



**A GUERRA E
AS GUERRAS
COLONIAIS
NA ÁFRICA
SUBSAARIANA**

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**THE OPPORTUNITY OF WAR.
SOUTH AFRICA IN WORLD WAR I: A CASE STUDY**

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Resumo: A Primeira Guerra Mundial providenciou a oportunidade para que as fronteiras fossem reconfiguradas e os sonhos há muito desejados fossem cumpridos. Lutando para proteger os «direitos das pequenas nações», a guerra permitiu inesperadamente que territórios controlados pelo Império Britânico, como a União da África do Sul, acreditassem que poderiam alcançar os seus objetivos. Este artigo explora a forma como o desejo de expansão territorial da África do Sul e sua relação com a Grã-Bretanha determinaram o seu envolvimento militar durante a guerra. Para além disso, fornece uma visão de como a África do Sul e os seus vizinhos se perceberam mutuamente e como as potências coloniais tiveram que mediar os seus próprios desejos territoriais contra os dos seus estados subordinados ou subimperiais.

Palavras-chave: África do Sul, Expansão Territorial, Subimperialismo, Objetivos da guerra

Abstract: The First World War provided an opportunity for boundaries to be reconfigured and long-desired dreams to be fulfilled. Fought to protect the «rights of small nations», the war unexpectedly allowed empire-controlled territories such as the Union of South Africa to believe they could realise their goals. This paper explores how South Africa's desires for territorial expansion and its relationship with Britain influenced its military involvement during the war. In addition, it provides insight into how South Africa and its neighbours perceived one another and how the colonial powers had to mediate their own imperial territorial desires against those of their subordinates or sub-imperial states.

Keywords: South Africa, Territorial Expansion, Sub-imperialism, War Aims

Introduction

It is often through war that latent long-term desires come to the fore as the opportunity of having them fulfilled becomes a distinct possibility. For the student of history, and probably a few other disciplines such as international relations and politics, war has one advantage and that is to speed up decision making, so that motives which could have taken years to discern are brought to the fore allowing actions to be seen for what they really are. As Carl von Clausewitz notes, «war is a mere continuation of policy by other means»⁷. Countries go to war because of decisions made by individuals who feel they either want to obtain, or to protect, something. Invariably, human nature tends to reduce these events to a single cause, but as many of the discussions in online forums⁸ around why war erupted in 1914 conclude, this is too simplistic. The reasons for embarking in conflict are complex – for big powers as well as small. The First World War, in contrast to many previous wars, involved not only the immediate protagonists in the conflict but, where they had an empire, also their subordinate territories.

Hew Strachan simply refers to the complexities of this relationship as «sub-imperialism», namely: «the ambitions not only of those on the spot but also of the semi-independent dominions of those on the spot»⁹. He appears to have taken his line from P.R. Warhurst in a 1984

⁷ VON CLAUSEWITZ, Carl – *On War*. Trans. Col. J. J. Graham. New and Revised edition with Introduction and Notes by Col. F. N. Maude. Three Volumes. 3rd Impression. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & C., 1918.

⁸ For example, World War I List (<http://www.gwpda.org/wwi-l.html>); H-Net (<https://networks.h-net.org/node/35008/discussions/54907/ann-h-german-forum-first-world-war-mulligan-december-2014>); Goodreads (<http://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/292600-origin-and-causes-of-the-first-world-war>).

⁹ STRACHAN, Hew – *The First World War in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. vii.

article entitled «Smuts and Africa: a study in sub-imperialism». In this, Warhurst defined South Africa's expansionist desires under Jan Smuts, and his predecessor Cecil John Rhodes, as «Pan Africanism»¹⁰. Ross Anderson, in his thesis on World War I in East Africa, picked up on the theme of sub-imperialism set by Strachan as «a key factor in determining the fate of the German colonies», whilst Anne Samson in her thesis on South Africa's role in World War I explored why the Union engaged in the war to the extent it did in East, Central and Southern Africa and how this impacted on its relationship with Britain¹¹. Developing on the theme of sub-imperialism, this paper will explore South Africa's involvement in World War I in Africa, looking at the opportunities the war presented as well as the challenges. As a case-study, it enables an understanding of the political complexities of war to be explored and how these impacted on the military direction of each of the participants.

South Africa goes to War

South Africa, as a country, was young. It had come into existence on 31 May 1910 and, as a subordinate country within the British Empire, was automatically drawn into the war when Britain's ultimatum to Germany expired on 4 August 1914. However, in line with the agreements between Britain and its dominions, semi-autonomous states within the Empire, it could choose the extent to which it was prepared to be involved.

¹⁰ WARHURST, P. R. – «Smuts and South Africa: a study in sub-imperialism». *South African Historical Journal*. Cape Town: UNISA Press, 16:1, 1984, p. 82-100.

¹¹ Both subsequently published as ANDERSON, Ross – *The forgotten front. The East African Campaign 1914–1918*. London: The History Press Ltd., 2014, 372 p. and SAMSON, Anne – *Britain, South Africa and the East Africa Campaign. 1914-1918: The Union Comes of Age*. London: IB Tauris, 2006, 262 p.

