French expected colonial resource contribution via manpower and product but the details of logistics, appropriate

⁴⁸ Fogarty, *Empires at War*, 111.

⁴⁹ Ferguson, N *The Pity of War*, 157-58

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 436

⁵¹ Thomas, Martin, "At the Heart of Things? French Imperial Defense Planning in the Late 1930s." *French Historical Studies* 21, no. 2 (1998): 325

⁵² *Ibid.*, 326.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 334.

doctrine was ill-considered with an insufficient merchant fleet available to provide secure supply, nor was investment in basing adequate.⁵⁴

The development of French army doctrine was significantly influenced by its organisational culture, prior experience and public law, so doctrine was shaped through a test and learn process⁵⁵. The ideology underpinning the French doctrine was that of valiant nation ready to defend themselves. This military culture saw France structure its force for total war on the continent with little preparation for a globalised crisis. The 'nation in arms' approach saw force structure and capability based on a methodical battle, defensive strategies and firepower as the capability of a force with limited readiness⁵⁶. Although extensive change and innovation had been introduced from the First World War, including heavy artillery, tanks automated transport and airplanes, limited changes to doctrine occurred.⁵⁷ This was a failing to learn and adapt (information/intelligence power) that would become brutally apparent when faced with German doctrine of blitzkrieg.⁵⁸

The management of information and public opinion regarding the military was a subject of much civil-military disagreement in France. The Supreme Council of War saw a greater requirement than the army to have a large ready professional force, from 1920 to 1922 the Government pushed the war council hard to reduce these numbers. This deteriorated further through to 1928 when length of service and career soldiers were reduced again.⁵⁹ Other issues included the 1927 law that required the peacetime army to be transformed into a wartime army before it was deemed combat ready. There were also war time mobilisation conditions, which restricted the nation's ability to respond effectively in a time of crisis.⁶⁰ French bureaucracy was centralised and the military was dominated by the metropolitan army. France had always prioritised its metropole and not invested in the merchant, naval and logistic infrastructure to maximise the capacity of its empire. The pre-war, world war and inter-war

⁵⁴ Ibid., 329

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1999), 150.

⁵⁶ Robert Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster: The Development of French Army Doctrine 1919-1939* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1985), 39.

⁵⁷ Kiesling, *Resting Uncomfortably on its laurels*, 3.

⁵⁸ Edward Carr, *The twenty years' crisis, 1919-1939: an introduction to the study of international relations*. (London: Macmillan, 1946).

⁵⁹ Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster*, 19.

⁶⁰ Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster*, 18.

periods had different competing priorities that at each time took precedent over its empire.⁶¹ The bureaucratic structure, the *Comité Consultatif de Défense des Col* (CCDC) set up for imperial decision making reflected the low priority of the empire in French affairs. It is this that resulted in the constraint as the “burden” was never viewed as a resource, in a strategic rather than reactionary way, in the time of war.⁶²

Economically, both nations went from credit status to debtor nations and military spending was seen as an area to find savings. This continued throughout 1930s. Fear of internal unrest and industrial disruption was a new constraint. Key features included the ‘ten-year rule’ where Britain would not be engaged in war for ten years and force expenditure would be reduced accordingly. After an immediate spike in many economies in the first few months after the Armistice, by mid-1919 war production contracted. As a result, industry faced difficulties shifting from wartime to peace-time manufacture, world trade and commodity prices reduced, the post-war burden of extensive debt, and bad harvests in key colonies, caused a sharp economic downturn.⁶³ There were a series of strikes, riots, and other forms of social conflict in the immediate post-war years in Britain and throughout many parts of its empire.⁶⁴

The post war financial and conscription crisis led members of the Imperial War Cabinet to suggest to Churchill in late 1919 that a solution to the demands in India and Ireland was to provide the armed forces with the latest in modern weapons, including mechanised mobility. These technological advances were expected to save money. However attractive this was, it was untested and novel.⁶⁵ Lloyd George introduced limited conscription that extended to air and navy to addresses the serious troop shortage. The colonies and commitments in Ireland, Egypt and the Middle East had increased, not diminished, liability. Mobilisation and modernisation were seen as the solution and the navy was a target for savings. Two years later the air defence policy for the Middle East was announced by Churchill.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Martin, *At the heart of things*, 361.

⁶² Martin, *At the heart of things*, 361.

⁶³ Strachan, *The First World War*, 169.

⁶⁴ Strachan, *The First World War*, 170.

⁶⁵ Jeffery, *The British army and the crisis of empire*, 13.

⁶⁶ Jeffery, *The British army and the crisis of empire*, 18.

