# THE BRITISH ARMY IN 1899: PROBLEMS THAT HAMPERED PREPARATIONS FOR WAR IN SOUTH AFRICA

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In a previous article[2] the British view of a war in South Africa was discussed, including the way in which problems with regard to military intelligence affected this view and hampered preparations with regard to the coming war. In this article three other aspects typical of the British Army in 1899 will be analyzed, namely the conflict between the military and political leaders, financial problems, and the problem of reinforcements, i.e. manpower shortages.

In the light of the fact that by the end of the nineteenth century Great Britain was the world's only super-power, one would have thought that the British Army would have sorted out its relationship with its political masters, and that it would have had access to sufficient funds and a sufficient number of soldiers to defend Britian's global interests. The run-up to and outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War on 11 October 1899, and the defeats suffered by the British forces under the command of Gen. Redvers Buller, indicated that all was not well with Britain's army.

## 2. CONFLICT BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND THE POLITICAL LEADERS[3]

It was the Prussian general and military philosopher, Carl von Clausewitz, who said that war is the continuation of politics by other means.[4] Harmony between political policy and military strategy is a precondition for success in war,[5] and co-operation

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2 See pp. 153-67 of this journal, **supra**.

3 For the relationship between war and politics in general see, for example, B Brodie, **War and politics** (London, 1974), and for the British Parliament and the war, see F-R Flournoy, **Parliament and war: the relation of the British Parliament to the administration of foreign policy in connection with the initiation of war** (London, 1927).

4 See, for example, MI Handel, **Masters of war: classical strategic thought** (3rd edition, London, 2001), pp. 67-8 and F Maurice, **British strategy: a study of the application of the principles of war** (London, 1929), p. 44.

5 WS Hamer, **The British Army: civil-military relations, 1885-1905** (Oxford, 1970), p. 31.

between the politicians and the military is indispensable.[6] Conflict between the military and political (civilian) leaders usually includes personality clashes, and is often linked to a lack of funds. It is indeed the politicians who have to provide the funds for military expenditure. Since military strategy is generally a vehicle for implementing political policy, and civilian politicians in a democratic state tend to determine national policy, it is inevitable that in such a state civilian control over the military will be the norm.[7] Mutual understanding between politicians and the military is therefore of critical importance, but since cabinet decisions with regard to military strategy have a party-political character, some professional officers will understandably not take kindly to the fact that they are subject to political control.

When the conflict between the military and the politicians in Britain, prior to and during the Anglo-Boer War, is studied, a number of paradoxes become apparent. For his entire career, Lord Wolseley worked for the expansion of the British Army, and it was appropriate that by 1895 he had become the new Commander-in-Chief in place of the Duke of Cambridge, and in this way, had achieved the ultimate reward for a career of self-sacrificing service. Although Queen Victoria did not have the last say on the issue, she did indeed exercise some influence when appointments were made, and she dearly wanted one of her sons, the Duke of Connaught, to succeed Cambridge.[8] Although Wolseley's success could be ascribed, inter alia, to the fact that he was almost the only renowned militarist who supported the governing Liberal Party,[9] that very same party intended to appoint Gen. Redvers Buller as the new Commander-in-Chief. In 1895, the Unionist government, under the leadership of Lord Salisbury, came to power, and on the recommendation of the Secretary of State for War, Lord Lansdowne, Wolseley was appointed.[10] Although Lansdowne was instrumental in Wolseley's appointment, the latter did not have much respect for his Secretary of State for War. Thus, there was only a superficially sound relationship between the military and the political heads in the War Ministry,[11] a situation that did not bode well for the future.

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6 H Tovey, **The elements of strategy** (London, 1904), p. 6.
7 HE Eccles, **Military concepts and philosophy** (New Jersey, 1965), p. 172.
8 JH Lehmann, **All Sir Garnet: a life of Field Marshal Lord Wolseley** (London, 1974), pp. 383-4.
9 M Blumenson and JL Stokesbury, **Masters of the art of command** (Boston, 1975), p. 5.
10 **Dictionary of South African Biography** (henceforth abbreviated as **DSAB**), 1 (Cape Town, 1968), p. 888.
11 See in general the articles of D Steele ("Salisbury and the soldiers"), K Surridge ("Lansdowne at the War Office"), IFW Beckett ("Buller and the politics of command") and H Kochanski ("Wolseley and the South African War") in J Gooch (ed.), **The Boer War: direction, experience and image** (London, 2000), pp. 3-69.

In the choice of a supreme commander for the British expeditionary force to South Africa, Lansdowne supported Buller's appointment, but in December 1899, it was indeed Lansdowne who ensured that Lord Roberts - a good friend of his - replaced Buller, without having consulted Wolseley first. It should also be borne in mind that Wolseley and Roberts were fierce competitors, each with his "ring" or circle of staunch supporters. This was not entirely out of character for Wolseley; after all, he had claimed earlier that the position of Commander-in-Chief at the War Office could be compared, after 1895, with that of a vice-chairman of a debating society![12]

According to Wolseley, the Commander-in-Chief should be at least an **ex officio** member of the cabinet, which would have enabled him to put his case in person to the politicians. Wolseley would actually have preferred the post of Commander-in-Chief to be scrapped – the duties attached to the post could be performed by the Secretary of State for War. The head of state could then be the nominal Commander-in-Chief. Wolseley believed that military decisions could not be left in the hands of politicians. Because he was supposed to be the cabinet's military advisor in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief, he would at least have liked to address this body from time to time.[13]

The lack of sound mutual interaction between the military and the politicians was reinforced by the fact that even by the middle of 1899, when it was almost certain that war in South Africa would break out at some or other time, Wolseley was still not in constant contact with the British cabinet. He generally found out coincidentally, and indirectly, what British policy was with regard to the deteriorating situation in South Africa. Wolseley's ideas, in turn, were conveyed to the cabinet in the form of second-hand accounts by Lansdowne. In Wolseley's view, this unhealthy situation compromised national security. To Wolseley, it appeared that the cabinet had not taken him into their full confidence.[14]

In a memorandum, dated 5 September 1899, Wolseley expressed his concern about the communication gap between the military and politicians. Neither knew what the other expected; therefore, not much was being achieved. The government did not realize how long it would take to deploy troops, and diplomatic and military preparations had to be synchronized. It would indeed take five to six weeks to send an army corps to South Africa. By not completing their military preparations in time, the British committed one of the most critical errors of the war. It was for this

12 **DSAB**, 1, p. 888.

13 **Royal commission on the war in South Africa: minutes of evidence taken before the royal commission on the war in South Africa**, 1 (Cd. 1790, London, 1903), pp. 380-1: Wolseley's response to questions 9030, 9035, 9041, 9042 and 9060.