Although the Union of South Africa was still young, its four constituent parts were much older and when the Act of Union took place in 1909, many of their long term desires had become absorbed into Union aims¹². Most of these concerned land and therefore expansion. Externally, there were three big drivers for the Union, namely the inclusion of German South West Africa, Portuguese East Africa's port of Lorenzo Marques in Delagoa Bay and Cecil Rhodes's Cape Town to Cairo Railway line linked with the charter territories of Southern and Northern Rhodesia¹³. South Africans had been working on incorporating these territories for years and the outbreak of war provided the catalyst for overt attempts at realising these dreams.

When war was declared, Britain knew that South Africa would participate, despite the strong anti-British feelings within the Union, as the country wanted German South West Africa. Louis Botha, Prime Minister of the Union, had said as much to then British Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George in 1911. At an imperial conference in London, Botha had told Lloyd George that if an opportunity presented itself South Africa would take it to bring German South West Africa into the Union and Empire fold. This was despite many of his fellow Afrikaners feeling that the Union should support Germany and take the opportunity of war to declare the Union independent of Britain¹⁴. In this way, the two Boer states which had been defeated by Britain in the 1899–1902 war would be free again¹⁵.

¹² For background information on the formation of Union, see THOMPSON, L. M. – *The unification of South Africa 1902–1910*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1960, 549 p.

¹³ HYAM, Ronald – *The failure of South African Expansion. 1908–1948*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1972, 219 p. and NEWTON, A. P. – *The Unification of South Africa*. 2 Vols. London: Longmans Green and CO., 1924.

¹⁴ SAMSON, Anne – *Britain, South Africa*

¹⁵ The best overview of the Anglo-Boer War remains PAKENHAM, Thomas – *The Anglo-Boer War*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997, 688 p.

Botha's desire to include German South West Africa in the Union fold was to plunge the young country into rebellion two months after war was declared. Britain asked South Africa on 6 August 1914 to assist in putting the German wireless stations in South West Africa out of action¹⁶. For the most part, this would be a coastal action on the bases at Luderitzbucht and Swakopmund, however, the one at Windhoek would entail a land attack. On 7 August 1914, Botha's cabinet met to discuss the request and was soon divided over the invasion of German South West Africa – the reason being concern at opening old wounds which had been slowly healing. On being warned that if South Africa did not undertake the task, India or Australia would be, the cabinet unanimously, but reluctantly, agreed to support the invasion¹⁷. No action, however, could be taken until Parliament sanctioned it, which it did during the week of 8 September following the arrival of the new Governor General, Sidney Buxton¹⁸. It was shortly after this that the rebellion broke out as anticipated by FS Malan of Botha's cabinet. Following the suppression of the rebellion, the campaign against German South West Africa was re-launched in January 1915 and the German colony capitulated to the Union on 9 July 1915¹⁹. For the remainder of the war, South Africa administered the territory pending the final outcome of the peace talks.

¹⁶ The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA): ADM 137/9, Telegram Secretary of State for Colonies (SoSC) to Acting Governor General (GG), 6 August 1914.

¹⁷ South African National Archives, Pretoria (hereafter SANA): PM 1/1/12 4/37/14, Minute 9/15, 7 August 1914; SAMSON, Anne – *World War I in Africa: The forgotten conflict among the European Powers*. London: IB Tauris, 2013, p. 69.

¹⁸ The previous Governor General, Lord Gladstone had resigned his post in February 1914 and left the Union in early July 1914. Buxton had been Minister of the Board of Trade until the enquiry into the sinking of the Titanic in 1912/3. In addition to his role as Governor General of South Africa, he was also High-commissioner of the British protectorates in Southern Africa and of the British South African controlled territories of Southern and Northern Rhodesia. SAMSON, Anne – *Britain, South Africa...*

¹⁹ On the rebellion, see DAVENPORT, T. R. H. – «The South African Rebellion, 1914». *English Historical Review*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Vol. LXXVIII, Issue CCCVI, 1 January 1963, p. 73-94; SPIES, S. B. – «The outbreak of the First World War and the Botha government». *South African Historical Journal*. Cape Town: UNISA Press. Vol. 1,

Moving clockwise from German South West Africa are Northern and Southern Rhodesia. These territories were managed by order of a charter held by the British South Africa Company under the watchful eye of Lord Buxton, the South African High Commissioner who was also the Governor General. It had been envisaged that when the charter expired in 1915, the territories would be included in the Union and the Act of Union, 1909, had made provision for this. However, the outbreak of war was to thwart South Africa's aspirations as the rebellion and the rise of Afrikaner nationalism caused great concern to those resident in the chartered territories. The outcome was a delay in decision to after the war²⁰. Other factors which influenced the decision by the chartered territories, was the impact of recent South African policies towards its black population and economics. In 1913, the Union had passed the Land Act, which restricted the amount of land blacks in South Africa could buy, rent or own. It was disproportionate to the size of the population. The Act also enabled white farmers to remove blacks residing on their property who were not in employment²¹. This led to increased tensions in the Union, which, although they did not flare into rebellion, were enough to concern the neighbouring territories. The chartered territories, which also operated a white dominant patriarchal government, were slight-

Issue 1, 1969, p. 47-57; and for German South West Africa, see COLLYER, John Johnston – *The Campaign in German South West Africa, 1914–1915*. Pretoria: Government Press, 1937; NASSON, Bill – *Springboks on the Somme: South Africa in the First World War*. Johannesburg: Penguin, 2007, 300 p., gives an overview of South Africa's involvement in World War I including in Africa.

