Paradise in Peril. Western colonial power and Japanese expansion in Sout-East Asia, 1905-1941

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Chapter 2.

GREAT BRITAIN

2.1. Introduction.

This chapter deals with Great Britain, the only nineteenth century superpower deserving that description, and even Great Britain was in decline after its greatest triumph: victory over Germany in 1918. Not only the contemporary history of Great Britain in the Far East, but also Dutch-British relations in that region are covered here until the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The First World War left Great Britain utterly exhausted. The result was not only that Britain disarmed quickly after the war, but the loss of knowledge, experience and production facilities needed to rearm quickly whenever that need might arise was also an unforeseen consequence. Warships in particular take 5 to 6 years of construction before they can be brought into service. In foreign policy however, Britain acted as if it was still ruling the waves. This was especially the case in the Far East, where there was no longer sufficient British military or naval power available to challenge an increasingly aggressive Japan. In the end, Japan called the British bluff, with disastrous results for Britain and her close allies.

This chapter is an important one because the security of the Netherlands East Indies was directly dependent on a strong and well-armed Singapore base supporting an Eastern Fleet. When Singapore capitulated on 15 February 1942, the loss of the East Indies was only a matter of time. It is therefore of importance for Dutch readers to have an understanding of why the British decided to have a Singapore naval base in the first place and how this decision was implemented in the years between the wars. Because generally a superpower's naval strategy is directly related to foreign policy, then British foreign policy in the interwar years must be dealt with as well.

British interwar defence policies are covered next, dictated by political expediency as highlighted by the Ten-year Rule, and defined within the framework of the 1922 naval disarmament conferences at Washington and the one in 1930 in London. It resulted in the irretrievable loss of British naval superiority. The role the much maligned Treasury under Churchill and later under Neville Chamberlain played in that process is discussed. British naval strategy in the interwar-years was dominated by the concept of the "Main Fleet to Singapore", which in its turn was dependent on the availability of a fleet base at Singapore.

The origins of the Singapore strategy are discussed, as well as the repeated political interventions during the construction of that base, caused by its symbolic function for the security of the British Pacific Dominions of Australia and New Zealand and the "Jewel in the Crown": British India. At the important Imperial Conference in 1937, those dominions could still be kept pacified by reaffirming the Singapore strategy. As is discussed however, in time British promises in time became shallower due to the deteriorating situation in Europe. Secret talks with the U.S. Navy failed to fill the security gap as the Americans did not fall for the bait of an empty base. The refusal of successive British Naval Chiefs of
Staf to send even a single squadron of capital ships to Singapore made the British position in the Far East in the end untenable, and even Churchill's decision to send a "deterrent squadron" of 2 capital ships intended to tame the Japanese, could no longer change the situation.

In a separate sub-chapter the development of the Singapore base is discussed right from its inception. It was marred by the ongoing debate on air power versus battleships in the British defence establishment in the twenties. This resulted in delays which were not fatal for the base itself, but struck defence a fatal blow. In the late thirties, the defence of Singapore became dependent on that of the whole of the Malayan peninsula, including specifically the good landing beaches on Siamese territory, close to the Malayan frontier. However, Churchill refused to invest scarce resources in the defence of Malaya, believing that Singapore could hold its own as a "fortress", which it really couldn't at all.

The second part of this chapter is devoted to British-Dutch relations in the Far East.

The integrity of the Netherlands East Indies has always been paramount in the discussions on the security of the Singapore base. If those islands which were under Dutch rule were to be occupied by the Japanese, then they could invest Singapore at leisure. The security of these islands was therefore of paramount British interest. The British Government, however, remained deeply divided about the question of whether to extend a security guarantee to the Dutch almost up to Pearl Harbor. Moreover, at that time, contrary to common sense and opinion, the Dutch administration in the East Indies was not at all convinced that a close alliance with the British was in its best interest. It remained officially neutral and aloof therefore, even after May 1940 and the alliance with Britain in Europe. It put the Dutch Government in exile in London in a quandary, as its official policy was to obtain a British guarantee for the East Indies. In time, however, these internal differences were resolved, and although the Dutch Governor-General maintained a dignified political aloofness with respect to the allies-to-be almost up to Pearl Harbor, his naval and military commanders became deeply involved in attaining a common understanding with their allies. During an important series of Staff Conferences, called the Singapore Conferences which will be gone into in depth, this understanding was translated into common military goals and cooperation.