14 Cd. 1790, pp. 363 and 380: Wolseley's response to questions 8 703 and 9 029.

reason that they allowed the military initiative to be placed in the hands of the Boers prior to the war.[15] The entire strategic course of the war was changed by this, and it would take the British several months, at the cost of many lives, and great expenditure, to correct this strategic blunder.

The cabinet had the responsibility of deciding when a situation had become so critical that military forces had to be mobilized.[16] In Lansdowne's view, the order to embark upon full-scale military preparations could not be given by August 1899, for political reasons. The British government did not want to create the impression that they were the aggressors, and merely wanted to ensure that they could deploy adequate numbers of soldiers in South Africa to defend the British colonies against Boer incursions until reinforcements arrived. In August 1899, however, the British still worked according to the assumption that the Boers would only launch raids and would not embark upon full-scale invasions of the British territories.[17]

Lansdowne acknowledged that he was not a soldier. He also admitted that long before the advent of the war, his military advisors in the War Ministry had requested that the necessary preparations should be made. As his excuse for not having taken these steps, Lansdowne argued that negotiations between the British and Transvaal governments were being pursued, and that a peaceful settlement was not excluded altogether. Public opinion in Britain at the time was against war and enormous military expenditures.[18]

Some hold Lansdowne responsible for the fact that the British Army was unprepared on the eve of the war. Although he cannot be blamed for the military advice he was given by his military experts, he can be held responsible for the fact that he did not better co-ordinate the few preparations that had been made, that he did not insist on more funds from the government, and that he did not prompt Wolseley to engage in more action.[19]

Of course, Lansdowne's problem apparently was that he could only respond to decisions taken by Joseph Chamberlain and his Colonial Office. The problems in South Africa were, in the first place, the responsibility of the Colonial Secretary and his officials. In April 1897, Chamberlain wanted Lansdowne to send

15 Appendix D, **Report of His Majesty's commissioners appointed to inquire into the military preparations and other matters connected with the war in South Africa** (Cd. 1789, London, 1903), pp. 268-9: Minute by Wolseley, 5 September 1899.
16 Cd. 1790, p. 260: Wolseley's response to question 6 128.
17 **Royal commission on the war in South Africa: minutes of evidence taken before the royal commission on the war in South Africa**, 2 (Cd. 1791, London, 1903), pp. 500-9: Lansdowne's response to questions 21 149, 21 157, 21 159, 21 160 and 21 175.
18 Cd. 1791, p. 509: Lansdowne's response to questions 21 177 and 21 179.
19 **DSAB**, 3 (Cape Town, 1977), p. 683.

reinforcements to South Africa so that the show of force could act as a deterrent to the Transvaal, and give the loyal British subjects in the Cape and Natal the assurance that the British would indeed defend the territories. Lansdowne was willing to send soldiers as part of a show of force to achieve political purposes, as long as the War Ministry's budget allowed such an operation. At that stage, an amount of only £200 000 was available to send reinforcements to South Africa, while the force that was proposed by the military would have cost £500 000.[20] For this reason, nothing was done.

Political and financial considerations precluded the training of adequate reserves.[21] Moreover, the British government was uncertain about the nature and scope of the preparations that had to be made, while the system in terms of which preparations had to be made was also unsatisfactory. Wolseley criticized the British government in very strong terms because they had not made adequate funding available for these preparations in good time. As late as 16 September 1899, Lansdowne refused to provide funds for preparations pertaining to transport.[22] According to Wolseley's evidence, the War Ministry did indeed have the funds available, but these were not utilized correctly.

Until 22 September 1899, the British Army was unable to obtain adequate funds for military preparations. Although the Chancellor of the Exchequer was apparently reluctant to give the necessary authorisation for the provision of the funds,[23] the responsibility ultimately lay with the cabinet as a whole. For example, Wolseley had suggested as early as 8 June 1899 that an army corps should be mobilized at Salisbury Plain, and be kept in a state of readiness. If the necessary funds had been available, the army corps would therefore have been in a position to be sent to South Africa far earlier than actually happened. Eventually the order to mobilize an army corps with a view to military service in South Africa was only given on 7 October 1899.[24]

According to Lansdowne, the military authorities did not accurately or fully grasp the task ahead of them, nor did they realize the full extent of what they were facing. They underestimated the Boers' military power and their endurance.[25] On the other hand, however, the politicians did not provide the military with the necessary funds, nor adequate political information, to enable them to prepare properly. According to Maj.-Gen. WF Butler (General Officer Commanding, Cape Colony,

20 Appendix C, Cd. 1789, p. 185: War Ministry – Colonial Office, 29 April 1897 (report).
21 Appendix D, Cd. 1789, p. 223: Memorandum by Wolseley, 8 June 1888.
22 Cd. 1790, p. 368-9: Wolseley's response to questions 8 779, 8 784 and 8 786.
23 Cd. 1791, p. 143: Gen. GS White's response to question 14 698.
24 Cd. 1790, pp. 370-1: Wolseley's response to questions 8 793, 8 803, 8 804 and 8 830.
25 Cd. 1791, p. 503: Lansdowne's response to question 21 108.

1898-1899), the Secretary of State for War, Lord Lansdowne, had a very simplistic view of a conflict in South Africa.[26] The politicians' policy was highly conducive to a war in South Africa, yet they did not give their army the authorisation nor the means to prepare for a potential war. Since the military were subordinate to the politicians, there was not much that the army could do about the problem.[27] Ultimately, it was the army that had to rescue the situation, while the politicians were awaiting victory with much impatience.

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By 1899, the problems related to Wolseley's role as the British Army's Commander-in-Chief began to take on crisis proportions.[28] Wolseley was not only dissatisfied about the fact that his authority was limited; his relationship with Lansdowne was tenuous at best, which in turn led to tensions between the military and the politicians. Wolseley, the soldier, displayed a greater understanding of military matters than Lansdowne; however, he was subordinate to Lansdowne, the civilian politician.

Wolseley complained that he did not see all the correspondence that was sent by the Colonial Office to Sir Alfred Milner (the Governor of the Cape Colony and British High Commissioner for South Africa).[29] On the eve of the war, it was of critical importance that the Commander-in-Chief should remain informed of diplomatic negotiations, and any communication gap would impact negatively on military preparations. Moreover, Wolseley was rarely summoned to cabinet meetings where the situation in South Africa was discussed. Thus, he was informed second-hand by Lansdowne, who gave him as much information as he thought was necessary. Although the army was convinced that the Orange Free State would indeed fight on the Transvaal's side, and that a strategy had to be planned in terms of this scenario, Lansdowne was unable, as late as 28 September 1899, to state definitively how the Free State's position should be seen.[30]

The Wolseley-Lansdowne dispute proved beyond doubt that the army reforms of 1895 had failed, especially since the reforms did not facilitate a healthy spirit of co-operation between politicians and the military.[31] However, the two protagonists' personalities also played a role in the dispute. It appears that Lansdowne was inclined to look down on Wolseley, while Wolseley, for his part, did not like the

26 Cd. 1791, p. 75: Butler's response to question 13 424.
27 Cd. 1789, p. 20.
28 Cd. 1789, p. 145: Note by Viscount Escher.
29 Appendix D, Cd. 1789, p. 265: Wolseley – Lansdowne, 18 August 1899 (minute).
30 Cd. 1790, pp. 363-4: Wolseley's response to question 8 703.
31 Hamer, p. 170.