²⁰ SAMSON, Anne – *World War I in Africa...*; HYAM, Ronald – *The failure of South African...*; HYAM, Ronald and HENSHAW, Peter – *The lion and the springbok: Britain and South Africa since the Anglo-Boer War*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2003, 396 p.

²¹ PLAATJE, Sol – *Native life in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Bhekizizwe Peterson, Brian Willan, Janet Remington, 2016, 300 p. First published in 1916, Sol Plaatje explains the impact of the 1913 Land Act on black South Africans. HIGGINSON, John – *Collective violence and the agrarian origins of South African Apartheid, 1900–1948*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2014, 409 p.

ly more liberal in their approach to the treatment of their black populations. The Land Act was also to caution Bechuanaland (Botswana) and Swaziland about joining the Union, possibilities which had been on the cards pending the inclusion of the chartered territories into the Union²².

On the economic front, the board of the chartered territories was concerned about the long-term consequences of the territories not joining the Union as the territories were completely land-locked and relied on railway and road routes through the Union for imports and exports. Director Jameson, therefore, suggested to the High Commissioner that if possible, the chartered company would like to obtain a strip of Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique) to allow it access to the ocean. This no doubt, he reckoned, would clash with the Union's desire. And so it did²³.

The Union had long desired the port of Lorenzo Marques (Maputo) in Portuguese East Africa. For the gold mines in Johannesburg, it was a shorter, and therefore cheaper, route to the coast. The Lorenzo Marques harbour facilities were better than those at the Cape which were subject to storms and to Durban, which, at that time, was not very deep. There was an existing railway line between Johannesburg and the port of Lorenzo Marques, but because it ran through Portuguese territory, customs' duties needed to be paid. These would be done away with if the Union had control of the territory²⁴. Other considerations which made this territory attractive to the Union was the Limpopo River which would form a natural boundary between

²² SAMSON, Anne – *World War I in Africa...* and HYAM, Ronald – *The failure of South African...*

²³ SAMSON, Anne – *World War I in Africa...*

²⁴ SHILLINGTON, Kevin (Ed.) – «Maputo». In *Encyclopedia of African History*. London: Routledge, 2004, p. 943, provides an overview of the South African-Lorenzo Marques relationship; KATZENELLENBOGEN, Simon E. – *South Africa and Southern Mozambique: Labour, railways and trade in the making of a relationship*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986, 188 p.

an extended Union and the rest of Africa, thereby protecting the cattle trade from rinderpest and foot and mouth disease – diseases the South African government had worked hard to eradicate. A final reason for bringing the territory into the Union fold was the better control of manpower. For reasons of culture, blacks resident in South Africa were reluctant to work on the gold mines, whilst Shangaans in particular, who were resident in Portuguese East Africa, seemed quite happy to do so. As these men were resident in another country, their employment in the Union involved quite complicated agreements between the two countries and the companies involved as well as those recruiting the labour. Inclusion of the territory would, again, simplify this situation thereby increasing revenue for the gold mines and hence the Union²⁵.

In due course, Nyasaland (Malawi) could be incorporated into the Union, thereby creating tensions with neighbours which were currently one removed from the borders of South Africa. The potential incorporation of these front-line territories posed a threat to the Belgian Congo which feared South Africa wanted to take over the Katanga Region which bordered on Northern Rhodesia and which was rich in copper. Occupation of this territory would also enable Britain, to complete its Cape Town to Cairo railway route as envisaged by Cecil Rhodes in the previous century²⁶. German East Africa would, therefore, be on a future greater South Africa's border. It was for this reason that Minister of War and commander of the forces in East Africa 1916–1917, General Jan Smuts, used the need to protect South Africa as a motivation for South Africans to enlist in the Imperial contingent for service in German East Africa.

²⁵ KATZENELLENBOGEN, Simon E. – *South Africa and Southern...*; HYAM, Ronald – *The expansion of South Africa...*

²⁶ SAMSON, Anne – *Britain South Africa...*; WIENTHAL, Leo – *The story of the Cape to Cairo Railway and River Route from 1887 to 1922: the iron spine and ribs of Africa*. London: Pioneer Pub. Co., 1923.

South Africa, Britain, Belgium and Portugal

The neighbouring countries feared South Africa's desired aims, perceived or real, and this was to govern relations between the Union, Britain and its allies during the war. The fact that South Africa was a subordinate territory of the British Empire often meant that the ideals and aspirations of the two countries became conflated even when there was no clear indication that one partner had a vested interest.

To date, no convincing evidence has been found that the Union of South Africa was interested in the Katanga Region. This appears to be a purely British desire, linked to Rhodes' Cape Town to Cairo railway and the idea of painting the map of Africa red from north to south. During the war, June 1918, the Governor General and High Commissioner of South Africa visited Elizabethville, now Fungurume, in Katanga Region to dispel the myth that Britain was after the territory²⁷. However, neither this nor Jan Smuts's attitude towards the Belgian Congo military leaders did much to ease these concerns.