Interestingly enough, especially for British readers, even before the war in Europe had started, informal contacts between the two Dutch services and their British and Indian counterparts had been made. Although much original source material has been lost, enough has remained to elucidate a most interesting development which took place more or less illegally, without the official consent of even the Dutch political decision-makers but which laid the foundation stone for close military and naval cooperation later on. The final part of this chapter contains much original source material taken from Dutch archives, which may be of use for English-language historical researchers.

2.2. British Foreign Policy.

British foreign policy between the two World Wars was strongly influenced by the past, particularly by the nineteenth century. The basic principles of British foreign policy however are even older, going back to the Hundred Years' War with France. Great Britain exercised a stronger influence on European history than would have been thought possible considering its of its small population and its geographical size. Its force multiplier was its geographical position: an island astride the richest countries of Europe on the other side of the
Channel and the North Sea. As long as its fleet ruled the waves, Great Britain was safe behind both the "moat" of Channel formed and the expanse of the North Sea against any interference by any continental Power whatsoever. When the Royal Navy lost its command of the sea temporarily, as happened during the War of American Independence, the results were disastrous. Until Singapore happened, the lost battle of Yorktown was Britain's greatest military disaster.

A constant factor in British foreign policy was the "balance of power": the balancing of continental Powers in such a way, that no single one could become too powerful to challenge the British. The Dutch owe their existence as an independent nation to British interventions on their behalf, such as against the Spanish King Philip II during the Dutch War of Independence in the 16th century and against the French in the 18th and early 19th century. The Kingdom of the Netherlands anno 1813 was a British design to provide a counterweight to French aspirations.

British influence during the Belgian secession remained strong, and at that time they were not on the same side as The Netherlands. Britain "ruled the waves" during the whole of the nineteenth century but the rise of a united Germany in Europe at the end of that century coupled with the emergence of the United States and Japan as world powers at the beginning of the 20th century, changed the balance of power to the disadvantage of England. The fact, that the British Empire was spread all over the world made it more vulnerable than these emerging powers were. As Paul Kennedy has pointed out, Great Britain succumbed to "imperial overstretch". This became all too apparent in the period between the two World Wars, the period which will be considered in this chapter.

2.2.1. The Organizational context

The person responsible for the formulation and execution of British foreign policy was (and still is) a member of the British Cabinet, called the Foreign Secretary. He is a member of Parliament, as are all the cabinet members. The Parliamentary Undersecretary is his deputy, charged with the explication of foreign policy to the House, should the Foreign Secretary himself not be allowed to come himself if he happened to be a Lord. If both the Foreign Secretary and the Parliamentary Undersecretary belong to the same House, then Foreign Policy is discussed with members of the other House (in most cases the House of

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Lords) by one of the Cabinet Ministers, who belong to that House.578

The Permanent Undersecretary to the Foreign Office is the civil servant holding the highest rank in the Foreign Office, comparable to the Secretary General of a Dutch department. There were 68 functionaries on the staff of the Foreign Office in 1913 and as many as 102 functionaries in 1935, divided among different geographical departments. During the period under consideration, there were eight of these so-called Political Departments: American and African, Far Eastern, Eastern, Central, Western, Northern, Southern, and Egyptian. The Netherlands were part of the Western department until 1937, thereafter they were part of the Central Department. The Far Eastern Department formulated policies for their own area. Its chief, Charles Orde, was a far less powerful figure than his counterparts in the American and Western Departments.579

