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## **Poseidon's Long View Across Time<sup>1</sup>**

By

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### **Abstract**

Amphibious warfare has long been placed in the category of one of the more complex operations of armed conflict. Its knotty nature derives from its demand for intricate planning; a situation of full spectrum dominance; integration of every conceivable dimension of warfare; stealth in the contradictory environment of managing large forces with their huge logistic train; setting aside of some of the key principles of conventional warfare such as flexibility, economy of effort and mobility; transition of Command responsibilities at critical points in the operation; and most perilously, operating under conditions that are favourable to the enemy. Given that the deck tilts against success, it will be interesting to examine the nature of this combat manoeuvre through the lens of two historical battles that occurred with a time interregnum of more than two millennia. The intriguing reality of these episodes was that they were played within the same geographical constraints of the Dardanelles and the essential struggle was between a maritime and a continental power. In both events the continental power prevailed.

*"The Fleet and Army, acting in concert, seem to be the natural Bulwark of these Kingdoms... We don't mean to lessen the dignity of the Army, but to encourage it to make the Conjoint War their great Object..."*

- Molyneux 1759 <sup>2</sup>

### **Historical Sketch I: An Enactment from the Past-Aegospotami 405 BCE**

#### **Thessalic versus Continental Strategy, Powers of Antiquity Face Off**

Ancient wars are more often shrouded in myth and through the years fashioned by popular imagination. But not so the Peloponnesian War, waged from 431 BCE to 404 BCE, between Athens and Sparta. The conflict's scholastic significance does not lie in its protagonists or the events that transpired or even in the fact of it having been an archetypal war between a mercantile democracy and an agricultural aristocracy, but more because of the discipline with which its proceedings were recorded. To be sure, Thucydides precision is both dry and pithy and yet has relevance that transcends time. The strategies developed by the two warring States and their confederations (the coastal chain formed by the Delian League and the continental Spartan Allies which included Persia) were studies in contrast for Thessalic Athens, war plans were largely driven by a

maritime strategy that strove to vanquish the Spartans through attrition, sanctions and peripheral campaigns waged from its far flung coastal bases in the Mediterranean, Aegean and the Black seas; while the Spartans fought to their strength and adopted a continental strategy that centred on invasion, armed alliances and striking at the heart of the enemy homeland. In an incisive and laconic analysis, the historian believed that what made war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear this caused in Sparta.<sup>3</sup> The theatre of warfare extended from Sicily in the west to the Black Sea in the east, a span of 2000 kilometres across the Mediterranean and into the Black Sea. Ten major maritime engagements occurred during the 27 years of war each having a disproportionate impact on the progress of war on land (Thucydides' history, unfortunately, ends in 411 BCE). However our focus is on the last engagement which involved an amphibious operation at Aegospotami across the Dardanelles (Hellespont) in September 405 BCE the outcome of this engagement saw the crumbling of Athenian sea power and the consequent severance of all sea lines of communication to its empire and its eventual capitulation within the year.

### **Run-up to Battle**

The two sides spent the early part of the year maintaining, logistically and materially preparing, and honing the fighting potential of their fleets. Eventually in September Lysander, the Spartan fleet commander, decided to move into the Hellespont, partly to try and regain control of a number of cities lost in recent years and partly to try and block the Athenian logistic and economic life line emerging from the Black Sea. His first success came at Lampsacus (4 to 5 kilometres north of Lapseki, see Map 1), across the Hellespont, on the Asian shore which fell to a land assault.

When the Athenians discovered that Lysander had moved into the Hellespont, they followed with a fleet of 180 ships. They sailed up the Strait, and took up position at Aegospotami four to five kilometres across the Strait west of Lampsacus, where they established a base to progress operations. On the next morning the Athenians put out to sea and formed up in line of battle outside Lampsacus. Lysander did not oblige to come out of his haven and engage the enemy. Frustrated, the Athenians returned to their base on the beach at Aegospotami. Lysander sent some of his fastest ships to follow the Athenians for surveillance and intelligence gathering. For the next three days the same rite was replayed only with great tactical shrewdness, the Spartans through their intelligence effort reconnoitred the coastline, earmarked potential beaches for landing and significantly built a tactical picture of the Athenian fleet's pattern of operations. On

the fifth day Lysander manoeuvred into the operational area keeping a discrete distance from the Aegospotami beach.<sup>4</sup>

### **Fragmented Command versus Spartan Unified Plan**

The Athenian fleet was led by six admirals who in turn rotated command of the 180 ships of the fleet.<sup>5</sup> The Commander for the day was the relatively inexperienced Philocles, disjointed Command and an almost daily change in the methods and the graphics of control would have undoubtedly imposed unnecessary stresses on both man and material to the detriment of operational efficiency. Considerably less is known on the size of the Spartan fleet, it is assumed that the Spartan fleet was similar in size and capabilities to the Athenian fleet. Lysander's plan envisaged a frontal engagement of the Athenian fleet at their moorings with a simultaneous amphibious landing to the north. The landing force was to move in a coordinated scything pincer manoeuvre which would crush Athenian forces between the land and the maritime prongs. It is this amphibious landing which is of particular note to our study since it involved a major surprise assault.