Secretary of State for War at all. It should also be borne in mind that Wolseley's memory began to deteriorate by about 1896.[32] It would appear at times that he was not really in control of, nor really cared about, the situation.

Wolseley could never accept that he was subordinate to Lansdowne, and that a civilian was allowed to prescribe to him, a military officer, what he should do in the military field. In turn, Lansdowne did not allow his military subordinate's attitude to put him off at all, and instead of adopting a sympathetic attitude to secure Wolseley's wholehearted co-operation, he adopted a domineering attitude towards him,[33] thereby rather tactlessly rubbing more salt into his wounds. Wolseley would never acknowledge that he was responsible for some of the problems he experienced, and insisted that it was civilian interference that led to problems. After all, Wolseley did get on very well with most of his fellow officers, such as Evelyn Wood.[34]

If there had been better co-ordination between the political and military leaders, and a carefully considered strategy had been in place, the British would have entered the war in a far better state of readiness than they did. The politicians were under the wrong impression that adequate safety measures had been implemented so that the colonies in South Africa could protect themselves for as long as it would take the expeditionary force to arrive.[35] Although, eventually, the British did succeed in defending the Cape and Natal against Boer incursions, they were unable to prevent the Boers from occupying large parts of these areas, and in the process the strategic situation had changed to such an extent that it would take the British much longer to subdue the Boer republics than they could ever have imagined.[36] Fortunately for the military, the war zone was far from the motherland, and the politicians' influence on the military operations in the field was not so significant.

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Apart from the problems between Wolseley and Lansdowne, there were sometimes tensions between the officials in Britain and those in South Africa, and between the military and political officials in South Africa. Milner played a significant role in this respect. He wanted to place the Transvaal under British control, and also wanted to deploy an adequate number of soldiers in South Africa to strengthen his hand, as well as defend the Cape and Natal against possible Boer attacks.

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32 Lehmann, pp. 385-6. In his evidence before the Elgin Commission, Wolseley sometimes appeared to be uncertain. However, this does not mean that his evidence should be discarded as a whole.
33 Lehmann, p. 385.
34 F Maurice and G Arthur, **The life of Lord Wolseley** (London, 1924), pp. 259-60.
35 Cd. 1791, p. 467: LCMS Amery's response to questions 20 473 and 20 474.
36 RA Silburn, **The colonies and imperial defence** (London, 1909), p. 208.

Milner was not satisfied with the number of soldiers who were stationed in the Cape. In this regard, he enjoyed the support of Wolseley.[37] Milner preferred not to involve the Orange Free State in a war, and he was therefore opposed to the deployment of British soldiers on the southern Free State border.[38] As Britain's High Commissioner for South Africa and Governor of the Cape, Milner sometimes had serious conflict with the British garrison commander in the Cape Colony, Maj.-Gen. WF Butler. Butler did not want to provoke the republics, and therefore opted for a defensive strategy. He resigned from his post in August 1899 and returned to Britain. After Britain had suffered defeats during the first few months of the war, Butler was accused by the press of being responsible for the fact that the British had been caught unprepared in South Africa.[39]

During the war, Milner increasingly became involved in military affairs. When Buller departed for Natal, Milner assisted in organizing the defence of the Cape Colony. He was assisted in this task by his military secretary, Maj. Hanbury-Williams, and the military commander in the Cape, Lt-Gen. FWE Forestier-Walker.[40] Milner was responsible for strict martial-law measures in the Cape Colony,[41] because the large Afrikaner population in the colony was a potential fifth column. However, no evidence could be found that Milner played a part in drawing up a military strategy for the war, and Chamberlain warned him early in the war not to meddle in military affairs.[42]

Although Milner did not assist in formulating military strategy for the war, he did in fact determine the political strategy and the political objectives. By insisting on the unconditional surrender of, and making no concessions to, the Cape rebels, he was instrumental in wrecking the Middelburg peace talks (February-March 1901), and in this way he prolonged the military conflict by more than a year. Kitchener, who was prepared, during the negotiations, to adopt a more conciliatory approach,[43] was forced to engage in more drastic counter-guerrilla measures. On the eve of the

37 Appendix D, Cd. 1789, p. 265: Wolseley – Lansdowne, 18 August 1899 (minute).

38 Appendix F, Cd. 1791, p. 590: Summary of evidence by Lt-Gen. FWE Forestier-Walker.

39 **DSAB**, 2 (Cape Town, 1972), p. 111. See also Cd. 1791, p. 517: Butler's response to question 21 264. Butler's frank testimony before the commission casts an interesting light on events at the Cape prior to the war. See Cd. 1791, pp. 72-86: Butler's response to questions 13 381-13 635.

40 LS Amery (ed.), **The Times history of the war in South Africa 1899-1902**, 3 (London, 1905), p. 98.

41 **Ibid**., 6 (London, 1909), pp. 544-72.

42 **DSAB**, 3, pp. 614-5. However, Chamberlain himself sometimes recommended certain tactics and strategies to the War Ministry, as well as to some generals. See **ibid**, pp. 141-2. For Milner's role with regard to military matters before and during the war, see C Headlam (ed.), **The Milner papers**, 1 (London, 1931), pp. 501-63, and 2 (London, 1933), pp. 1-323.

43 As far as the Middelburg negotiations of February - March 1901 are concerned, see Amery (ed.), 5 (London, 1907), pp. 183-93 and S du Preez, **Vredespogings gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog tot Maart 1901** (M.A., University of Pretoria, 1977), **passim**.

war, however, few of the British would have imagined that the war would take on such dimensions.

Prior to the war, it was Milner who would not avoid war. However, he was accountable to Chamberlain (Colonial Secretary). As cabinet minister, Chamberlain, in turn, had to co-operate with the prime minister (Salisbury), the War Secretary (Lansdowne) and all the other ministers. As War Secretary, Lansdowne had to issue orders to the army (Wolseley). Eventually, it was the army that had to do Milner's 'dirty work' for him – only to be criticized and prescribed to by Milner himself. During the siege of Kimberley, Cecil John Rhodes – who was in the city – became involved in military matters; however, no indication could be found that he had assisted the British in formulating their military strategy. As an empire builder through the years, he did, however, assist in formulating British imperial strategy.

