INTRODUCTION

On 6 August 1914, two days after Britain entered the Great War, the British Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, concluded an address to parliament with a call to arms. 'Let us now make sure that all the resources, not only of this United Kingdom', Asquith urged, 'but of the vast Empire of which it is the centre shall be thrown into the scale.'[1] The Prime Minister was sure that the Empire would rally around Britain in the war that followed, and subsequent events proved his confidence well founded. The dominions of Canada, Australia and New Zealand alone contributed expeditionary forces of more than 840 000 men to the conflict. The origins of such imperial military cooperation, however, pre-dated the war by decades. The physical manifestations of intra-Empire military cooperation might have unfolded on the shores of Gallipoli, the fields of France and the deserts of Palestine, but conceptions of how, or even whether, this situation was ever to come to pass had been the subject of tentative, halting thought and discussion since the late-Victorian era.

This book is a study of the military career of Lieutenant-General Sir Edward 'Curley' Hutton. Yet it is not a traditional biography. Rather, Hutton is a means by which to shed light on late-Victorian thinking on the 'land' defence of the British Empire and the embryonic structures of imperial (military) defence during this period. Developed in an era when traditional military mechanisms and assumptions in London were increasingly seen as inadequate to cope with rapidly changing global circumstances, these were issues concerned fundamentally with whether and how the white self-governing colonies could contribute to the collective security of the

Empire at large. They were complex questions, which spoke to a wide range of issues beyond a narrow – and at times shallow – contemporary defence debate in Britain and at the edges of the Empire. This work aims to shed light upon them; to investigate on the form, failings and accomplishments of the theory and practice of this notion of 'imperial defence'. A close study of Hutton's career is particularly well suited to untangle the many threads of the imperial defence paradigm of the era. A British regular officer, his various appointments across the Empire, and the controversies they engendered, provide a unique window through which to view and interpret a range of key issues at the heart of the imperial defence conundrum. His career illuminates key aspects of a wider issue. First, however, that larger question, the very concept of imperial defence, needs to be placed in context.

The second half of the nineteenth century marked not only a material high point for Britain and the Empire but also key transitions in the very conception of imperialism in Britain and the self-governing colonies. For much of the period relative stability and prosperity coincided with continuing British commercial and maritime dominance overseas. At the same time, however, the British world was being transformed – and fast. One of the most obvious conceptual manifestations of such change concerned thinking about the Empire itself. In the first half of the century many had concluded that the British Empire 'as both an idea and a physical edifice' was crumbling.[2] Natural processes of evolution and maturity in the Anglo-Saxon colonies would see them move, inexorably, towards independence, especially considering the mid-century grant of responsible self-government to the Australasian colonies and Canadian Confederation in 1867. This in itself was no disaster. After all, what was really to be gained by underwriting an empire, a large proportion of which Britain effectively no longer controlled – and one that represented a drain on the Exchequer? Such sentiments reflected not only pragmatic politics and economic concerns but also a large measure of the popular mood.

Yet change was in the air. After some decades of intellectual and sentimental 'neglect', from the 1870s the Empire was again a subject of discussion. What was, or should be, its character? What was its value to Britain, and what, if anything, should be done to shape it? Indeed, by the late 1870s differences of philosophy and its practical application with respect to the imperial project came to be split along party lines. The division was brought to a head over the aggressive foreign policies of Benjamin Disraeli, which British Liberals characterised and criticised as 'imperialism' – a label still at this stage considered a taunt in its implications of military

recklessness, undue expenditure, foreign entanglements and land-grabbing. For British Liberals such policies were simply incompatible with 'values that should be fostered at home and abroad'.[3] Conservatives countered by charges that the Liberals wished (and had been trying) to dismember the Empire from the inside out. It was an exchange won from the 1880s onwards decidedly, in the public sphere if not always in Parliament, by an ever-growing chorus of advocates of Empire.