### **Lay of the Strait**

The Dardanelles, formerly known as Hellespont is a narrow strait in present day north-western Turkey connecting the Aegean Sea to the Sea of Marmara. It is located at approximately 40°13'N 26°26'E. The Strait is 61 kilometres (38 mi) long but only 1.2 to 6 kilometres wide, averaging 55 metres deep with a maximum depth of 103 metres. Plutarch mentions that Aegospotami lies directly across the Dardanelles, opposite the Spartan camp at Lampsacus. He describes the site as nothing more than a beach, the river which gave its name to the battle drains into the Strait about 6 kilometres south west of Gallipoli. Furthermore, according to Xenophon the Hellespont was fifteen stades (approximately 2¾ kilometres) wide between Aegospotami and Lampsacus. It is commonly accepted that the name Aegospotami (literally 'Goat Rivers') refers to the earlier mentioned river.

### **Choice of Mounting Port and Operational Underpinning**

What is perplexing is the Athenian choice of an in-theatre operational base that lacked ready source of logistics; particularly so when good friendly mounting ports existed at Sestos (about 12 kilometres south) and Gallipoli upstream to the north (about 4 kilometres; in the days of the oar being upstream had its tactical advantage). While it provided for relatively close surveillance of the Spartan fleet at Lampsacus it was to pose

an awkward provisioning as well as a critical operational problem for the Athenians who were forced to travel some way to forage for food and water, and had got into the routine of disembarking from their ships at the end of each sailing for this purpose.<sup>6</sup> In the event tactical proximity to the enemy proved to be one of the causes of the eventual Athenian debacle. The Spartans, on the other hand, were not only in an operationally superior position but also the early capture of Lampsacus offered them an excellent mounting port. The city provided a safe haven and was well stocked with materials and stores. At the same time, its location threatened the Athenian grain shipments from the Black Sea. These operational comforts gave to the Spartans considerable flexibility. Lysander could afford to initiate aggressive action at a time of his choosing. It was also clear to him that the logistic situation and the morale of the Athenian fleet would force them to offer battle sooner rather than later for it was common knowledge that by then Athens' treasury was running low. To the Spartans it was the decisive battle that was being sought, for victory at Aegospotami would mean the end of Athens' command of the seas and with it the beginning of the end of war.

### **Planning Factors**

In planning the amphibious prong of operations, Lysander had chosen time of landing astutely; based on natural conditions, the weather (September from weather point of view provided ideal conditions for the campaign) and the operational situation<sup>7</sup>. The mission for the amphibious landing force was clearly defined 'to execute a coordinated enveloping manoeuvre to block the landward escape of the Athenian embarked army as their ships were being engaged by the seaward prong'. Past surveillance and intelligence gathering had established pattern of operations along with critical inputs that determined selection of landing beaches about 4 to 6 kilometres north of Aegospotami which not only ensured security of landing but also provided the necessary discretion by remaining clear of 'foraging routes' which would have alerted the Athenians of the impending sea-land operation. In terms of his personal virtues, Lysander unlike his Athenian counterpart combined in his person a very experienced admiral commanding the Spartan fleet for the second time, with an influential statesman. In his first command he had led his fleet to several victories and achieved political acclaim; notable amongst these was his triumph at Notium and winning Persian economic, political and material support for the Spartan cause. He also enjoyed the unreserved confidence of his people and his men<sup>8</sup>. His appreciation of the impending battle being decisive in the outcome of the war must have greatly influenced him in selecting a Course of Action that would deliver the *comp de*

*grave*. To summarise from the Spartan standpoint the run up to the campaign was marked by focused planning and preparation, leadership had displayed an acute strategic sense of awareness of the impending engagement and had rapidly ascended the operational high ground, morale was high and most significantly intelligence and surveillance had made transparent Athenian pattern of operations and their weaknesses. While from the Athenian perspective the campaign was poorly planned and desperate in its manoeuvre and to cap it all low morale pervaded the fleet and fragmented leadership assured a complete lack of battle coherence in execution.

### **Events of the Engagement**

Unable to appreciate intentions of the Spartan Fleet, Philocles, put to sea with thirty triremes, and ordered the rest of his armada comprising of 149 ships still at their moorings to follow. His vanguard of 30 ships, analysts suggest could have been a part of a deception plan to seduce the Spartans into ambush by the waiting main fleet or a phased move to Sestos.<sup>9</sup> The state of preparedness of the main fleet would, however, negate both theories and would insinuate confusion and ineptitude rather than a deliberate plan. Lysander decided to take advantage of the split Athenian force. The entire Peloponnesian fleet joined battle, and in a rapid head on engagement defeated Philocles before his ships could find deeper soundings and the manoeuvring space that the centre of the Straits offered. Having overwhelmed the vanguard, he then attacked the unprepared Athenian fleet. While Lysander engaged the Athenian ships and towed the Prizes out to sea, a coordinated Spartan amphibious landing of an army comprising 3000 infantry and 360 cavalry<sup>10</sup> led by the Spartan General Etionicus was effected on the beaches south of Gallipoli (Turkish Gelibolu). Surprise was total and while the landing force broke out of the beach head, raced southward and routed the Athenians on the Aegospotami seashore; Lysander closed the pincer on the main body of the bewildered Athenian fleet still at their moorings, 170 Athenian ships were captured, their embarked army lay devastated and victory was complete.<sup>11</sup> In the aftermath the Athenian position crumbled. Hellespont came under Spartan control and the strangulation of Athens was to end the War within a year.