If Britain had had a general staff available, its army would have had to be allowed to act more autonomously.[44] Since such a body did not exist, there was much tension between the military and political leaders prior to the Anglo-Boer War. The politicians formulated the objectives. The military were required to achieve these aims. To do so, they required the means such as funds, soldiers and time. It was the politicians' responsibility to warn the army in time, to provide them with the necessary information, as well as to authorise the requisite funds for preparations. However, this did not always happen, and tensions arose. Personality clashes aggravated the situation. Military and political leaders sometimes despised one another, and personal intrigue often undermined morale. This state of affairs led to a situation in which strategic planning was compromised. Ultimately there was no coordinated planning.

## 3. FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

The mighty British Empire of the end of the nineteenth century is generally associated with great financial wealth. However, it was costly to maintain such an unwieldy empire. Although the British Army was indeed large and strong, it was not as large as one would have expected. Perhaps the British relied too much on the Royal Navy to ensure the safety of the Empire. However, financial problems were one of the reasons for the British Army's state of relative unpreparedness on the eve of the war.

44 Hamer, p. 40.

The army's financial problems date back far in history. According to Wolseley, the British parliament and cabinet had gambled since the 1870s with Britain's security because they did not provide sufficient funds for defence.[45] Since the tax-payers had to provide the funds for the defence of the country, the army's finances were taken into the political arena. The Secretary of State for War (Lansdowne) and the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Sir Michael Hicks Beach) had to agree between themselves on how much funding could be allocated from state coffers to the army. If they could not come to an agreement, the issue was referred to the cabinet. The continuous conflict between the military and the politicians with regard to financial matters[46] could result in nothing other than damage to the army, and on the eve of the Anglo-Boer War, Hicks Beach was an obstacle in the way of military expansion.[47]

One of the basic problems that the British Army had to deal with at the start of the war was the lack of trained reserves. As early as 1884, the then Adjutant-General, Wolseley, complained that the training of adequate reserves had to be postponed from one year to the next for financial reasons.[48] Even after the war had started, and reinforcements had to be mustered from all possible quarters, funds remained the constraining factor. In December 1899, the Treasury was not prepared to authorize the full £6 million required for the training of reserves. Meanwhile the war that was raging at the southernmost tip of Africa was beginning to show up the weaknesses in the British reserves in practical terms.[49] Thus, the British Army was forced to make use of volunteers. It is doubtful whether these volunteers had been trained adequately for their difficult task, and this is one of the reasons for the British forces' poor performance in South Africa.

The lack of funds had military-strategic implications. Even if the British had had a comprehensive strategy on the eve of the war, they would not have been able to implement the strategy, owing to a shortage of soldiers. The military were thoroughly aware of the problems, but they were powerless to do anything about these matters because the politicians were not prepared to provide the requisite funds. For example, in a minute, dated 22 February 1896, Wolseley presented an urgent plea for expansions to the British Army.[50] In another minute, dated 10 July 1896, Lansdowne, in his capacity as War Secretary - in other words as the link between the military and the politicians - responded to Wolseley's recommendations.

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45 **The Parliamentary debates, fourth series: second session of the twenty-seventh Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland** (henceforth referred to as **Hansard**), 90, column 331: Wolseley, 4 March 1901.

46 Hamer, pp. 64, 66.

47 J Symons, **Buller's campaign** (London, 1963), p. 67.

48 Appendix D, Cd. 1789, p. 223: Memorandum by Wolseley, 22 February 1896.

49 Cd. 1791, pp. 518-9: Lansdowne's response to question 21 280.

50 Appendix D, Cd. 1789, pp. 211-215: Minute by Wolseley, 22 February 1896.

Although he agreed that expansions would be to Britain's advantage, he could not recommend the proposals to the cabinet, in the light of the fact that the related expenditures would amount to approximately £2 million. In any event, he did not believe at that stage that these expansions were necessary in an absolute sense. He also pointed out that Wolseley appeared to be sceptical about whether it would be possible to implement the proposals immediately because they would require so much money.[51]

Because military and financial considerations were inextricably linked, Lansdowne was in favour of the gradual implementation of Wolseley's proposals. It had to be borne in mind that Britain's maritime defence enjoyed higher priority than land-directed defence; for this reason, Navy expenditure enjoyed preference.[52] That the 230 Victorian wars and other military conflicts[53] were almost all waged exclusively on land was apparently ignored. However, in a memorandum, dated 30 October 1896, Wolseley rightly pointed out that financial problems had not yet changed the safety situation of the British Empire. The safety of the Empire was indeed under threat because the British Army had neither the manpower nor the means to safeguard the country effectively, owing to financial problems.[54] Even at the start of September 1899, the cabinet refused to approve additional military spending, since in the cabinet's opinion these expenditures were not justified, in view of the negotiations that were being conducted at the time in South Africa.[55]

Although Wolseley had already ordered Brig.-Gen. FW Stopford, in June 1899, to work out the finer details with regard to the sending of an army corps, a cavalry division and communication troops to South Africa,[56] the British government only decided on 30 September 1899 to allocate all the necessary funds so that mobilization could commence as a matter of great urgency.[57] An amount of £860 000 was assigned for this purpose.[58] The fact that the necessary funds had not been provided in June 1899, Wolseley held, was an error[59] that seriously jeopardized the mobilization process. It was only on 7 October 1899 that the mobilization order was issued. Thus, the British mobilized their forces long before the Boers issued their ultimatum to Britain on 9 October. However, the British were still caught unawares, and the mobilized soldiers only began to leave for South Africa by 20

51 Appendix D, Cd. 1789, p. 229: Minute by Lansdowne, 10 July 1896.
52 **Ibid**. However, by October 1899, Wolseley's proposals had not yet been implemented fully.
53 B Farwell, **Queen Victoria's little wars** (London, 1973), pp. 364-71.
54 Appendix D, Cd. 1789, p. 232: Memorandum by Wolseley, 30 October 1896.
55 Cd. 1789, p. 26.
56 Cd. 1790, pp. 47-8: Brig.-Gen. FW Stopford's response to questions 1 034 and 1 040.
57 Cd. 1790, p. 45: Stopford's response to question 987. See also Cd. 1790, p. 110: Gen. CM Clarke's response to questions 2 374 and 2 375.
58 Symons, p. 89.
59 Cd. 1790, p. 259: Wolseley's response to question 6 112.

October. The mobilization took place without a hitch, and after hostilities had started, the requisite funds were (suddenly) available.[60] However, reserves could obviously not be trained overnight.