Key to the conversion of British public and political opinion from the indifference (and sometimes antipathy) of 'Little Englandism' in mid-century to overt imperial enthusiasm at its end were two important issues: sentiment and fear.[4] These two were not separate, but rather worked to buttress each other. With regard to the first, appeals by intellectuals and authors such as John Robert Seeley to embrace the noble sentiment of Empire, not simply to reduce the imperial ledger to an account-balancing or entirely practical exercise, found fertile ground. This was so much so that by the 1880s the very concept of imperialism had become respectable, in the political and public sphere. In fact, this 'respectability' and notions of a 'greater good' at home and abroad resulting from the imperial paradigm soon reconciled many British Liberals towards their own brand of imperial enthusiasm. It was a transition assisted, no doubt, by a concurrent crisis of Liberal Gladstonian thought that appeared to have no answer to emergent international challenges. Nor were more traditional antagonistic British Liberal attitudes to Empire easy to maintain in the face of the issue of Irish Home Rule in the 1880s. Liberals accused of trying to weaken the Empire in Ireland by their Conservative critics were tempted to prove their imperial credentials by advocating greater connections between Britain and the white Empire overseas, and so imperial momentum gathered steam.[5]

Transforming political attitudes were, of course, only part of the story. The growth of popular support for the sentimental and physical importance of the Empire in the late-Victorian era was central. In 1870 a petition of 104 000 working men was presented to the Queen in favour of retaining the colonies and the consolidation of the Empire. The emergence of Victoria from mourning in 1876 to be crowned Empress of India and the Jubilee celebrations in 1887 at which colonial representatives gathered for the first Colonial Conference were important public symbols. Popular romanticism in the British world in literature and art, and increasing literacy, further spread imperial ideas. Aside from Seeley, authors from Dilke to Froude and from Tennyson to Kipling waxed lyrical on the value of the colonies and the future of imperial relations.[6] All of this was set

against the backdrop of significant social uncertainty and upheaval. Continuing urbanisation and the breakdown of traditional communities in Britain, and an economic depression from 1868 to 1876 that shook the faith of many free-traders, for example, merged with an extended franchise from 1867, which encouraged a rise in general political consciousness. An outlet, an explanation, perhaps even a distraction was required; a 'sense of where it all fit'.[7] The answer was the Empire. Such sentiments were further encouraged in the self-governing colonies by self-government, which allowed a vision of partnership (rather than dependency) within the Empire. Meanwhile, free of the burden of direct control of such colonies, Britain could now strengthen imperial connections within the white Empire more easily than in the past thanks to steamships, telegraphs and cables laid to Canada in 1866 and to Australia in 1872.

Importantly, these powerful emergent imperial ideas were embraced not only by political elites in Britain but also by those in leadership positions in the colonies. At the periphery the Empire was led and managed by members of the ruling classes: governors, senior military and naval officers, and administrators who came to share a set of common, if unspoken assumptions about the role and future of the Empire. Often sharing similar social positioning, education and a reasonably common ethos, in the main this ruling elite believed their duty extended to the Empire, its growth and preservation. This was a powerful manifestation of Robinson and Gallagher's 'official mind'.[8] Moreover, the notion of inter-imperial defence cooperation often became a part of the vision shared by those who worked for a closer and more consolidated Empire. As international competition with Britain grew more serious, the self-governing colonies grew more powerful and, instead of favouring independence, seemed to want to move closer to Empire. All of this meant that various schemes and plans for defence cooperation began to be raised and discussed.[9] Such historians as John Darwin may be correct in suggesting that British imperial policy in the late-Victorian era was *ad hoc* and therefore lacked clarity, coherence and consistency.[10] The common interests of a 'gentlemanly capitalist' class (a merger of the emergent financial and 'service' sector and the older ruling class) might also have set the imperial policy agenda.[11] Regardless of the causes, however, most influential agents of Empire at home and abroad were agreed that 'the Empire must be maintained and threats must be countered', even if few had definitive plans on how.[12]

A growing and pervasive fear that the Empire was under increasing external threat was another key ingredient in the rise of imperial identification and sentiment as the century drew to a close. For a generation

Britain had been on top, but by the late 1860s and 1870s there were signs that serious challenges were mounting. There was a sense in intellectual circles that a crisis loomed, which preceded the material challenges that manifested in the next decade. Just as such nations as the newly unified Germany and a post–Civil War United States emerged as serious competitors, Britain's influence on international affairs was at a low point (well represented by the Danish Crisis of 1862–64). Money was short, and one considerable and undeniable burden was the colonies. Many Liberals in the 1860s favoured cutting ties, yet this movement was countered, ironically, by Liberal prime ministers such as Palmerston, Russell and Gladstone who did not share this view. By the end of the decade, encouraged in part by rising international competition, a Conservative reaction against Liberal rank-and-file attitudes to the Empire was underway.[13]