### **Analysis**

Any analysis of this campaign will invariably sacrifice objectivity for want of precision in the records available. Yet, retrospection based on macro stimulants, proceedings as historically evident (sparse as they may be) and the reality of

consequences permit constructing a picture that underscores the character and nature of amphibious warfare and the planning salients that provide a theoretical foundation for embarking on such operations. The attributes that contributed to success of Lysander's amphibious assault may be distinguished as follows:<sup>12</sup>

- Clarity of objective against the backdrop of the larger strategic situation.
- Nature and characteristics of the campaign at hand, enemy to be fought and precision in mission definition.
- Precise assessment of the balance of forces.
- Perceptive choice of mounting port.
- Focused intelligence gathering and development of a best course of action.
- Judicious appraisal of natural elements and selection of landing beach.
- Adroit and single minded leadership supported by meticulous planning and coordination.

**Map 1. The Strait of Dardanelles (Hellespont)**



*Source: This is a file from the Wikimedia Commons. Geographic locations in red have been inserted by the author, they are approximate. The Commons is a freely licensed media file repository.*

## **Episode II: The Amphibious Campaign at Gallipoli 1915**

### **Conjunct Warfare**

To the British Admiralty, amphibious operations were hardly a novel discipline of warfare. In fact as early as 1759 a theory and directive principles of what was termed 'Conjunct Warfare' had been propagated in a treatise entitled "Conjunct Expeditions: or Expeditions that have been carried on jointly by the Fleet and Army, with a commentary on Littoral Warfare."<sup>13</sup> As the treatise so eloquently puts it "the conjunct armament goes against the enemy like an arrow from a bow. It gives no warning where it is to come, and leaves no traces where it has passed. It must wound too where it hits, if rightly pointed at a vulnerable part. When this is done a new aim is directed. The enemy in the meantime, like a man in the dark labouring under an unwieldy shield, moves slowly to and fro, distracted and at a loss which way to guard against the stroke of the invisible hand."<sup>14</sup> Molyneux understood that a nation with superior sea power possessed the advantage of initiative and therefore could bring powerful forces against an enemy at a time and place of its choosing. He emphasised that surprise was a key element to an amphibious attack (obviously the author implied surprise of time and place rather than surprise of intent), calling it a "terrible sort of war that comes like thunder and lightning to some unprepared part of the World." Despite his high opinion of the potential of amphibious landings, Molyneux recognised that they failed more often than they succeeded.<sup>15</sup> He insisted that the main reason for failed amphibious missions, or miscarriages, in his words, was mismanagement of planning and execution. The most important aspects of this mismanagement was the lack of cooperation between navy and army commanders, want of application, deficiency of a system on which the operation is founded ('doctrine' in present day parlance) and significantly, the attitude of relegating this form of warfare to a lesser priority.<sup>16</sup> What is remarkable is how contemporary this analysis is.

### **Grand Strategy and the Flawed Campaign Instructions**

In 1915, the Western Allies sent a massive invasion force of British, Indian, Australian, and New Zealand troops to attempt to force and control the Dardanelles and Bosphorus Straits. Of all the campaigns of the First World War, perhaps the one that inspires the most lasting grisly fascination was this attempt to break through the Turkish Straits invest Constantinople (modern day Istanbul) and establish control of shipping in and out of the Black Sea. Originally conceived by then-First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill, the Dardanelles initiative was intended to open a supply line through the Black Sea to the beleaguered Russians and simultaneously drive Ottoman Turkey out of the