The inter-war period saw a focus on the protection of natural resources, noting their exposure to attack. The focus was on coal and iron ore and small oil reserves, and that these were geographically close to the German threat was unfortunate.⁶⁷ The protection of critical resources along the frontier impacted organisation of French forces and strategy. This, combined with mobilisation into Belgium, saw France lead the world in monitoring forces, in particular cavalry guarding infantry, in a defensive rather than offensive approach despite having the capability.⁶⁸ Although fortifications along the Maginot Line gave some confidence, the key vulnerability was the exposure of natural resources and the failure to prepare for a rapid enemy attack through the Ardennes.⁶⁹ This economic strain saw establishment of the “mise en valeur” program for colonial development, including potential as a source of food, and primary resources grew in attraction as the economy declined.⁷⁰ Whether due to mismanagement and idealistic goals or the dire financial situation, the program faltered. Over production, poor transport and falling world markets meant that this attempt to turn the tide of French reliance on imports for industry failed.

Extensive diplomatic negotiations between Britain and France occurred to fill the vacuum that resulted from the fall of the Ottoman Empire and diffuse claims from other opportunistic states. The League of Nations mandate system approach to colonial territories to a status quo would often fail.⁷¹ The First World War created fertile ground for the growth in revolutionary ideologies as well as a new approach to global order guided by national self determination, articulated in the Woodrow Wilson Fourteen Point speech in January 1918⁷², while decolonisation spread through Europe seeing Russia, Austria-Hungary and Germany all significantly decolonised and the introduction of communism by the Bolsheviks. Although unquestionably both Britain and France were huge territorial powers, their political power had been diminished globally; neither were at “peace” after World War One, with numerous

⁶⁷ Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster*, 43.

⁶⁸ Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster*, 43.

⁶⁹ Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster*, 71.

⁷⁰ Andrew and Kanya-Forestner, *France Overseas*, 212.

⁷¹ Kitchen, *Colonial Empires after war/decolonization*, 4

⁷² Kitchen, *Colonial Empires after war/decolonization*, 5

conflicts in Ireland, India, and Egypt, varying only in scale and characterised by rioting and violence with nationalistic fervour.⁷³

Using the elements of the D.I.M.E model the period began with harsh diplomacy at Versailles, alienating Germany and the United States for different reasons, an appeasement policy as time passed, information challenges when faced with rising nationalism and questioning of the role of empires and strong public sentiment for reforming quality of life at home. While the military was demobilised, the territory to defend had expanded, treaty restrictions contracted capability investment, and the credit nations become debtors facing a dire post war economic reality. All these elements influenced resource allocation, capability investment and force structure despite extensive diplomatic efforts to achieve a cost-effective middle ground⁷⁴.

Conclusion

*"The empire is what states make of it"*⁷⁵

The imperial commitments of Britain and France provided both with a competitive strategic and resourcing advantage, but these existed in a dynamic global economic, social and political environment which created challenges and costs to accessing these advantages. It has been demonstrated that the respective empires were an invaluable source of manpower in a war of attrition and provided primary products and industrial mobilisation in the preparation and conduct of war. Despite associated costs and constraints, Britain and France had a greater resilience during the period as a result and, by effective use of elements of national power, both nations were relatively successful in preparing and fighting wars.

As Clausewitz stated, "everything ... is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult." The relationships among the elements of national power, specifically the balancing of constraints and opportunities offered by an empire, are interrelated and shift in utility and influence depending on circumstance, and are seldom clear-cut. The capacity to yield power and achieve political objectives as a result of imperial assets is contextual, and this has been

⁷³ Ferguson, *Pity of War*, 155.

⁷⁴ Kennedy, *The realities behind diplomacy*, 311.

⁷⁵ Strachan, *The First World War*, 237.

demonstrated by the use of the DIME model to evaluate some of the costs and benefits of imperial responsibilities balanced during an intensely complex period. Much change and reprioritisation occurred over time. During World War One, the Allies were able to mobilise their far superior resources both on the home front and the front lines. In the case of Britain and France, it is clear that despite the benefit of their empires, economic climate, changes in global market forces and ideology that these internal and external shifts were the constraining and changing factors to the imperial preeminence during the period.

The appearance and actual power associated with being an empire is dependent on political, social and logistical architecture to realise the resource value. The period of 1900–1939 saw a world war devastate Europe and shift global power balances to include the United States and set a course to decolonisation of the developing world, undoing a power structure that had been in place for over three centuries. A nation does not necessarily have to be the best in each element of the D.I.M.E. to achieve its national goals and interests; it does however, have to be adept in managing each element of national power synergistically in order to achieve its political objectives.

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