Like the diplomats at the embassies and legations, most civil servants at the Foreign Office were members of at least upper class society, if not of outright noble birth, and they knew each other from Eton and Harrow, Oxford and Cambridge. Although their professionalism had improved, the observation by a cynic in 1858 that foreign affairs was "a gigantic system of outdoor relief for the aristocracy of Great Britain" was still more or less true in the interbellum.580 In short, it was one of the "old boy" networks in English society and, as such, it frequently clashed with the politicians in the Cabinet and the Houses of Parliament, and also with that other "Old boys network" in each of the Service Departments, culminating in the Chiefs of Staff. In addition to a general lack of military expertise within the Foreign Office there was also a fundamental lack of insight in economic matters.581

A steady stream of documents and reports emerged from the legations. The number of despatches handled by the Foreign Office for example increased from 145,169 in 1926 to 223,879 in 1938, without an appreciable increase in the number of staff.582 These documents were read by all the members of the corresponding political departments, starting with the youngest civil servant, who added his comments and passed it on to his superior, and so on, until it reached the Department Head. He then decided whether or not the document should be passed on to the Permanent Undersecretary, who in his turn decided which documents had to be forwarded to the Foreign Secretary. Notwithstanding this chain of handlers, security in the closed society of the Foreign Office was self enforced and very strict. With the increasing workload, however, it is small wonder that, in 1939, the permanent Undersecretary complained in his diary: "Life is Hell."583

578 H.P. Waalwijk: Whitehall en Plein: de betrekkingen tussen Groot Brittannië en Nederland 1930 - 1940, Terneuzen 1985, pages 42 ff. This thesis will be subsequently referred to as Waalwijk.

579 Ann Trotter: Britain and East Asia, 1933 - 1937. Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge 1975, 9. This work will be subsequently referred to as Trotter.


582 Aster, op. cit. 8.

583 Aster, op. cit. 11.
The organization which coordinated the imperial defence requirements of this far-flung Empire was the Committee of Imperial Defence (abbreviated to CID). It was established in 1904 as an advisory body to the cabinet in order to avoid the shortcomings in communication and coordination between the British armed forces, which had become so painfully obvious during the Boer War. It was a permanent commission chaired by the Prime Minister, sub-divided in a number of permanent and ad hoc sub-committees, of which the Chiefs of Staff sub-committee (abbreviated COS) was the most important. In this permanent sub-committee, the three chiefs of staff of the three armed services regularly met under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. The coordination between the committees and the sub-committees was the task of the Permanent Secretary. Between 1912 and 1938 this was Colonel Maurice Hankey, whose tireless efforts made the CID one of the most important agents concerned with defining British foreign policy. The CID also concerned itself with appreciations of the defence potential and capabilities of foreign countries, and advised the cabinet accordingly. It was an extremely important body as it, in fact, defined the military limits of foreign policy as an independent counterweight to the Foreign Office which, as is discussed further on was, at times, not at all happy about the CID appreciations.

One of the important functions the CID secretariat fulfilled was the organisation of the Imperial Conferences, at which the Prime Ministers of both the British Government and of the dominions gathered to discuss policy relating to the British Empire. During the interbellum, those Imperial Conferences took place in 1921, 1923, 1926, 1930 and 1937 respectively. From these conferences emerged the different objectives of the foreign policy of each of the dominions, resulting in a breach between the dominions in the important and last Imperial Conference of 1937. At this Conference, Canada and South Africa were not very much interested in Imperial defence, and they were even less interested in the Singapore Strategy. This in contrast to Australia and New Zealand, who were directly exposed to the Japanese menace.

2.2.2. Personalities

The period from 1930 to 1940 saw four Foreign Office Secretaries come and go, namely Sir John Simon (5 November 1931 to 7 June 1935), Sir Samuel Hoare (7 June 1935 to 18 December 1935), Anthony Eden (22 December 1935 to 21 February 1938) and Lord Halifax (26 February 1938 to 10 December 1940). The latter was succeeded by Anthony Eden, who was one of the rising stars of the Conservative Party and was destined to become Prime Minister himself in the early fifties.