war with one decisive blow. Even today there is little doubt that in term of a grand concept the idea of relieving Russia, rallying the Balkan States to the side of the Entente and bringing about the fall of the Ottoman Empire—with the consequent accession of the oil rich Arabian Peninsula and Persia, all in one assault was, debatably, the only far reaching strategic thought of the First World War. That it failed, when in an analogous situation of two global powers of antiquity at war two millennia earlier, an amphibious operation in the same theatre with similar strategic objectives brought to termination a 27 year war, would suggest the need for any serious student of military history to weigh in balance the two campaigns. After a combined fleet of French and British warships were thwarted in their bid to force their way through the Straits in an all-out assault on 18 March 1915, losing three capital ships in the process (the sinking of the ships, disproportionately influenced the subsequent decision), the British War Council whose decision it was to seize control of the Straits through a purely naval expedition<sup>17</sup> elected to abandon the naval bombardment concluding that systematic longer range blitz of the Turkish shore batteries and forts by naval gunfire would not in itself bring about control of the narrows and that the only way to breach the Straits was by seizing the entire Gallipoli Peninsula. The awkward irony was that the change of strategic heart comes at a time when the defenders had resigned to defeat. Also this pivotal decision was contradictory to the Campaign Instructions dated 13 March 1915 (Establishing Directive in contemporary amphibious warfare lexicon) passed down to the Commander-in-Chief General Sir Ian Hamilton by Kitchener the Secretary of State for War.<sup>18</sup> Intriguing and at the same time uncharacteristic was the Instruction's ambivalence at places, lack of intelligence at others, contradictory in matters of intent and perhaps most seriously the inability to appreciate the need for close and precise coordination and fatally so the absence of a declared strategic context and an umbrella system within which the campaign was to be anchored. Paragraphs 3, 6, 7 and 9 of Kitchener's Instructions are particularly indistinct, contrary and imprecise; they bear mention for clearly they would have contributed to the 'miscarriage' of the campaign:<sup>19</sup>

- **Paragraph 3.** "Having entered on the project of forcing the Straits there can be no idea of abandoning the scheme. It will require time, patience and methodical plans of cooperation between the naval and military commanders. The essential point is to avoid a check, which will jeopardise our chances of strategical and political success." In the event within a month of issue of the Campaign Instructions this crucial



strategic impulse which lay at the heart of the engagement was to be discarded.

- **Paragraph 6.** “Under present conditions it seems undesirable to land any permanent garrison or hold any lines on the Gallipoli Peninsula.” What changed circumstances led to turning this Instruction on its head is not entirely clear but by 13 April 1915 Instructions to the same Commander-in-Chief was to seize the Peninsula through military action.
- **Paragraph 7.** “...The occupation of the Asiatic side (eastern side of the Straits) by military forces is to be strongly deprecated.” While Paragraph 9 in direct contradiction suggests that “... it may be necessary to land parties to hold entrenched positions on the east side (Asian) of the Bosphorus...”

Kitchener's initial Instructions had envisaged a quick breakthrough by Allied warships to Constantinople, whereupon Hamilton's Mediterranean Expeditionary Force (MEF) would rendezvous with Russian forces in occupying the city and its hinterland, and then withdraw to deploy as required elsewhere. The role of the MEF was delineated to a concentrated offensive on the European side of the Straits to overwhelm any Turkish ground forces hindering the passage of the Allied navies.

### **Forcing the Straits**

Consider, once again, the geography of the Dardanelles (see Map 1), the narrow, southwest-northeast strait that connects the Aegean Sea with the Sea of Marmara, with Asia to the south and the European Gallipoli Peninsula to the north. From its entrance between Cape Helles and Kum Kale, the Dardanelles stretches for 61 kilometres to the town of Gallipoli (Gelibolu in Turkish), where it widens into the Sea of Marmara. Constantinople lies at the far end of the Marmara, 200 kilometres to the northeast. For the most part, the strait is several kilometres wide, but 25 kilometres upstream at the Narrows opposite the town of Canakkale on the Asian shore, the passage necks down to only 1,600 metres and veers sharply north, then east again, with a depth of approximately 50 metres. Complex and unpredictable cross currents and the layering of salt and fresh water further complicate a transit. In 1915, the Narrows were well protected by formidable masonry forts on the European and Asian shores, as well as multiple minefields, searchlights, and both fixed and mobile artillery. German military advisors to the Turkish Army had trained the gunners, and the overall defence was under German command. The attempt to force the straits made in February and March 1915, and was

purely a naval affair. It was instigated at the insistence of Churchill who was convinced that naval gunfire supported by selective landings would be adequate to secure the straits. The first of three attacks was made on 19 February with twelve capital ships (the French ships *Bouvet*, *Charlemagne*, *Gaulois* and *Suffren*; the British ships HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, *Agamemnon*, *Inflexible*, *Vengeance*, *Albion*, *Cornwallis*, *Irresistible* and *Triumph*) and while initial operations were successful, bad weather halted the expedition. Vice-Admiral Robeck commenced a second attack on the 25 February, and managed to overpower the main batteries. Landing parties were put ashore at Kum Kale and Sedd-el-Bahr and disabled the remaining guns. The mobile batteries could not be put out of action and they thwarted mine clearance attempts. The third and final naval assault was made on 18 March with eighteen capital ships (two in reserve) formed in three waves. The first and second waves met with success but as the third wave advanced and the second started to withdraw, they ran into an unexpected minefield. This resulted in *Bouvet*, *Inflexible*, *Irresistible* and *Ocean* hitting mines, all but *Inflexible* sinking.<sup>20</sup> The attack was called off. Faced with the loss of four capital ships in the Straits Admiral Robeck was reluctant to resume operations until the military had landed to neutralise the Turkish guns and allow safe mine clearance operations.