For a growing number of politicians, military figures and British intellectuals, one key answer to the problem of international competition to Britain from the 1870s was to look to the white Anglo-Saxon Empire – Canada, the Australasian colonies and those in South Africa – for physical, moral and economic support. Perhaps a 'Greater Britain' might be mobilised and the growing strength of the self-governing colonies used to reinforce the centre.[14] Such ideas were, after all, firmly in the context of global pan-racial movements, which encouraged thinking of the white Empire as an Anglo-Saxon family. By the 1890s the pressures helping to move attitudes in this direction grew more powerful still. Increasing international industrial capacity demanded larger fields of commercial exploitation. Empires consequently grew larger, rapidly and, in some places such as Africa, pressed each other at their edges. Military threats followed. Britain, with the largest Empire of them all, seemed increasingly exposed, and British statesmen responded by looking even more closely to a stronger and more consolidated Anglo-Saxon Empire. By now the white settlements were looked on quite differently from India and the direct-rule colonies.[15] In this transition of conception, from a ruling centre with subordinate outposts to some sort of collaboration between Anglo-Saxon nations, the self-governing colonies were generally more than willing participants.[16]

Of course there is no question that such late-Victorian conversions of thinking about the white Empire were not universal. Segments of society, in Britain and the self-governing colonies, naturally did not subscribe to it, especially elements of the working classes and labour movement. But to suggest, as some have done, that the late-century explosion of imperial sentiment was predominantly a middle- and upper-class phenomenon

goes too far. The imperial movement was mass and popular. Meaningful broad-based conclusions about it do not require universality in order to be valid. As Lehane notes, the presence of small groups that were not caught up in the tide of imperial enthusiasm 'does not negate the value of searching for positions of consent' – or working with them.[17] In any case, it is safe to conclude that by the new millennium early nineteenth-century attitudes throughout the Empire to the idea of Empire had reversed. Imperialism as a social and political force had grown more symbolic, more strident than ever before. The crisis of the Second South African War of 1899–1902, and Empire-wide reactions to it, coincided with it and to some extent represented a climax of imperial sentiment.[18]

At this point it is important to consider what 'imperialism' meant to people throughout the Anglo-Saxon Empire in the late-Victorian era.[19] For the purposes of this study, the key aspect in this regard is the *idea* of Empire, rather than the physical act of empire-building in the period. In this respect, the term was itself politicised and malleable. The imperial idea was not only a rhetorical device but also a weapon in the political battles waged between Conservatives and Liberals. It was also an inherently ill-defined and adaptive notion in that it attempted to represent a wide variety of colonies with unique governments, physical and economic circumstances. The Empire was never a single or homogenous whole, despite the ceaseless imperial mantras of common ethnic past and destiny.[20] Moreover, what the word represented to self-governing colonies was not the same as that which applied to India or the direct-rule colonies. Throughout this book therefore 'imperialism' refers to a type of Empire-wide nationalism, or even patriotism, shared between Britain and the self-governing colonies. It is the drive to celebrate and strengthen what was considered to be a shared ethnic, cultural and even religious heritage in a way that saw the whole as more than the sum of the constituent parts.

Importantly, late-Victorian imperialism was fundamentally rooted in conceptions of race – a shared Anglo-Saxon identity as a distinct cultural and ethnic group, itself a notion well aligned with emerging ideas of social Darwinism. Shared beliefs in unique racial characteristics were a means of self-identification and 'ethnicity' a shared value that needed to be protected. Such ideas, more than any other single factor, created the 'strategic mental mind maps' of the era.[21]

So too late-Victorian British imperialism developed within the context of the broader rise of nationalism across the globe from 1880 but at the same time remained separate from it. It never meant, for example, ignoring or making subservient the imperatives or interests of the self-governing

colonies. The interests of Britain and these colonies ran side by side. As it concerned the white Empire, this was not 'an imperialism of the despotic, grasping, oppressive mould; but, rather, a type of nationalism, a sense of belonging to a common nation', the Empire.[22] The dominant vision of that Empire was one of British English–speaking communities living British lives in strange and far-away places. National identities were accepted, but were asserted within a wider imperial framework. As Thompson points out, however, it was not the differences between these parts but the similarities that were emphasised. By the 1890s even the language of imperialism – voiced by men like Joseph Chamberlain – was a key currency of political debate in Britain and right across the Empire.[23]