In 1916, the Belgians, having obtained control of Lake Tanganyika with British assistance²⁸, sought to occupy territory in German East Africa to use in negotiations with Germany to restore German-occupied territory to Belgium in Europe. The initial intention had been that the Belgian forces under General Charles Tombeur would co-operate with the British Lake Force led by South African General Charles Crewe. However, Tombeur, fearful of South Africa's intentions and not getting on well with Crewe, instructed his column command-

²⁷ British Library Manuscripts: Buxton ADD MS 87042, British vice-consul Denton Thompson to Buxton.

²⁸ FODEN, Giles – *Mimi and Toutou go forth: The bizarre battle for Lake Tanganyika*. London: Penguin, 2005, 256 p.; PAICE, Edward – *Tip and Run: The untold tragedy of the Great War*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008, 528 p.; CAPUS, Alex – *A matter of time*. London: Haus Publishing, 2013, 256 p.

ers to rush ahead of Crewe in order to arrive at Tabora first²⁹. This they did on 19 September 1916 and placed Colonel Justin Malfeyt in control of the captured town.

Smuts, though, pushed to gain control of the Belgian lines of communication as a means to regain a hold over the area. Although he argued that it was to assist Belgium, his reluctance to let the Belgians administer Tabora, Ruanda and Urundi was more to protect the Union's greater interests held by Britain³⁰. His persistence in wanting control of Tabora soon led to Britain asking its allies what they hoped to gain from the war; an action which put Britain in a controlling position when it came to the peace discussions in 1919³¹. For South Africa, the more German territory controlled by British Empire forces in East Africa, the greater were the Union's chances of obtaining the territories it really desired after the war – namely German South West Africa and Portuguese East Africa to the Limpopo, or even the Zambezi, River.

Ensuring a valid claim to Portuguese East African territory was more challenging for the Union than German South West Africa or even Tabora, especially as the former was Britain's longest serving ally; a relationship which dated back to 1386. At the start of the war, Portugal assumed neutrality at the request of Britain and on 9 March 1916 entered the war, also at Britain's prompting. In neither its neutral nor its belligerent state, could South Africa occupy the territory. This meant the Union had to find alternative ways to achieve its aims. It did this by declaiming Portugal's management of its East African possession³². Before Portugal officially entered the war, the Union

²⁹ DELPIERRE, Georges – «Tabora 1916: de la symbolique d'une victoire». *Journal of Belgian History*. Brussels: Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society. XXXII, 3-4, 2002, p. 351-381.

³⁰ SAMSON, Anne – *Britain South Africa... and World War I in Africa...*

³¹ Idem – *Britain South Africa...*

³² For example, TNA: CO 616/25, 26, 27, 28 various files.

wanted to search and claim shipping bound for and out of Lorenzo Marques as the Union politicians did not trust the Portuguese East African officials to uphold Portugal's neutral position and claims of goods being smuggled into and out of the German colony to the north was rife. The claims were not completely unfounded as the Danish/German captain of the blockade runner Rubens/Kronberg was able to return to Germany through the port³³.

As much as the Union objected and put its case to Britain to intercept mail and obtain control over aspects of Portuguese East Africa, the more Britain held its ground. Portugal was Britain's oldest ally and its neutral position was in response to a request from Britain as its involvement in the war would place greater pressure on the already stretched British resources. The Colonial Office was also aware of the British South African Company's interest in the territory and how British strategic occupation of the same territory would benefit landlocked Nyasaland³⁴. Agreeing to the Union's request would place Britain in a challenging position having to mediate between its allies and subordinates to its own possible detriment.

Liaison Officers and Agents

In the same way that Britain needed to mediate between its subordinates and allies, so individuals had to mediate between different priorities within the Union and its dealings with Britain's allies. In terms of the latter, the role of liaison officers, military attaches and ambassadors should not be underestimated and is an area requiring further research.

³³ CHRISTIANSEN, Christen P. – *Blockade and Jungle: From the letters of Nis Kock*. London: Robert Hale, 1940.

³⁴ SAMSON, Anne – *Britain South Africa... and World War I in Africa...*

Liaison officers played a significant role in the East Africa theatre mediating between the various forces. Ewart Grogan was, for most of the war, the liaison officer to Belgian Congo. His task was made more difficult when Smuts was in command, and for a time Grogan was withdrawn. It was only when Reginald Hoskins became Commander-in-Chief in January 1917 that relations were restored and the liaison officers allowed to continue their roles. When the South African General Jaap van Deventer replaced Hoskins in mid-1917, there was almost another break-down in relations purely because he was South African. However, this was avoided. The Belgian liaison officer to the British forces was Charles Huyghé. These men generally were able to find ways to move things forward, however, national priorities dictated the extent to which this happened.

An example is the rush for Tabora. It had been agreed that the Belgians would work with South African General Charles Crewe in the advance on Tabora. However, the Belgian priority to occupy German territory to use in negotiations with Germany at the peace table and distrust of South African intentions, meant they gave lip-service to this co-operation. The reality was that the two Belgian Brigades were instructed to rush their advance. They succeeded in arriving and occupying the town before Crewe was able to do much. Despite the Belgian occupation of Tabora on 19 September 1916, Smuts did what he could to bring the area under British control claiming that as the Belgians were reliant on the British for supplies and communications, to ease the situation everything should move to British control. The Belgians held their ground and Tabora; as Colonial Secretary Paul Hymans told the King: «the duty of the government is to speak loudly and firmly [...]. The country [will] never pardon its leaders for a peace without advantages and aggrandisements»³⁵. For all these differences and hiccups, the Belgians and

³⁵ Quoted in SAMSON, Anne – *World War I in Africa...*, p. 174.