### **Change in Strategic Impulse**

At a conference on the fleet's flagship, the *Queen Elizabeth*, on 22 March 1915, Hamilton concurred with the assessment of the naval commander, and ordered his forces to Egypt. Here they resupplied and prepared in public view, for the invasion of the Gallipoli peninsula. The strategic dilemma that an amphibious campaign to seize the Gallipoli Peninsula posed was reflected in the Minister for War ambivalence towards it despite the War Council having given it a green signal; the fact was that “Kitchener could never quite decide whether to support fully or not.”<sup>21</sup>

### **The Amphibious Assault**

Meanwhile Hamilton and his staff planned amphibious landings on six beaches around the south of the peninsula. He prepared his four divisions comprising Anglo-French troops for the assault, only one of which, the 29th was a regular formation. The landings took place on the 25 April 1915 and an invasion force of Australian, New Zealand, British, and French troops landed at three points on the peninsula itself and at one location on the opposite Asian shore to continue the campaign. The landings showed imagination and may well have succeeded, but for a combination of critical

failings which included fragmented Command, poor leadership, lack of preparation, the geography and terrain in the peninsula with its few beaches and constraints on logistic support. Unfortunately, the "British Army was too rigidly structured . . . to attempt amphibious operations" and it was "the antiquated command structure that impeded progress."<sup>22</sup> The British advance crucially lost momentum, and the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) landing on the western coast between Gaba Tepe and Ari Burnu ('Anzac Cove') met with stiff resistance from the Turkish 2nd Division commanded by Colonel Mustapha Kemal Ataturk and almost got thrown back into the sea. Between May and July, the French and British slowly advanced up the peninsula while the Anzacs clung to their small perimeter, content to inflict losses on sustained Turkish attacks. The landings established beachheads but the MEF failed to gain the vital heights on Gallipoli. During May, June and July, as the campaign settled into a deadlock of trenches, frontal assaults and raids mirroring those of the Western Front. The Allies could neither break out of their beachheads nor the Turks drive them back into the sea. Hamilton claimed a lack of reinforcements and ammunition denied him the ability to attack the Turkish lines decisively. However, by the midsummer of 1915 the Government's Dardanelles Committee eventually determined that Hamilton had to be allocated more resources in order to achieve the necessary thrust. Three new army divisions were dispatched to Gallipoli in July. These troops (the 9th Army Corps) were to land in August to the north west of the peninsula in the hope of outflanking and turning the Turkish defenders. For a few fleeting hours, as this force landed at Suvla Bay on 6 August 1915, it appeared the plan might succeed. Their surprise arrival threatened to overwhelm the few Turkish ground forces present. However a combination of difficulties in disembarking at the assigned sites and in securing sufficient supplies of drinking water had led senior officers of 9 Corps to halt and regroup their troops on the beaches. This inertia in moving inland in sufficient strength allowed the defenders to withdraw to the heights above Suvla, reinforce, and dig in. Despite Hamilton's arrival at Suvla on the 8 August 1915 to urge his commanders onwards and the subsequent replacement of a number of officers concerned by generals fresh from the Western Front, the MEF had again reached an impasse.

### **The Evacuation**

General Hamilton's amphibious force was unsuccessful in its attempt to capture the Gallipoli peninsula, and its withdrawal was ordered in January 1916, after 10 months of fighting and more than 200,000 casualties (overall casualties were immense:

approximately 252,000 for the British/French while the Turks suffered about 300,000). The failed campaign gained nothing and badly tarnished the Allies war waging capability. Evacuation of all combatants from the peninsula was completed by 9 January 1916. The failure of the Gallipoli campaign led to Churchill's relegation and by the end of 1915 he had resigned. The campaign has been varyingly portrayed, but none more critical than by the war correspondent E. Ashmead-Bartlett when he described it as a story of "muddle, mismanagement and useless sacrifice."<sup>23</sup>

## **Analysis**

The intellectual framework provided by Molyneux when he first propagated 'Conjunct Warfare' and the idea of a 'strike by an invisible hand' placed amphibious operations in the context of a 'Manoeuvrist Approach.' The key lay in the ability to project force from the sea in a manner that lends itself to such manoeuvrist precepts as surprise of time and place and out-flanking movements. As would be apparent from the narrative, the amphibious campaign to seize the Gallipoli peninsula and lay control of the Straits fell far short of the attributes that make for manoeuvre warfare despite the obvious advantages that weighed with the maritime power. 'Muddle, mismanagement and useless sacrifice' as mentioned earlier, were features of this campaign which rose to prominence as planning dithered, casualties mounted and the drive for control of the Straits visibly faltered, some logic may even conclude that one fed on the other. Yet, in order to bring some objectivity to the analysis, the same litmus tests that gave victory at Aegospotami in 405 BCE may be applied to the Gallipoli campaign primarily because the larger strategic objective of Control through the instrument of an amphibious landing were indistinguishable. The seven attributes that may therefore be placed in balance are:

- **The Objective:** While the larger strategic aims were well conceived, it was the fragmented approach both in methods and time towards attaining it that was unconvincing. After all to force the Straits through pure naval action and then within a month to fundamentally alter it to an army sized amphibious operation would not only suggest a radical strategic dither but also a failure of higher political and military decision making to fully appreciate what the alteration implied in terms of preparation, training and logistics. Kitchener's 'Campaign Instructions' to his Commander-in-Chief lacked the strategic commitment necessary to see through an operation of this scale. Also, it was neither based on a thorough intelligence estimate nor on a realistic appreciation of the state of preparedness of the landing force. And

then to break the momentum of the offensive by reinforcing the April landing only in the second week of August, long after energy of the thrust had petered out, would suggest a total lack of grasp of the ground situation.

