

**THE COMMAND OF THE SEA:
SOME PROBLEMS OF IMPERIAL
DEFENCE CONSIDERED IN THE
LIGHT OF THE GERMAN NAVY
ACT, 1912**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649009145

The command of the sea: some problems of imperial defence considered in the light of the German Navy Act, 1912 by Archibald Hurd

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ARCHIBALD HURD

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BY

ARCHIBALD HURD

AUTHOR OF

"NAVAL EFFICIENCY : THE WAR READINESS OF THE FLEET,"

"THE BRITISH FLEET : IS IT SUFFICIENT AND EFFICIENT ?"

ETC.

TEXT OF THE FIVE GERMAN NAVY ACTS

LONDON

CHAPMAN & HALL, LIMITED

1912

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Printed by
The Westminster Press 411a Harrow Road, London, W.

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PREFACE.

THE German Navy Law Amendment Act was passed by the Reichstag on May 21st. This is the last of the five enactments for the expansion of the German Fleet, and it is the most notable and menacing to her neighbours.

It is proposed to add only three large ships, two cruisers and seventy-two submarines to the "established strength" of the fleet, but the grave feature of the Act consists in the resolve to set up a new standard of naval efficiency.

For many years all nations in the interest of economy kept a large proportion of their men-of-war in reserve. Under the impetus of Germany the tendency of administrations has lately been to achieve rapid action—quick transition from the conditions of peace to those of hostilities. Now the German naval authorities have taken a further step in the same direction, which must impose on Europe the burden of war in times of peace.

In future, within four hundred miles of the British Isles, all the most effective ships of the German Navy—battleships, cruisers and torpedo craft—will be held on the leash—manned, stored, victualled and incessantly trained.

The German Fleet as now planned will be superior in fighting strength and more instantly ready for

aggression or defence than the fleet of any Power in the past.

So far as shipbuilding is concerned, the British people knew in 1909—in the words of Sir Edward Grey—that “Germany was creating a fleet larger than had ever existed before.” Now it has been decided that, winter and summer alike, at moments when there is not a cloud on the political horizon, and at moments when there are signs of storm, the greater portion of these ships shall be kept on a war footing, the remainder being furnished with nucleus crews which can be increased to full strength in a few hours.

The purpose of this volume is to explain the character of the new German Navy Act and to consider its influence upon the British Fleet and on some of the correlated problems of British and Imperial Defence.

The present writer can claim that during the twenty years which he has devoted to the study of naval affairs, he has never exaggerated the dangers which have threatened British sea power, and in the present volume he has set forth the facts of the new situation without any desire to excite unnecessary alarm. But it must be apparent that unless adequate measures are speedily taken by the British peoples our naval supremacy will be in serious jeopardy and our homes, our trade, and our Empire in peril.

Acknowledgment is made of the kind permission of the Editor of the *Fortnightly Review* to use in the preparation of this volume articles contributed to that publication.

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JUSTIFICATION OF BRITISH SUPREMACY

We should have ample margin (because) the consequences of defeat at sea are so much greater to us than they would be to Germany or France. . . .

There is no parity of risk. Our position is highly artificial. We are fed from the sea. We are an unarmed people. We possess a very small Army. We are the only Power in Europe which does not possess a large Army.

We cannot menace the independence or the vital interests of any great continental state; we cannot invade any continental state. We do not wish to do so, but even if we had the wish we have not got the power.

People talk of the proportion which the navies of different countries should bear to the commercial interests of the different nations—the proportion of France, the proportion of Italy, the proportion of Germany; but when we consider our naval strength we are not thinking of our commerce, but of our freedom. We are not thinking of our trade, but of our lives.

These are facts which justify British naval supremacy in the face of the world.

We must never conduct our affairs so that the Navy of any single Power would be able to engage us at any single moment, even our least favourable moment, with any reasonable prospects of success.

*First Lord of the Admiralty, House of Commons,
March 18th, 1912.*