Because Lansdowne had not asked for adequate funds, and the necessary reforms and planning could therefore not be tackled in good time, a valuable once-off strategic opportunity was lost. It was only at the very start of the war that the British had the opportunity – provided that they could quickly concentrate a large number of soldiers in South Africa – to deliver a rapid defeating blow to the Boer forces.

Lansdowne accepted co-responsibility with the cabinet for the fact that adequate funds had not been made available in time for military preparations.[61] As the responsible minister, he should have shown better military insight, and should have paid attention to Wolseley's requests, and should moreover have insisted that the government allocate more funds. If more funds had been provided, the Anglo-Boer War could possibly have been prevented. In that case, a military show of force might have forced the Transvaal to reconsider its position with regard to the Uitlander voting-rights issue; or, if the war had broken out anyway, the conflict would not have been as costly as it turned out to be.[62] If £2 million had been made available in 1896 for the purposes of expanding the army, and if, in the months prior to the war, more than the paltry amount of £860 000 had been made available more readily for mobilization, the war could have cost much less than the more than £200 million that was eventually spent.

## 4. THE PROBLEM OF REINFORCEMENTS

Prior to the war, there was much debate on the number of soldiers that would be required to defeat the Boers. There was not agreement in British military and political circles on the issue of whether the garrisons in the Cape Colony and Natal should be reinforced, and if so, how many soldiers should be sent to these colonies beforehand, when they should be sent, and where they were to be deployed. The problem with regard to the sending of reinforcements was indeed closely related to, inter alia, the problems between the politicians and the military, as well as financial problems.

60 Cd. 1790, p. 43: Stopford's response to questions 948, 949 and 1 051.
61 Cd. 1791, p. 508: Lansdowne's response to question 21 154.
62 Cd. 1789, p. 150: Note by Sir John Jackson.

Although quantity should never be confused with quality, superior numbers may indeed ensure success in a war. Numerical superiority may generate self-confidence among one's own forces, and motivate them to achieve the stated objective as speedily as possible.[63] Having argued, so it seems, that because they were theoretically far stronger than the Boers, they would necessarily achieve victory with ease and speed, the British developed a false sense of security. However, at the start of the war, they had hopelessly too few soldiers in South Africa. This fact limited the strategic possibilities available to them, and they could do nothing but adopt a defensive strategy. When they went on the offensive, it soon appeared that the number of soldiers that they had deemed necessary to defeat the Boers, was not at all adequate. As the war progressed, it indeed became apparent that the British Army could hardly provide an adequate number of soldiers to achieve military victory. For this reason, increasing numbers of black and coloured people were armed in due course.[64]

Some British officers were very well aware of the dangers of a small garrison when the war broke out; however, these farsighted officers' ranks were not always high enough to give adequate force to their warnings. For example, in September 1898, Maj. EA Altham, an Intelligence Service Officer, had come to the conclusion that, although the situation had deteriorated to such an extent in South Africa that it amounted to armed neutrality, there were not an adequate number of British soldiers in South Africa to immediately go on the offensive if war broke out. This lack of sound resistance at the start of the war could lead to serious strategic problems. Moreover, it would take approximately six weeks before an adequate number of soldiers would arrive in South Africa.[65]

According to Altham, it was of critical importance that when the war broke out, Britain should have a strong force in South Africa. If British territory was not protected comprehensively from the start, this could lead to great humiliation and enormous cost to Britain. There was also a possibility that the Afrikaners in the Cape and Natal would rebel. Although it was realized that approximately 27 000 Boers were prepared for military action outside the borders of the republics, the Intelligence Service doubted whether incursions into British territory would constitute much more than raids by commandos of 2000 to 3000 men. Potential

63 Appendix A, Cd. 1789, p. 155: Statement by the Intelligence Service.

64 Eventually more than 120 000 black and coloured people were deployed in some or other way by the British. See A Wessels, **Die militêre rol van swart mense, bruin mense en Indiërs tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog (1899-1902)** (Bloemfontein, 1998), **passim**; P Warwick (ed.), **The South African War: the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902** (Harlow, 1980), pp. 62, 191, 196, 201, and P Warwick, **Black people and the South African War** (Cambridge, 1983), **passim**. Although approximately 10 000 black and coloured people served on the Boer side, only a handful were armed at Mafikeng and possibly also at Vaalkrans.

65 Appendix B, Cd. 1789, p. 168: Memorandum by Altham, 21 September 1898.

target areas were also limited to Kimberley and its surroundings, as well as the northern parts of Natal.[66] Since the Boers were mobile, and the British had to defend strategic points across a wide front, it was critical that a large number of soldiers should be stationed in South Africa, and that these soldiers should largely be mobile and able to operate independently of the railway. Unfortunately for the British, the size of the force would eventually be limited owing to political considerations.[67]

Altham repeatedly focused the attention of the Colonial Office, and that of the War Ministry, on the deteriorating political situation in South Africa - as if they, who in large measure, had created the situation, were not aware of this - and the fact that adequate numbers of soldiers had to be sent to the region in order to deal with any eventuality.[68] The Director of Military Intelligence, Maj.-Gen. JC Ardagh, also suggested as early as 1896 that the garrison in South Africa needed to be reinforced.[69] He believed that many more soldiers were needed to protect British interests during this critical phase of the war, when the Boers would be most likely to take the initiative. The strategic situation was still fluid and uncertain while the garrison was awaiting the arrival of a well-organized expeditionary force.[70] At that stage, the British did not imagine that the Boers would invade Natal in force.[71] This invasion eventually put the entire British strategy in jeopardy.

Although the Intelligence Service warned that more soldiers should be sent to South Africa, they never mentioned the ideal number of soldiers who, in their opinion, would be required to defend British interests. Later, Altham gave evidence before the Elgin Commission, where he expressed his view that a minimum of 35 000 soldiers should have been deployed to protect the borders of the Cape and Natal, apart from the troops that were needed to defend the lines of communication.[72] Ultimately, only approximately 27 000 soldiers were available to perform these tasks.

Why were there so few soldiers in South Africa on 11 October 1899? Was this planned intentionally; in other words, did it form part of British military strategy? Or did the planning go awry? How did the politicians and British supreme command see the issue? To find answers to these related questions, it is necessary, inter alia, to explore both Lansdowne's and Wolseley's views on these issues.

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66 Appendix B, Cd. 1789, p. 168: Memorandum by Altham, 21 September 1898.
67 Appendix C, Cd. 1789, p. 185: War Ministry – Colonial Office, 29 April 1897 (report).
68 Cd. 1789, p. 12.
69 Cd. 1790, p. 212: Ardagh's response to question 5 032.
70 Cd. 1789, p. 12.
71 Cd. 1790, p. 213: Ardagh's response to question 5 038.
72 Cd. 1790, p. 27: Altham's response to questions 651 and 652.