British were focused on the same aim: the defeat of Germany and in this they were supported by those on the ground.

The relationship with Portugal and Portuguese East Africa was not as straight forward. Although Portugal was allied with Britain, the country internally was divided. It had become a republic in 1910 when the monarchy was overthrown, with the result that no one party was strong enough to hold power for an extended period. During the war years, the government changed roughly every six months which did little to help cement or develop a coherent military policy. This was exacerbated in East Africa where the Portuguese East African territory was governed by different governors or controllers of companies. These, too, were split in their loyalty with some openly siding with their German neighbours. This was not surprising from an economic point of view as they were reliant on each other for imports and exports. However, this was to have an impact on the conduct of the war as commanders sent to East Africa were not welcomed. There was little cohesion amongst the various military personnel and military posts were left to their own devices with little discipline being enforced. The result was the German overrun of various posts and the successful acquiring of much needed equipment which allowed them to prolong the campaign³⁶.

The dominance of the pro-German governors was partially overcome by the reappointment of Errol MacDonell as Consul. He had given up this post on the outbreak of war, and later, when Portugal officially entered the war, became liaison officer in March 1917. However, it was felt that he had less power as liaison officer and could do more to further Britain's war aims by re-assuming his consulate role. This he did and with great effect as noted by a German governor who complained about MacDonell controlling Lorenzo Marques. Major Azambuja Martins was his counterpart to General Hoskins from

³⁶ Idem – Ibidem.

April 1917, having previously been Chief of Staff to General Gill's expeditionary force³⁷.

MacDonell's appointment, although influential in controlling manoeuvres through the port, had no impact on Portuguese military efficiency; a situation which would result in an almost complete breakdown in relations between the two allies. Further potential complications were eased when Belgium decided it would no longer take offensive action after its involvement at Mahenge in October 1917. This left the British to manage the Portuguese separately. Portuguese commanders were under pressure to perform as Lisbon noted that: «Our prestige as a belligerent nation will be considerably diminished and our interests as a colonial nation prejudiced if an offensive against the Germans be not at once undertaken by the decided invasion of the territory beyond the Rovuma»³⁸.

After the Portuguese had been decisively pushed out of the Kionga – a section of the Rufigi Delta the Portuguese believed the Germans had stolen from them during the last century and pushed back across the Rovuma – Smuts was instructed to capture the territory before the Portuguese could reclaim it. This was despite all investigations by the British suggesting that the area was only good for smugglers³⁹. As van Deventer's forces moved south in chase of Lettow-Vorbeck who was approaching the Portuguese East Africa border in November 1917, he discussed tactics with the Portuguese about holding the Germans in check. However, Colonel Sousa Rosa's men were not up to the task, but for political and face-saving reasons he could not openly tell his allied counterpart. Martins felt it was because Rosa

³⁷ SAMSON, Anne – *World War I in Africa...*; ANDERSON, Ross – *The forgotten front...*; PIRES, Nuno Lemos – «Recordar o esforço Português em Moçambique durante a Grande Guerra (1914–1918) através da Revista Militar». *Revista Militar. Portugal na I Guerra Mundial – Operações em África (1914–1918)*. Lisboa: Europress – Editores e Distribuidores de Publicações Lda., ISSN 0873-7630. Vol. 66, n.º 5, 2014, p. 429-458.

³⁸ Quoted SAMSON, Anne – *World War I in Africa...*, p. 120.

³⁹ Idem – *Ibidem*, p. 122.

«was a very pronounced Republican and introduces politics into his military duties»⁴⁰. Despite the efforts of the liaison officers, including the use of a French officer, Colonel Viala, the outcome was the disaster at Nhamacurra which allowed Lettow-Vorbeck to continue in the field for almost another year. Smuts had tried to keep the Portuguese actions contained for political reasons while van Deventer tried to do the same for military reasons. Despite van Deventer's attempts to keep the Portuguese at bay pressure and counsel from the British War and Foreign Offices, and the work of MacDonell and Viala on the ground, enabled some semblance of unity to continue.

The End of the War

The end of the war and the ensuing peace discussions would provide the final opportunity for the Union to turn the opportunities the war provided into reality. However, each of the other powers had the same idea which continued the political struggle.

By the time the peace talks arrived, Britain was clear about what it wanted from the war – particularly concerning Africa. This had come about in response to prompts by Smuts in 1916 to wrest control of Tabora away from the Belgians. As a result of Smuts's questions and suggestions, the British Foreign Office approached each of its allies to ascertain what they wanted from the war. This meant that by the end of the war, Britain had a fairly good idea of what each wanted as a minimum and how this related to its own desires. The Dominions were included in this process, albeit in a slightly different way through the imperial conferences. Following Lloyd George's succession to the premiership, he introduced imperial meetings of

⁴⁰ ANDERSON, Ross – *The First World War in East Africa*. Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2001, Ph.D. thesis, 334 p.

the cabinet where war policy and other issues could be discussed openly between the various country representatives⁴¹.

