

## The Years Of Stalemate

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### Rival strategies and the Dardanelles campaign, 1915–16

By late 1914 the state of deadlock on the Western Front had become clear to the governments of the warring countries and even to many members of their general staffs. Each side sought a solution to this deadlock, and the solutions varied in form and manner.

Erich von Falkenhayn had succeeded the dispirited Moltke as chief of the German general staff in September 1914. By the end of 1914 Falkenhayn seems to have concluded that although the final decision would be reached in the West, Germany had no immediate prospect of success there, and that the only practicable theatre of operations in the near future was the Eastern Front, however inconclusive those operations might be. Falkenhayn was convinced of the strength of the Allied trench barrier in France, so he took the momentous decision to stand on the defensive in the West.

Falkenhayn saw that a long war was now inevitable and set to work to develop Germany's resources for such a warfare of attrition. Thus, the technique of field entrenchment was carried to a higher pitch by the Germans than by any other country; Germany's military railways were expanded for the lateral movement of reserves; and the problem of the supply of munitions and of the raw materials for their manufacture was tackled so energetically and comprehensively that an ample flow was ensured from the spring of 1915 onward—a time when the British were only awakening to the problem. Here were laid the foundations of that economic organization and utilization of resources that was to be the secret of Germany's power to resist the pressure of the British blockade.

The western Allies were divided into two camps about strategy. Joffre and most of the French general staff, backed by the British field marshal Sir John French, argued for continuing assaults on the Germans' entrenched line in France, despite the continued attrition of French forces that this

strategy entailed. Apart from this, the French high command was singularly lacking in ideas to break the deadlock of trench warfare. While desire to hold on to territorial gains governed the German strategy, the desire to recover lost territory dominated the French.

British-inspired solutions to the deadlock crystallized into two main groups, one tactical, the other strategical. The first was to unlock the trench barrier by inventing a machine that would be invulnerable to machine guns and capable of crossing trenches and would thus restore the tactical balance upset by the new preponderance of defensive over offensive power. Such a machine had long been contemplated, and the early years of the 20th century saw the first attempts at a practical armoured fighting vehicle. British efforts were nourished and tended in infancy by Winston Churchill, then first lord of the Admiralty, and ultimately, after months of experiment hampered by official opposition, came to maturity in 1916 in the weapon known as the tank. Some of the British strategists, on the other hand, argued that instead of seeking a breakthrough on the Germans' impregnable Western Front, the Allies should turn the whole position of the Central Powers either by an offensive through the Balkans or even by a landing on Germany's Baltic coast. Joffre and his supporters won the argument, and the Balkan projects were relinquished in favour of a concentration of effort on the Western Front. But misgivings were not silenced, and a situation arose that revived the Middle Eastern scheme in a new if attenuated form.

Early in January 1915 the Russians, threatened by the Turks in the Caucasus, appealed to the British for some relieving action against Turkey. The British, after acrimonious argument among themselves, decided in favour of "a naval expedition in February to bombard and take the Gallipoli Peninsula (the western shore of the Dardanelles), with Constantinople as its objective." Though subsequently it was agreed that army troops might be provided to hold the shores if the fleet forced the Straits, the naval attack began on February 19 without army support. When at last Sir Ian Hamilton's troops from Egypt began to land on the Turkish shores, on April 25, the Turks and their German commander, Otto Liman von Sanders, had had ample time to prepare adequate

fortifications, and the defending armies were now six times as large as when the campaign opened. Against resolute opposition from the local Turkish commander (Mustafa Kemal, the future Atatürk), Australian and New Zealand troops won a bridgehead at “Anzac Cove,” north of Kaba Tepe, on the Aegean side of the peninsula, with some 20,000 men landing in the first two days. The British, meanwhile, tried to land at five points around Cape Helles but established footholds only at three of them and then asked for reinforcements. Thereafter little progress was made, and the Turks took advantage of the British halt to bring into the peninsula as many troops as possible. The standstill of the enterprise led to a political crisis in London between Churchill, the Liberal government’s first lord of the Admiralty, who, after earlier doubts, had made himself the foremost spokesman of the Dardanelles operation, and John, Lord Fisher, the first sea lord, who had always expressed doubts about it. Fisher demanded on May 14 that the operation be discontinued and, when he was overruled, resigned the next day. The Liberal government was replaced by a coalition, but Churchill, though relieved of his former post, remained in the War Council of the Cabinet.

In July the British began sending five more divisions to the peninsula, and a new plan was hatched. In the hope of cutting the Turks’ north–south communications down the peninsula by seizing the Sari Bair heights, which commanded the Straits from the west, the British reinforced the bridgehead at “Anzac Cove” and, in the night of August 6–7, landed more troops at Suvla Bay (Anafarta Limanı), farther to the north. Within a few days, both the offensive from “Anzac” and the new landing had proved ineffectual. More argument ensued in the War Council, and only late in the year was it acknowledged that the initially promising but ill-conducted enterprise should be given up. The evacuation of the troops was carried out from Suvla Bay and from “Anzac Cove” under cover of darkness in December 1915, and from the Cape Helles beaches in January 1916. The Dardanelles campaign thus came to a frustrating end. Had it succeeded it might well have ended Turkey’s participation in the war. In failing, it had cost about 214,000 casualties and achieved nothing.