- **Nature of Operations:** The Nature of amphibious operations, as Molyneux with so much sagacity had pointed out, demanded comprehensiveness of planning and precision in execution. The most important aspects of management and control of operations was the critical need for cooperation between navy and army commanders, a system as a prerequisite on which the operation is founded (doctrine in present day parlance) and significantly, the attitude of awarding a place of primacy for this form of warfare; these were woefully lacking. By May 1915, within a month of launching operations it became clear that the hope of a short campaign was a pipe dream and success in the Dardanelles would require a far greater effort both in terms of resolve and preparation than the planners had ever contemplated. Gross underestimation of the enemy can only have been credited to incompetence.
- **Balance of Forces:** The balance of forces weighed up on the side of the Entente. Yet, due fragmented approach, poor planning and the inability to commit to and underwrite unity of Command; the advantages of capability and firepower could never be brought to bear.
- **Mounting Port and Training:** The location of mounting ports in Egypt (Alexandria and Port Said) was ideal, for they were situated in the theatre of operations yet adequately displaced (600miles) from the amphibious objective area to ensure no enemy interference. Also base support and logistic facilities available in Egypt were comprehensive. Where the fatal flaw lay was in the inadequacy of training of the amphibious force for what was envisaged to be speedy and inexpensive campaign. After all if the “essential course for Britain therefore, was to re-equip Russia and to rally the Balkan States against Austria and Turkey; and this could best be done by forcing the Straits and capturing Constantinople” (and Churchill concluded) that this was the “only prize which lies within reach this year. It can be won without unreasonable expense, and within a comparatively short time. But we must act now and on a scale which makes speedy success certain.”<sup>24</sup> Evidently there was serious mismatch between the “essential course” and the preparation needed to realise it.
- **Appraisal of Elements and Selection of landing Beaches:** Weather-wise April and August were fair weather months and well suited for amphibious operations. The selected beaches were appropriate for landing operations, however their geographic spread of less than 10 miles provided inadequate manoeuvring space for, what

eventually amounted to, seven Divisions. The cramping of the invasion front permitted the Turkish defenders to operate on inner lines and concentrate their efforts which eventually stalled the invasion practically on the beaches.

- **Intelligence:** Periodic intelligence bulletins were made available to the MEF throughout the campaign, however these were persistently of a field and a tactical level.<sup>25</sup> The absence of strategic intelligence is obvious by the absence of information on the preparedness and combat readiness of the Turkish Army on the Peninsula; Paragraph 5 of Kitchener's Campaign Instructions makes this apparent (see End Note 17). Also, the extent of complacency and the belief that a victory was to be got on the cheap was palpable in Churchill's statements (see End Note 22). In addition the impact of naval gunfire (ranging from 15 inch to 8 inch guns<sup>26</sup>) while attempting to force the Straits was never ascertained as a result there was neither intelligence on damage assessment nor an appreciation of the state of Turkish morale at this crucial juncture of operations. In the absence of such intelligence, to abandon the plan, would suggest feeble resolve.
- **Planning, Leadership and Unity of Command:** 'Muddle, mismanagement and useless sacrifice'; the words used by the war correspondent Ashmead-Bartlett succinctly summed up the characteristics of direction and control of the campaign. Starting with Kitchener's Campaign Instructions, planning at the highest level of decision making was muddled; the change in strategic impulse was neither justified nor carried with it the determination necessary to push for a decision. Also, the planning of an amphibious operation without adequate time for training and rehearsal provided the immediate recipe for disaster. Misconception of force requirements and Logistic planning was so derisory that within a month of the first landing (by May), the invasion was starved of munitions and reinforcements. Leadership's belief in the success of operations was based on some abstract and baseless notions that the adversary's fortitude and grit would crumble with the first salvo; this underestimation of the opponent's operational tenacity was a cardinal failure. At the operational level, leadership was never in touch with the ground realities of the progress of the campaign and failed to appreciate the criticality of the principles of surprise, concentration of effort and coordination. Command at every level was disjointed and lacked unity of purpose. Relying on mere army-navy cooperation without unity of command particularly so in an amphibious operation is a clear formula for inefficiencies. For in a cooperative situation what is being provided is support bereft of precise allocation and definition of subordinate

responsibilities along without a comprehensive command and control network to bind together the sea, land and air elements of the amphibious force.