The rise of the imperial idea in the late-Victorian Empire included, and was to some degree stimulated by, a rise in military consciousness. This was, again, a consequence of feelings of increased external threat mixed with popular and romantic sentiment. From the 1870s the Victorian army was constantly involved in colonial conflicts and, with some notable exceptions such as Isandlwana in Zululand (1879) and Majuba Hill in Natal (1881), it was most often victorious. Popular heroes like Wolseley, Roberts and even Gordon found fame as protectors of the Empire and the imperial ideal. Extensive press and popular coverage of military affairs and adventures reflected the influence of rising imperialism and its associated cultural drivers.[24] Yet the Victorian army was a small organisation by European standards and was constantly stretched, sometimes close to breaking, by various commitments throughout the globe. Its famous regiments of cavalry and foot were, in many ways, a 'bluff that masked considerable weakness and vulnerability'.[25] Although sufficient troops might be scraped together to put down an indigenous rebellion or two, this was not the same as maintaining a force capable of prevailing in a general war with a European power. Moreover, this uncomfortable truth was well recognised by a small but growing military reform movement.

A key response to changing late-Victorian attitudes to the Empire, and its preservation, was the birth and development of the idea of 'imperial defence'. This was an important evolution of thinking over earlier assumptions that British soldiers and sailors would protect any and all parts of the Empire when needed – although Britain never retreated from responsibility for underwriting colonial security. Rather, as noted, the idea slowly developed that some type of mutual defence arrangement might be possible as the self-governing colonies grew in power and confidence. Perhaps the colonies, contributing not only to their local defence but also to the military strength of the Empire as a whole, might even help to offset

obvious British military weakness and the danger posed by other emergent and existing powers with increasing imperial ambitions of their own. This was a two-way street. The colonies looked to Britain for security, and Britain gradually came to view the colonies as sources of potential military strength, and to realise how much her imperial position relied upon the self-governing colonies. Gradually, from the 1870s, the issue of imperial defence and organising to defend the Empire became a key aspect of the evolving relationships within the Empire.[26]

Clearly the most important instrument for defending the Empire during the late-Victorian period remained the Royal Navy.[27] Before 1914 the navy was 'intellectually, physically, symbolically and intuitively regarded as the embodiment of the martial nature of imperial defence'.[28] The army was in many ways a poor cousin. The army's regular force, especially early in the period, was often posted to garrison duties to support bases important for the navy, while the defence of India remained a central consideration. Yet military forces, even outside the army in India, were important and grew increasingly so as military challenges to the Empire mounted. Moreover, it was military officers, thinkers and politicians, much more than their naval counterparts, who encouraged truly cooperative aspects of imperial defence thinking. This book is therefore concerned, in the main, with the 'land' defence of the Empire – not to question the central importance of the navy, but to shine a light on less well known but equally important areas.

It is important to understand that the idea of imperial military defence was in flux in this period, certainly much more so than it would become by the eve of the Great War. There were continual shifts in how the notion was conceived by political and military elites in London, and by their contemporaries at the edges of the Empire. Such shifts were, of course, themselves representative and part of the wider evolution of how the Empire itself was conceived. So too a range of factors of a non-defence nature always intruded upon and shaped imperial defence attitudes and practices in London, including domestic politics, economics, technology and the European balance of power. At all times British policy-makers were severely constrained as to how imperial defence initiatives might be implemented. They could not cost too much money or consume too many other industrial or human resources. They also had to be sure that 'the act of producing imperial defence [in no way] altered the very fabric of what was being protected'.[29] That is, decision-makers were restrained by theories of free trade and what it ought to mean in terms of international relations, ideas of democracy, standing armies, liberal notions on the use

of military force, religious ideas about role of the Empire, volunteer traditions and a range of other factors. Equally, it was never a question of simple military strategy in the colonies. Ideas of imperial defence mingled with notions of colonial self-respect and the perceived prerogatives of new self-governments, local pressures and politics. It is also true that, largely as a consequence of such issues, imperial defence for much of the period was more an intellectual and theoretical exercise than a physical reality in terms of firm structures, definite plans or consistent thoughts, but it was no less important because of this.[30]