As War Secretary, Lansdowne had to liaise with the Commander-in-Chief and the heads of the military sections to establish how many soldiers were required for the protection of the British colonies, and how large an expeditionary force should be in time of war. However, Lansdowne never formally asked Evelyn Wood, who was the Adjutant-General of the British Army on the eve of the war, how many soldiers were needed. In private, Lansdowne did in fact touch on the subject, and Wood is claimed to have said that 60 000 men would be required to defeat the Transvaal.[73]

Wolseley was far more concerned about sending reinforcements. To him, the war against the Boers had long been a potential reality. In 1896, he stated that the British needed to prepare themselves for war, and in a report entitled **The strategic importance of the Cape** (Cd. 1899, London, 1896), which was directed at Lansdowne, he proposed that reinforcements be sent to South Africa. However, Wolseley also tried repeatedly to persuade the British government to bolster the army, and time and again he referred to South Africa. Wolseley knew that the British actually wanted to prevent a war, and as a result, from about June 1899, he felt that overt preparations for war were needed for the purposes of persuading the Transvaalers to abandon their so-called aggressive plans. Even if the deterrent failed, the British would then at least be ready if a war broke out. If the British government, and more particularly Lansdowne, had heeded Wolseley's advice, the necessary army corps would have been sent in time, and would have been fully deployed in South Africa before 11 October 1899. According to Wolseley, the mobilization of the army corps would certainly not have motivated the Transvaal to embark upon action. The Boers, Wolseley claimed, would have had to wait until October when there would be sufficient grass for their horses.[74] If adequate reinforcements had been sent, the war could have been prevented; however, if the war had broken out anyway, the British would have had a much greater military capacity and they would have been able to go on the offensive immediately.

The British Intelligence Service did not have to determine the precise number of soldiers to be drawn from the British colonies for defensive purposes and military operations. The commanding generals in the various colonies had to determine strategic points that needed to be defended, and the number of soldiers required for the task. The Commander-in-Chief at the War Office then had to decide how many soldiers were required for campaigns. On 22 February 1896, Wolseley proposed

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73 Cd. 1790, p. 177: Wood's response to questions 4 191 and 4 193. It is not clear how many soldiers Wood had recommended for the defence of the colonies.

74 Cd. 1790, pp. 365-6, 368: Wolseley's response to questions 8 714, 8 727, 8 730 and 8 778. According to Lansdowne, this idea posited by Wolseley was without grounds because the Boers continued to engage in military operations in the winter months of the war. See Cd. 1791, p. 510: Lansdowne's response to question 21 180.

that a cavalry regiment, a battery of artillery and two infantry battalions should be added to the Cape garrison.[75] Interestingly, Lansdowne, in a memorandum dated 10 July 1896, responded that more than two infantry battalions were required to defend British positions.[76]

At a meeting of the Mobilization Committee on 5 May 1897, at which Buller - at that stage the Adjutant-General - was also present, Wolseley stated that the War Ministry was ready at any time to send between 2000 and 27 000 soldiers into active service at any place in the world.[77] However, the funds for such rapid deployment were not provided by the politicians.

While politicians and military leaders in Britain disagreed among themselves on the manner and scale in terms of which the garrison in South Africa should be reinforced, the issue of reinforcements was a major problem for commanders in South Africa. In a telegram dated 17 April 1897, Maj.-Gen. G Cox, the military commander in Natal and Zululand, posed the question to Lt-Gen. WH Goodenough, the commander of British forces in South Africa, as to whether the sending of reinforcements to South Africa would not be interpreted by the Boers as preparations aimed at an attack against the Transvaal, and whether the Boers might not then be provoked to embark upon a pre-emptive strike. The strategic point of departure, Cox claimed, should rather be to adopt defensive positions in case of war while they were awaiting reinforcements.[78]

On 20 April 1898, Wolseley requested that reserves, artillery, additional arms and ammunition should be sent to the Cape. On 8 June 1899, he stated that in case of a war against the Transvaal, a full army corps, a cavalry division, a battalion of mobile infantry, as well as four battalions for the protection of communication lines, should be sent to the war zone. In his view, it would be good if all preparations in forming this force and bringing it to South Africa, could be carried out in secret. For example, the force could assemble at Salisbury Plain under the command of the general who would command them in South Africa.[79]

Provisionally, the British government did not take much notice of Wolseley's proposals. By the time Wolseley had drawn up his next minute on 7 July 1899, however, the British government had evidently had a change of heart, because they

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75 Cd. 1789, p. 14. See also Appendix D, Cd. 1789, p. 226: Appendix V to Wolseley's minute of 22 February 1896.
76 Cd. 1789, p. 15.
77 Appendix no 56, Cd. 1792, p. 421: Minutes of the Confidential Mobilization Committee, 5 May 1897.
78 Appendix C, Cd. 1789, p. 186: Maj.-Gen. G Cox – Lt-Gen. WH Goodenough, 17 April 1897 (telegram).
79 Cd. 1789, pp. 15-6.

informed Buller that if war were to break out in South Africa, he would be sent to the region as Commander-in-Chief in charge of the army corps. However, in the meantime, they had not begun to prepare an army corps for service in South Africa. Wolseley repeated his recommendation that an army corps and a cavalry division should be assembled either at Salisbury Plain or at Aldershot, and kept in a state of readiness. Meanwhile, an infantry division and a cavalry brigade should be sent to South Africa as soon as possible. Buller too supported these recommendations.[80]

It appears that the British government still did not pay attention to these realistic proposals. Even Buller suddenly changed his mind, because in a meeting in Lansdowne's office on 18 July 1899 at which both he and Wolseley were present, Buller, in response to a question from Wolseley, said that the situation in South Africa was under control, and did not justify the sending of reinforcements.[81]

In a minute dated 2 August 1899, Lansdowne announced that the British government had in fact decided to send 2 000 men to South Africa.[82] Although the British government were thoroughly aware of the weak state of the garrison in South Africa, they were unwilling to send too many soldiers for fear that this might lead to the Boers breaking off negotiations immediately.[83] In his minute dated 2 August, Lansdowne stated that the 2 000 soldiers who had been sent as reinforcements would be able to eliminate the danger of a Boer invasion.[84] However, on 27 August 1899, Lansdowne expressed the view to Wolseley that no more reinforcements should be sent.[85]

Wolseley did not assess the potential capacity of the Boers realistically. In a minute, dated 2 August 1899, he proposed that the British force should be deployed close to Lang's Neck in Natal to defend the area against raids; however, he did not expect a full-scale invasion. Thus, in his opinion, it was not critical to send more reinforcements to Natal. Nonetheless, Wolseley stated on 18 August 1899, in a communiqué to Lansdowne, that he shared Milner's concern about the weaknesses of the British garrison in South Africa.[86] Two days later, however, Lansdowne notified Wolseley that the situation in South Africa was improving.[87] The lack of military-strategic insights among politicians and the lack of decisive action on the part of the military, would eventually cost the British dearly.