Concern was expressed that if the German colony was returned to Germany at the end of the war, it would cause similar unrest in South Africa as had happened at the start of the war with the focus this time being «on the betrayal and neglect by Britain of those South Africans who had fought in the campaign»⁴². The Portuguese and Belgian interests were also discussed but felt to be negligible. The result was that

Belgium was to be deprived of the two areas it was occupying and apart from rounding off the Portuguese territory, it was felt no further territory should go to Portugal which was believed to have entered the war only to ensure its colonial territories were protected under the Anglo-Portuguese Agreement⁴³.

The weight of the British Empire was therefore clearly against Belgium and Portugal in terms of territorial expansion in Africa⁴⁴.

During these discussions, Smuts attempted to put in an official request for Portuguese East Africa. He «considered it very important to secure the elimination of Portugal from the southern part of her present East African territory», because «[t]hat territory had a seaboard of 2000 miles, a great part of which interfered directly with the natural development of the Union of South Africa and of Rhodesia». He

⁴¹ SAMSON, Anne – *Britain South Africa...*

⁴² *Idem* – *Ibidem*.

⁴³ TNA: CAB 29/1, Imperial War Cabinet meeting, 28 April 1917 Report of Committee on Terms of Peace (Territorial Desiderata) P-16, ff. 325, 333; India Office Records: Curzon MSS EUR F 112/180, 28 March 1917 CID 3rd Interim report (G118b), f. 69; FERREIRA, José Medeiros – *Portugal na Conferência da Paz, Paris, 1919*. Lisboa: Quetzal Editores, 1992, p. 17. The Portuguese delegate to the Peace Discussions refuted this allegation at the first meeting he attended.

⁴⁴ SAMSON, Anne – *Britain South Africa...*

noted that «[i]t had occurred to the South African Government that an exchange might be arranged by which, in return for the southern part of German East Africa, Portugal might be willing to cede her territory up to the Zambezi including Delagoa Bay and Beira». This, he continued, would be along the «lines of the secret agreement made with Germany in 1898». He acknowledged though that it was unlikely that the Portuguese would find the proposal attractive unless it «were supplemented by a money consideration»⁴⁵.

Britain was keen to rid itself of its Portuguese burden but it did not want to «lumber itself with a situation where an internally politically unstable subordinate country, South Africa, would be able to hold it to ransom at a future date»⁴⁶. This was a very real concern for the British government as the South African National Party, which had been formed in February 1914 and whose support of the rebellion had been tacit, had gained a higher than expected number of seats in the October 1915 national elections and had become a serious threat to Botha's more accommodating South Africa Party.

South Africa's overt attempt at obtaining the East African territory it desired fell foul of a stronger power: America. Its claim to the German South West African colony was undisputed although it was acknowledged in 1915 that America, and the other allies especially France, would need to ratify the position.

This left the peace discussions themselves as the final opportunity for South Africa to obtain the Portuguese East African territory it desired and was possibly the reason Smuts resorted to more subtle operations to achieve his goal. By the time the peace discussions arrived, however, there had been a change in personnel at the British Colonial Office which was more imperialist and favourable to Smuts.

⁴⁵ Idem – Ibidem; IOR: Curzon MSS EUR F 112/180, CID 3rd Interim report (G118b) 19 April 1917, f. 338.

⁴⁶ SAMSON, Anne – *Britain South Africa...*

By 7 May 1919 the decision had been made that the German colonies would not be handed back to Germany and that German East Africa would be awarded to Britain as a mandate. However, Belgium, on hearing this decision, objected which resulted in a series of semi-official negotiations happening outside of the formal Versailles talks. This was to prevent America from interfering in colonial issues. Lord Milner, Colonial Secretary, was called from London to take a lead on these and had to ensure that Belgian, Portuguese, South African and Indian desires were satisfied, alongside those of Britain⁴⁷.

Britain's desire for the German East African territory was to see the Cape Town to Cairo railway route completed; a move which would satisfy both Colonial and War Office aims. It was also known that the territory Belgium occupied was the most fertile in the area and would be an attractive bonus to the existing British territory. However, Belgium's demands on 8 May 1919 for a slice of East Africa meant that the Cape Town to Cairo route could not be completed. Milner therefore had his work cut out for him⁴⁸.

Baron Orts, Diplomatic Counsellor, explained that retaining the territory Belgium occupied «would complete the Congo Colony in many respects»⁴⁹. However, Belgium was really after territory on the West African coast which belonged to Portugal. Orts hoped that an exchange of territory would enable Belgium to obtain this piece of land. In return, Portugal could get a piece of German East African territory⁵⁰. Belgium would then be able to develop the harbour resulting in improved trade. But, as with Smuts and South Africa,

⁴⁷ Idem – Ibidem.

⁴⁸ Idem – Ibidem.

⁴⁹ *Paris Peace Conference*. Vol. III, 30 January 1919. Document reference 180.03101/25; BC-18; IC-128, p. 808-13.