### **The Common Thread that Binds Millennia**

The history of warfare infrequently tolerates replication of campaigns. And yet to regard battles and armed struggles in isolation rather than a part of a larger panorama of conflicts often leads to erroneous inferences which do not in any way further the cause of refining strategies. Examination of the larger continuum or the strategic approach seeks to understand and employ the inter-relationship between economics, geography and military genius to pursue political goals; these goals, however, have an uncanny iterative character. Both the Battle of Aegospotami and the Gallipoli Campaign, though displaced in time by almost two and a half millennia, was trans-historical in commonality of aim and that was 'Control of the Straits'. In the one case to bring about economic and logistic strangulation of the opponent while in the Gallipoli Campaign it was to bring about economic and logistic relief of a vital ally; both saw in the manoeuvre an efficient tool to bring about a speedy termination of the conflict. The Battle of Aegospotami was planned and implemented with consummate skill and its aim was fully achieved. The Gallipoli Campaign, on the other hand was a grand litany of 'muddled planning, mismanaged leadership and appalling waste of life'. If one were to attempt to put a finger on the single critical feature that differentiated the two, it had to have been the leadership of Lysander who saw to it that unity of command was upheld at every stage of the battle; whether it was integrity of the plan, intelligence gathering or coordination of the amphibious assault with the seaborne offensive.

### **The Indian Context, a Strategic Overview as a Conclusion**

To the minds of many Indian military leaders, amphibious warfare remains a lesser known mystery; to merit theoretical examination at the Staff College and thereafter to be set aside as a costly conjecture that has little chance of success in the real world of operations. This is based on the premise that a frontal military assault out of the water with all the complications of forming up in and disembarking from boats, moving through surf and landing on a hostile beach with neither overwhelming force nor stealth nor saturation firepower by air and sea that could suppress shore defences; was futile. The Gallipoli disaster appeared to many military critics to seal this judgement to the extent that Liddell Hart believed that amphibious assaults had become impossible.<sup>27</sup> However the experience of the Normandy landings and the Pacific Campaign during the

Second World War, the 1950 Inchon landing in South Korea and the 1982 Falklands war all suggested not only the viability of amphibious operations but also underscored its operational effectiveness.

The Indian maritime doctrine recognises amphibious warfare as an operation intrinsic to its capability.<sup>28</sup> Amphibious operations could potentially find a central role in each of the ten conflict scenarios identified in the doctrine.<sup>29</sup> Postulating the relationship between doctrine and strategy, the document titled “India’s Maritime Military Strategy” elaborates that “Doctrine is a body of thought, and a knowledge base which underpins the development of strategy”.<sup>30</sup> While there can be no argument thus far, what is problematic is the ability to bridge and characterize the linkage between doctrine and the military resources that are built up in circumstances when the development of strategies remain a dark area. Viewed from another perspective, this amounts to the maintenance of an amphibious capability without defining and distinguishing a contract for use.

India today maintains a combat sea lift capability of one Brigade, this facility is being built up to a Division size ability (by 2020) in terms of specialised ships, command platforms, escorts, surveillance and strike elements along with logistic support ships. The questions then are:

- Given a scenario, what best can be achieved by this amphibious force?
- Have we spelt out (in elaboration of the ten conflict scenarios) the specific contingencies in terms of circumstance and geography for use?
- Have we trained man and material and rehearsed for these contingencies?
- Have strategies been developed, Instructions and plans formulated (strategic, operational and logistic) to confront these contingencies?
- And lastly, are our command structures nimble enough to cope with the complexities of amphibious warfare, are they unified and is leadership at every level attuned to the unyielding demands of this form of warfare?

If the answer to any of these questions is in the negative or even conditional, then we have neither understood the quintessence of ‘Conjunct Warfare’ nor the perils of having to run the gauntlet of another Gallipoli.





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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup>From Greek mythology, Posiedon the God of the Seas had the power to stop time.

<sup>2</sup>Molyneux, Thomas More, *Conjunct Expeditions: or Expeditions that have been carried on Jointly by the Fleet and Army, with a commentary on Littoral Warfare* published by R.J Dodsely, 1759, London as quoted by Aston G. G Brigadier General in *Letters on Amphibious Wars*. John Murray, Albemarle Street, London 1911 p 2.

<sup>3</sup>Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Penguin Books Ltd, England 1986, p 23.

<sup>4</sup>Xenophon's *Hellenica* 2.1.17-32 and Diodorus' *Library*, 13.104.8-106.8.

<sup>5</sup>C. Ehrhardt, "Xenophon and Diodorus on Aegospotami", in: *Phoenix. Journal of the Classical Association of Canada* 24 (1970), p 226; G. Wylie, "What really happened at Aegospotami", in: *L'Antiquité Classique* 55 (1986), p 125-141.

<sup>6</sup>J.-F. Bommelaer, *Lysandre de Sparte*, Paris 1981, p 112.