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80 Cd. 1789, p. 16.
81 Cd. 1789, p. 17 and Appendix D, Cd. 1789, p. 264: Minute by Wolseley, 17-18 July 1899.
82 Cd. 1789, p. 17 and Appendix D, Cd. 1789, p. 264: Minute by Wolseley, 2 August 1899.
83 Appendix A, Cd. 1789, p. 154: Statement by the Intelligence Service.
84 Cd. 1789, p. 17.
85 National Archives of South Africa (Pretoria), microfilm M. 1726 (Cab. 37/50): Lansdowne – Wolseley, 27 August 1899 (letter).
86 Cd. 1789, pp. 17-8.
87 Appendix D, Cd. 1789, p. 266: Minute by Lansdowne, 20 August 1899.

A month before the war started, the British had begun to consider the problem of sending soldiers to South Africa as a matter of greater urgency than before, and had discussed the matter in more detail; however, the uncertainty continued as to precisely how many soldiers should be sent. In a memorandum, dated 5 September 1899, Buller informed the prime minister, Lord Salisbury, that 50 000 soldiers would be adequate in number to defeat the Transvaal; i.e., he assumed that the Free State would not participate in the war. These 50 000 men would be comprised of the following elements: 20 000 men to invade the Transvaal; 10 000 men to defend communication lines; and 10 000 apiece in Natal and the Cape, to protect these two colonies against Boer incursions.[88] The soldiers who were already in South Africa were therefore adequate, in Buller's view, to defend the territory. In retrospect, it is difficult to believe that Buller actually thought that he could defeat the Transvaal with only 20 000 men. In reality, he was compelled to use more than 40 000 men in his attempts at defeating the Transvaal and the Free State, and he failed miserably. Later, with a field force of more than 20 000 men, he was unable to break through the Boers' Thukela line.

On 13 September 1899, Lansdowne wanted to know how many men were required for the conflict with the Transvaal. In his view, 48 000 men would be adequate.[89] By 3October 1899, it was agreed that 67 000 men would be adequate to wage a successful war against both republics. Both Lansdowne and Wolseley held the view that the soldiers who had already been sent as reinforcements should not be excluded from the calculation of the numerical strength of the expeditionary force. In any case, the full contingent of 67 000 men could not be deployed physically against the Boers: only approximately 49 000 soldiers, with 174 guns, would be available for offensive operations.[90]

The minute of 3 October 1899 was drawn up in order to explain to the British cabinet why it was necessary to send such an enormous force to South Africa to overcome two such seemingly insignificant republics, and also in order to obtain the cabinet's permission for sending the force. The British cabinet agreed with the military advisors that this force would be adequate to achieve victory for the British. It should be noted that the minute was drawn up with the assistance of Wolseley and his military advisors.[91]

88 Appendix D, Cd. 1789, p. 268: Buller – Salisbury, 5 September 1899 (memorandum).
89 Appendix D, Cd. 1789, p. 269: Minute by Lansdowne, 13 September 1899.
90 Cd. 1791, p. 504: Lansdowne's response to question 21 113.
91 Cd. 1791, p. 504: Lansdowne's response to questions 21 113-6.

Right to the end, Lansdowne was opposed to sending large numbers of reinforcements to South Africa. Indeed, he actually believed that the Boers had sent the ultimatum because the British had sent additional soldiers to South Africa. If more reinforcements had been sent earlier, the war would possibly have commenced much earlier.[92] However, what Lansdowne did not consider was that if the entire army corps had been deployed in time, this would possibly have served as a deterrent and forced the Boers to reconsider their plans, or if not, the deployment of the army corps would have ensured that the British were prepared for war.

Lansdowne realized that, at the start of the war, the British would be outnumbered. In his view, however, a force of 23 000 was adequate to protect the Cape and Natal. His advisors at the War Ministry claimed that this number would be adequate, and neither the Quartermaster General nor the Inspector General of Fortifications requested that the garrison in South Africa should be further reinforced. Experts held the view that Natal would be safe once the mentioned reinforcements were deployed. Even Wolseley contended that 10 000 men would be adequate for the defence of the northern parts of Natal.[93]

In a memorandum dated 6 July 1899, Buller even stated that 10 000 men would be too many. On 5 September he actually recommended 5000 reinforcements. Buller believed that with competent officers such as Butler and Maj.-Gen. William Penn Symons in South Africa, it would not be necessary to send more soldiers. Lansdowne claimed that the garrison would not actually be able to prevent raids, but would be able to prevent Natal and the Cape from being overrun. He believed that although the borders of the colonies were vast, the British would be able to prevent the republicans from invading them on a large scale.[94]

Many of the above-mentioned speculations - which were regarded by the spokesmen at that stage as undeniable facts - were proved in time to be wrong. If an adequate number of soldiers had been sent to South Africa in 1897, there would possibly have been no war.[95] Even if, as late as June 1899 - in other words, after the failed Bloemfontein Conference - approximately 40 000 soldiers had been sent to South Africa, it would have been unlikely that the Boers would dare to send an ultimatum.[96]

92 Cd. 1791, p. 510: Lansdowne's response to question 21 188.
93 Cd. 1791, p. 509: Lansdowne's response to questions 21 097, 21 162, 21 165-6 and 21 388.
94 Cd. 1791, p. 509: Lansdowne's response to questions 21 166, 21 169, 21 171 and 21 173.
95 Cd. 1790, p. 218: Ardagh's response to question 5 209.
96 Cd. 1791, p. 99: Forestier-Walker's response to question 13 790.