⁵⁰ TNA: FO 608/219 (registry no 1501, file no 803/2/1), 1 February 1919 memo by Meinertzhagen for DMO, ff. 391-9; Bod: Milner 390, 21 February 1919 note by Stratchey, ff. 12-3; 27 February 1919 note from Amery, f. 14 and 26 May 1919 letter from Milner to Orts, f. 130.

Orts and Belgium did not raise this desire officially with Council members⁵¹.

Prepared with various minutes and papers setting out the minimum territorial requirements for the completion of the railway, Milner entered into discussions with Orts on 15 May 1919. According to WR Louis in Britain and Germany's lost colonies, Milner «told Orts in no uncertain terms that Belgium had blocked the Cape [Town] to Cairo route»⁵². He then set out to formulate a plan whereby all the claimants' demands could be met – at the expense of Portugal, which had not yet submitted its objections to the 7 May colonial allocation. In the end Britain had to surrender its claims to Urundi and Ruanda, but did retain the strip of territory required for the Cape Town to Cairo railway – a piece of land it returned to Belgium in 1923 as the first cross-Africa flight had been achieved and the land was no longer required for the railway⁵³.

During these discussions, Portugal requested an opportunity to state its case before the German East Africa mandate question was finalised. The request came in three days after Milner had presented Orts with his proposal⁵⁴. It was crucial that for the proposal to work, Portugal had to agree. If this did not happen, Belgium would keep Ruanda and Urundi which it would receive as a mandate⁵⁵. In essence the proposal was that Belgium would get the Portuguese territory it wanted in West Africa, Portugal would be compensated with territory in German East Africa on the borders of Northern Rhodesia and the Congo, while South Africa's claim for Delagoa Bay

⁵¹ Bod: Milner 390, nd. memo by Milner, f. 156.

⁵² LOUIS, W. R. – *Great Britain and Germany's lost colonies 1914–1919*. Oxford: Oxford University, 1967, p. 150. Louis has used Orts' diary to compile this section.

⁵³ LOUIS, W. R. – *Ruanda-Urundi. 1884–1919*. Oxford: Oxford University, 1963, p. 257.

⁵⁴ Bod: Milner 390, 29 May 1919 ps to memo, f. 181.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, 26 May 1919 letter from Milner to Orts, f. 130.

would be in the territorial alignments in the East. In «payment» for this exchange, Belgium would cede the German East African territory of Ruanda and Urundi that it received as mandates to Britain.

By 24 August 1919, it was finally agreed that German East Africa would be divided between Britain and Belgium⁵⁶. However, Portugal, which had been given the Kionga Triangle including the Rovuma River enclave as proprietor⁵⁷, refused to take part in the proposed exchange. The overriding reason can only be assumed to be prestige as Portugal had put in a request for finance to develop its existing colonial territory in East Africa⁵⁸. Colonel d'Andrade had said that public opinion would not tolerate Portugal losing the East Africa colony, but with the Portuguese governments changing as regularly as they were during the war, it is not clear that the public would even have been told what was happening in Africa, or have cared because of the focus on domestic issues⁵⁹. The territory Portugal was offered was undeveloped whereas the territory it was being asked to give up was well-developed with an economically strategic harbour and railways, which although Portugal claimed were for other countries' benefit, it at least obtained some revenue.

For South Africa, Portugal's decision meant that the Union's attempt to obtain Lorenzo Marques and round off its borders to the Limpopo River was at an end – for the foreseeable future. The Union had obtained German South West Africa but not in the complete way it had hoped. It was awarded as a mandate which meant that South Africa was administering it on behalf of the League of Nations for a fixed

⁵⁶ TNA: FO 608/216 (registry no 18287; file no 724/1/1), 24 August 1919, f. 106.

⁵⁷ TNA: FO 608/216 (registry no 19241; file no 724/1/1), 27 September 1919, f. 123.

⁵⁸ *Paris Peace Conference*. Vol. III, 30 January 1919. Document ref. 180.03101/25; BC-18; IC-128, p. 808-13.

⁵⁹ TEIXEIRA, Nuno Severiano – *O Poder e a Guerra 1914–1918: Objetivos Nacionais e Estratégias Políticas na Entrada de Portugal na Grande Guerra*. Lisboa: Estampa, 1996, 377 p.

period of time and had to fulfil certain obligations around its control of the territory.

The opportunities the war had provided for the Union to expand its territory had been lost and by the 1930s it was clear that the Union's territorial boundaries would remain where they were at the start of the war. The outcome eased pressure on Britain to allow the Union to take over the protectorates of Bechuanaland and Swaziland which in turn eased the decision in 1925 by the Rhodesian populations to join the Union. South Africa continued to attempt to include South West Africa as an integral part of the Union defying the League of Nations and later the United Nations, until in 1989 the ex-German colony became the independent country of Namibia.

The impact of the Portuguese decision in South Africa was negligible. South Africa had greater internal problems to cope with than to worry about what was happening on the international scene⁶⁰. The opportunity afforded by the war for the Nationalists to obtain their independence resurfaced in the peace discussions following statements by Britain and others that the war had been fought to protect the rights of small nations. The Governor General reported that when the end of the war was discussed in Parliament, Tielman Roos, a Nationalist politician at the time, surreptitiously requested that the old republics be given back their independence. In addition, when a vote of thanks for the South African armed forces was proposed, the Nationalists left the House⁶¹.