Within this context the earliest ideas about imperial military defence emerged and developed. It is upon this scaffold that key questions must be asked and answered. To what extent, for example, did the idea of imperial defence represent a set of clearly defined plans and concerted effort from London in this era? To what extent they were *ad hoc*, the result of local initiatives or the personal plans of various imperial officers abroad? Was there any measure of duplicity or coercion from the War Office to entice the colonies to offer up manpower to be sacrificed on command from Whitehall in war? Or were intra-Empire military initiatives better described as natural responses to shared concerns, with a significant two-way interplay? Answers to questions of this type shed light on more issues than those directly associated with defence – they illuminate important aspects of the Empire as a whole and the attitudes that held it together and drove it apart. This is a study therefore of more than military concerns, plans and strategic scheming. At the political level, for example, the issues involved include the jealously guarded prerogatives of relatively new nations – protective of their sovereign rights and constitutional responsibilities, interacting with agents, particularly in the War Office, which often failed to understand such sensitivities.

The military career of Edward Hutton has been chosen as a vehicle by which to investigate the imperial defence in the late-Victorian era for a number of reasons. First, his unique experiences and appointments in the self-governing colonies help to overcome the danger of a narrow national (and nationalist) approach. Not only was Hutton, in his capacity of General Officer Commanding, the 'creator' of the post-Federation Australian Army in 1901 but also he had by that time led the New South Wales colonial forces (1893–96) and the Canadian militia (1898–1900), as well as fought in four of Britain's expeditionary wars. This included, crucially, command of troops from Britain, the Australian colonies, New Zealand and Canada within the 1st Mounted Infantry Brigade in South Africa in 1900. Most of these commands unfolded during the key Colonial Secretaryship of Joseph

Chamberlain, from June 1895 to September 1903. A good speaker with a flair for publicity, as a junior member of the 'Wolseley Ring' of outspoken army reformers, Hutton became a leading advocate of the use of mounted infantry and colonial troops. At the same time his marriage into the aristocracy in 1889 and appointment as aide-de-camp to Queen Victoria in 1892 afforded him a degree of influence unusual for an officer of his rank and station. Hutton's various commands put him at the centre of key imperial defence issues. Indeed the frustrations and successes of his colonial career, and its associated professional crusades, are a microcosm of the difficulties and debates over late-Victorian intra-Empire military cooperation in a general sense. Operating at the practical end of philosophical and practical debates surrounding the issue, Hutton is an ideal individual case study by which imperial defence can be better understood.

Despite Hutton's centrality to such important questions of Empire, the man who had been 'undoubtedly the most influential British army officer serving in the self-governing colonies before 1910' has no published biography.[31] Perhaps more than anything else this reflects the narrow focus of many past studies. For authors writing on Canadian military affairs, for example, a few years spent in charge of the militia (even if Hutton is recognised as the most important and controversial of any British officer to hold this appointment) seems insufficiently significant. For British historians, on the other hand, interested in the difficulties of the late-Victorian army and various initiatives for harnessing the military potential of the self-governing colonies, the temptation is to focus on the centre, while men like Hutton worked at the periphery. Yet the scope of Hutton's career throughout the Empire as a whole – from London to Sydney, to Ottawa, to Pretoria and to Melbourne – placed him at the centre of the issues fundamental to imperial defence in the era. The man is intimately connected to, and his career in many ways representative of, this much larger issue.

Two other issues make Hutton a worthy case study through which to examine imperial defence issues in this period, as well as an interesting biographical candidate in his own right. The first is that Hutton himself pursued a personal vision of building a comprehensive system of what he called 'Cooperative Empire Defence'. This was his grand project, his overarching professional goal. Partly as a consequence of his colonial experiences, and partly the result of an agenda that he took with him to the edges of the Empire, as time progressed Hutton's dream of an imperial military partnership between the self-governing colonies and Britain, each fielding relatively cheap, self-contained volunteer militia armies capable of