Leo Amery, author and editor, also believed that if the garrison in South Africa had been gradually increased in size, it would have prevented rather than precipitated war. Amery did not imply that as many as 100 000 soldiers should be deployed, but rather that adequate numbers of soldiers should be sent to act as a deterrent to the Boers, and that these forces would ensure that if war was unavoidable, the Boers would at least reflect long enough before is suing an ultimatum to the British. In the meantime, enough time would have been gained to bolster forces in the colonies so that they could be defended properly.[97]

In July 1899, a decision was taken to send 10 000 men to South Africa. Although this force would actually form part of Buller's expeditionary force, it was sent as a separate fighting unit at the time.[98] At that stage, Buller was indeed in favour of sending 10 000 men to South Africa, but he wanted them to be sent as garrison soldiers, and not as a fighting unit. He did not want to provoke Boer attacks.[99] According to Buller, these garrison soldiers should be deployed in Natal, and not in the Cape Colony.[100] Milner, who was concerned about a rebellion among the Cape Afrikaners, was not in favour of this move. In June 1899, he indeed expressed the fear to Chamberlain that if a large British force was not assembled in South Africa before the war, the British would experience problems.[101]

From 1896 onwards, Wolseley and others submitted official requests on five occasions for reinforcements to be sent to South Africa. These requests were submitted on 22 February 1896, 20 April 1898, 8 June 1899, 7 July 1899 and 18 August 1899. The garrisons in the Cape and Natal were reinforced accordingly.[102] Thus, eventually there was a response to requests for reinforcements. However, the persons who submitted these requests asked for too few reinforcements.

On 1 June 1895, there was a total of only 3932 British soldiers and six guns in South Africa - 2 128 in the Cape and 1 804 in Natal. A year later, in other words, after Wolseley had requested reinforcements on 22 February 1896, there were 4 610 soldiers - 2 785 in the Cape and 1825 in Natal - and six guns. Most reinforcements were therefore sent to South Africa as requested. On 1 June 1897, the South African garrison consisted of 8154 men with 24 guns - 3 807 in the Cape and 4 347 in Natal.[103] Within a year, therefore, the number of soldiers had increased by more than 80%, and for the first time, there were also more soldiers in Natal

97 Cd. 1791, p. 468: Amery's response to questions 20 485, 20 489 and 20 490.
98 Cd. 1791, p. 158: Buller's response to question 14 971.
99 Cd. 1791, p. 186: Buller's response to question 14 986.
100 Cd. 1791, p. 186: Buller's response to question 14 988.
101 National Archives of South Africa (Pretoria), microfilm M.644 (W.O. 32/849): Milner – Chamberlain, 16 June 1899 (telegram).
102 Cd. 1789, p. 22 and Cd. 1791, p. 527: Lansdowne's response to question 21 394.
103 Cd. 1789, p. 21.

than in the Cape, a clear sign that the former was seen as strategically more important and potentially a more vulnerable target than the latter.

The next twelve months did not see large expansions because on 1 June 1898 there were 9 036 men with 24 guns in South Africa - 4 004 in the Cape and 5032 in Natal. The next twelve months, too, showed an increase of only approximately 10%, since on 1June 1899 the garrison strength was 10 289 men and 24 guns - 4 462 in the Cape and 5827 in Natal. Within the next four months, however, the garrison more than doubled: by 1 October 1899, there were 22 104 men with 60 guns in South Africa, or on their way there from India - 7 400 in or on their way to the Cape, and 14 704 in or on their way to Natal.[104] Most of these new reinforcements arrived after 1 August.[105] Wolseley's requests, dated 8 June, 7 July and 18 August 1899, were certainly not ignored. His demands for reinforcements were almost all met, since when the war started, there were more than 22 000 of his recommended 23 000 men in South Africa.[106] Two-thirds of these soldiers were stationed in Natal.

Wolseley and other military leaders had a reasonable idea of the enormity of the task ahead of them. They insisted on reinforcements, and after much wrangling, their requests were met almost entirely. However, there were still not enough soldiers in South Africa when the war broke out. All the British could then do was to improvise a defensive strategy and try to maintain their defences until the army corps arrived in the country. The defeats that the British suffered, and the fact that most of the reinforcements that arrived were soon besieged in Ladysmith in any case, gave the Boers more self-confidence, so that the foundation was laid for a protracted war.

## 5. CONCLUSION

If the British wanted to ensure an early victory, they should have worked out a comprehensive strategy in good time, and should have sent adequate numbers of soldiers to South Africa. Wolseley did not realize what the potential scope of the war would be. In general, the politicians had even less discernment in respect of the approaching war. As the politicians did not keep the military fully informed of diplomatic developments, proper precautions could not be implemented. It is therefore no wonder that, by October 1899 - however paradoxical this may sound -

104 Cd. 1789, p. 21.

105 Cd. 1789, p. 36, states that 12 546 soldiers arrived in South Africa from 1 August until directly after the war had commenced. According to Cd. 1789, p. 21, the additional troops numbered 11 815 from 1 June. It is not clear whether some soldiers had meanwhile been withdrawn.

106 Generally a number of 27 000 - 28 000 soldiers was mentioned on the eve of the war. The difference of 5 000 - 6 000 soldiers was made up of local units and volunteers who fought on the side of the British, for example, at Mafikeng and Kimberley.

the large British Army was actually not in a state of readiness to engage in war with the two small Boer republics. A sound strategy had not been worked out prior to the war. By neglecting to ensure numerical superiority in relation to the Boers from the start, the British had ignored the strategic superiority principle.

The claim has been made that the British prepared haphazardly for the war,[107] but that the hard work of the British officers' corps was laudable, since the expeditionary force was deployed within a reasonably short time in South Africa.[108] The question as to who was ultimately responsible for the lack of preparation on the part of the British, is an issue on which divergent opinions exist. According to Hamer, the British cabinet was the obstacle in the way of proper strategic planning.[109] Although it has been denied that the civilian members of the War Ministry withheld assistance from the military,[110] Symons places the blame squarely on the doorstep of the civilian officials in the War Ministry, criticizing Lansdowne in particular. Lansdowne can be blamed because he did not co-ordinate the limited preparations in meaningful ways, neither did he emphasize the urgency of the matter, nor did he insist on the allocation of adequate funds.[111]

As a result of these and other conflicting observations, and in the light of the lack of clear-cut evidence, one cannot but conclude that the responsibility for the situation must be shared. The politicians did not inform the military of political developments, and also did not provide funds in good time for preparations to be made. On the other hand, the military did not realize what the scope of the war was going to be, nor did they insist on the allocation of funds with the necessary urgency, and moreover, no sound strategic planning was carried out. Finally, the structure of the War Ministry further complicated matters. And so, from 11 October 1899 to 31 May 1902, the British Army-in-the-Field in South Africa suffered the consequences - and in due course, when this conventionally trained army was transformed into more mobile anti-commando units, the suffering was extended to the white and black civilians whose homes were destroyed and who were then either left destitute in the veldt, or carted off to concentration camps, where tens of thousands of them died.

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107 [WE Cairnes], **An absent-minded war, being some reflections on our reverses and the causes which have led to them** (12th edition, London, **s.a**.), p. 5.
108 **Hansard** 90, columns 343-4: Wolseley, 4 March 1901.
109 Hamer, p. 47.
110 **Hansard** 90, column 327: Duke of Bedford, 4 March 1901.
111 Symons, pp. 101-2.