In addition, on 19 January 1919, the National Party Congress authorised a deputation led by Nationalist Party leader JBM Hertzog to the peace talks to meet with Lloyd George to request South Africa's

⁶⁰ BLM: Buxton, 2 July 1919 note from FS Malan to Buxton re Botha's concerns on Peace Treaty.

⁶¹ SANA: GG 649 9/84/73, 29 January 1919. Reports to Secretary of State: Parliamentary affairs to 19 Jan. 1919.

independence from the Empire⁶². Reluctantly, in June, Lloyd George met the deputation after he was threatened with bad press in South Africa. He declined their request as the party was not representative of the country as shown in the last election and set out how independent the Union was by having participated in the war. The loyalty of the Boers was further pointed out in their involvement in bringing about Union in 1909 and in suppressing the 1914 rebellion⁶³.

The other South African group to take advantage of the Versailles talks was the deputation of blacks led by of the South African National Native Congress, and including a member of the African People's Organisation, to obtain redress of their grievances⁶⁴. They were met by Leo Amery of the Colonial Office, rather than the Prime Minister. The presence of the two deputations in Paris highlighted the differences amongst the South African population and proved that Botha's and Smuts's attempts to unite the two white races had failed.

Assessment

As mentioned at the start of the paper, war provides opportunities which results in some gaining advantage and others losing out. Despite the German commander in East Africa not having been defeated, Germany lost its colonies due to the collapse of its military and political power in Europe and internally, respectively.

⁶² MALAN, M. P. A. – *Die Nasionale Party van Suid-Afrika*. Pretoria: Nasionale Handelsdrukkery, 1964, p. 52-53.

⁶³ Ibidem; PIROW, Oswald – *James Barry Munnik Hertzog*. Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1957, p. 80; HEEVER, C. M. van den – *General JBM Hertzog*. Johannesburg: APB Bookstone, 1946, p. 187-190.

⁶⁴ BUSH, Barbara – *Imperialism, race and resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919-1945*. London: Routledge, 2002, 416 p.

What to do with the colonies was to prove more contentious as the various allies struggled to realise their localised war aims on the African continent. The only country to obtain what it wanted from the struggle in Africa was Portugal which was awarded the Kionga Triangle without the restriction of a mandate. Instead of Belgium getting the territory it wanted, it was lumbered with two mandated territories it did not really want – Ruanda and Burundi. South Africa got German South West Africa but with mandate restrictions whilst Britain was awarded German East Africa minus the territory ceded to Belgium. Not mentioned in this paper, is the country which received the least for its contribution to the war in East Africa – India. India supplied a total of 47,704 men to fight in East Africa, many serving for two years and more in the harsh conditions alongside the other Allies. In addition the country supplied food, material and equipment. Yet, despite a request to be given German East Africa as an outlet for surplus population, it received nothing. India was not as strong a political force in 1919 as was South Africa and the other British Dominions, whilst Britain felt it more important to realise its European allies' requests over that of its African Dominion in order to reduce American interference in its areas of interest as much as possible. Arriving at this position required much patience, forceful discussion, political manoeuvring and time⁶⁵.

When Lloyd George presented the compromised settlement around the German colonies on 30 January 1919, he noted that the compromise to accept the mandatory principle had been agreed by the Empire Delegation team purely to enable a decision to be reached but that it did not represent their true feelings⁶⁶. Louis Botha, in a rare

⁶⁵ SAMSON, Anne – *Britain, South Africa...*

⁶⁶ *Paris Peace Conference*. Vol. III, 30 January 1919. Document reference 180.03101/24; BC-17 (Council of 10); MACMILLAN, Margaret – *Peacemakers: The Paris peace conference of 1919 and its attempt to end war*. London: John Murray, 2001, p. 51-52.

contribution to the talks, gave the reason for the compromise: one had to «give way in the little things to achieve the highest ideals»⁶⁷. Coming from Louis Botha, the quiet spoken Boer who had persuaded his followers to accept a harsh peace in 1902 at the end of the Anglo-Boer or South African War, this statement carried the day. South Africa, implied Botha in his speech, was once more prepared to sacrifice its dreams to ensure a lasting peace – South Africa would forego annexing German South West Africa in favour of a mandate so that the peace discussions would not falter. Botha's compromise meant that Australia and New Zealand had to sacrifice their annexationist desires too, especially as the three Dominions had agreed to stand together on the issue⁶⁸.

Conclusions

The war provided the small nations with opportunities they might not have had during times of peace and although the «Big» nations tried to organise, some might say manipulate, situations to their advantage, they were challenged by the smaller nations. Although the smaller powers might not always have got completely what they wanted, they had the opportunity to assert their rights as independent countries. The extent to which they did this was reliant on the individuals representing them and how they fought to achieve their goals. Whilst dealing with the international situation, they also had to balance their demands with the wishes of their internal populations if they, as individuals, wanted to remain in power. As seen in the South African case study presented, this invariably led to compro-

⁶⁷ HANKEY, Lord – *The supreme control at the Paris peace conference 1919: A commentary*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1963, p. 62.

⁶⁸ SAMSON, Anne – *Britain, South Africa...*

mises, some of which had unexpected consequences; having become Prime Minister after Louis Botha died in 1919, Smuts lost the next election in 1924.

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