<sup>7</sup>Deductions and inferences of the planning process based on reconstruction of events by the author.

<sup>8</sup>Plutarch's *Life of Lysander*. Turnbull and McNamara, Agathon Associates, 2005.

[http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Lysander\\_-\\_Lysander\\_establishes\\_himself](http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Lysander_-_Lysander_establishes_himself)

<sup>9</sup>D. Kagan, *The Fall of the Athenian Empire* Ithaca, New York and London, 1987, p 391; C. Ehrhardt, "Xenophon and Diodorus on Aegospotami", in: *Phoenix. Journal of the Classical Association of Canada* 24 (1970), p 227; J.-F. Bommelaer, *Lysandre de Sparte* (Paris, 1981), 110. The tactic was supposed to work as follows. One part of the fleet was used as bait in order to entice the enemy to battle. It was reckoned that the enemy would not be able to resist such a seemingly weak adversary. Shortly after impact the fleet would then retreat and entice the enemy into following. The remaining part of the fleet, which would be in waiting, would subsequently surprise the enemy by attacking them in their flank.

<sup>10</sup>Connolly, Peter. *Greece and Rome at War*. Greenhill Books 2006, p 40.

<sup>11</sup>Diodorus Siculus, *Library*. Book 13. Chapter 106. Sections 1-6. Translated by Oldfather C.H, Harvard University Press 1989.

Available at [www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu)

<sup>12</sup>These attributes are based on deductions and extrapolations made by the author; what is remarkable is how well these would fit into the planning of modern amphibious operations.

<sup>13</sup>Molyneux, Thomas More, *Conjunct Expeditions: or Expeditions that have been carried on Jointly by the Fleet and Army, with a commentary on Littoral Warfare* published by R.J Dodsely, 1759, London as quoted by Aston G. G Brigadier General in *Letters on Amphibious Wars*. John Murray, Albemarle Street, London 1911 p 4.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. Molyneux' treatise contains an exhaustive history of littoral warfare, its nature and value. Of equal importance is its analysis of the principles that govern the planning and execution of amphibious campaigns. Time has neither diminished its contemporary relevance nor provided an alternative to the theory that it develops.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid Part I, 3-4 and Part II, 5-8.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid Part I, vii, 3-4, Part II, 8,46 and the general theme of Part II.

<sup>17</sup>Cassar, George H. *Kitchener's War, British Strategy 1914-1916*. Potomac Books 2004, Chapter 5.

<sup>18</sup>Aspinall-Oglander C.F. *History of the Great War Military Operations Gallipoli Vol I Appendix 1 Lord Kitchener's Instructions to Sir Ian Hamilton*. William Heinemann Ltd London 1929, p1to3.

<sup>19</sup>Weigley, Russell F. *The American Way of War*. Indiana University Press Bloomington 1973, p 257.

<sup>20</sup>Travers, Tim. 'The Army and the Challenge of War 1914 - 1918' in Chandler, David and Beckett, Ian. *The Oxford Illustrated History of the British Army*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994, pp. 215 - 240.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid p 223.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid 223.

<sup>23</sup>North, John. *Gallipoli the Fading Vision*. Faber and Faber Limited London 1936, p 30.

<sup>24</sup>Aspinall-Oglander C.F. *History of the Great War Military Operations Gallipoli Volume II*. William Heinemann Ltd London 1932, p 61. Churchill in a memorandum to the Government justifying the Gallipoli campaign pointed out that the allies, by April 1915, had regained 8 square miles of territory for a loss of 300,000 men on the Western front; almost as if to suggest that a victory at Gallipoli was available on the cheap!

<sup>25</sup><http://www.kingscollections.org/catalogues/lhcm/collection/f-j/ha30-001/7/h0-0706>.

<sup>26</sup>McMurtrie Francis E. *Jane's Fighting Ships 1939*. Sampson Low, Marston & Co., Ltd. London 1939, p 23-64, 175-206.

<sup>27</sup>Weigley, Russell F. *The American Way of War*. Indiana University Press Bloomington 1973, p 256.

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<sup>28</sup> *Indian Maritime Doctrine, INBR 8*. Issued by Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Indian Navy) 2004, p 81 and 114.

<sup>28</sup> *Jane's Fighting Ships 1939*. Sampson Low, Marston & Co., Ltd. London 1939, p 23-64, 175-206.

<sup>28</sup> Weigley, Russell F. *The American Way of War*. Indiana University Press Bloomington 1973, p 256.

<sup>28</sup> *Indian Maritime Doctrine, INBR 8*. Issued by Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence Navy) 2004, p 81 and 114.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p 59. The ten conflict scenarios identified are: conflict in immediate neighborhood, operations in extended neighborhood, peacekeeping operations, conflict with an extra regional power, protecting persons of Indian origin, anti terrorist operations, fulfilling bilateral strategic obligations, preserving SLOCs, safeguarding Indian energy assets and humanitarian role.

<sup>30</sup> *India's Maritime Military Strategy*. Issued by Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Indian Navy) 2007, p 6.