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584 For a very complete biography of Hankey, see the three volumes of Stephen Roskill: Hankey - Man of secrets. Collins, London 1974. For this study the most important volume is volume III, 1931 - 1963. This volume will be subsequently referred to as Roskill (Hankey).


586 For an in-depth review of the CID, see the UK Military History on the Second World War, the series edited by J.R.M. Butler on Grand Strategy, Volume I by N.H. Gibbs: Rearmament Policy HMSO 1976, 767 - 776. This volume will be subsequently referred to as "Gibbs".


Simon was one of the Liberal Ministers in MacDonald's national cabinet of representatives from the Labour, Liberal and Conservative Parties. He was considered to be an intellectually brilliant jurist but he lacked empathy and was very introverted. Sir Samuel Hoare, his successor, was a Conservative M.P. in Stanley Baldwin's equally Conservative cabinet from May 1935 to May 1937. In MacDonald's cabinet he had been responsible for getting the "Government of India Bill" passed, giving India effective internal self-government. Hoare had to fight his own Conservatives, of whom Winston Churchill, M.P., was the most vocal. After six months in office, Hoare was forced to resign due to his handling of the Ethiopian question. His successor, Sir Anthony Eden, grappled with the same problem but in addition he had to cope with not only the German occupation of the Rhineland (1936), but also with the Spanish Civil War and the growing threat Japan was becoming in the Far East. He was indeed "facing the dictators". In May 1937 McDonald retired from office and was succeeded by Neville Chamberlain, who had been Chancellor of the Exchequer since 1934. Chamberlain had been very interested in the Far East foreign policy during his tenure as Treasurer and when he became Prime Minister, confrontations with the Foreign Secretary were inevitable as he considered himself as something of an expert in that field. After a clash about the way Mussolini had been dealt with, Anthony Eden resigned on February 20, 1938. Since then until Munich, it was Chamberlain who executed foreign policy, by-passing the F.O. altogether.

Chamberlain appointed a new Foreign Secretary, whom he expected to be more pliant: it was Lord Halifax, Conservative M.P. of Ripon, Yorkshire. Halifax had been Vice-Roy of India from 1926 to 1931, and thereafter President of the Board of Education. Following his resignation in 1940 he became Ambassador of the United Kingdom in Washington. In his first year especially, Lord Halifax allowed himself to get completely over-run by his Prime Minister, who, for example did not invite Halifax to join him at the fateful Munich meeting with the dictators. Many historians consider Lord Halifax to have been the weakest of the four Foreign Secretaries of that decade.

The mainstay for every Foreign Secretary was, of course, the Permanent Under-secretary, who administered the Foreign Office and who, therefore, was an element of continuity. From 1930 to 1938, this post was held by Robert G. Vansittart, whose forebears originated from Sittard in the southernmost province of The Netherlands. He became known for his strong anti-German feelings. Vansittart was not very interested in the Far East.

580 Dutch Minister De Marees van Swinderen in London to Dutch Foreign Minister, 2 March 1934. ARA, BuZa Kabinetsarchief 341, 310/123.
583 Waalwijk, op. cit. 51, 52.
584 Vansittart however was not particularly proud of his Dutch ancestry. He visited Sittard in his youth and wrote about this visit: "I must say frankly that I was very glad that we had left the place, for even in my early youth it seemed to me far too close to the German border", in: Lord Vansittart: Lessons of my Life London, 1943. 17
585 See Lord Vansittart: Black Record: Germans Past and Present, London 1941, which is virulently anti-German.
concluded already in 1933 that "(our) resources were not sufficient to meet a menace from both Japan and Germany...and of the two, Germany was the greater menace." Due to his independence and strong convictions, combined with a sharp tongue and pen, he was soon in trouble with both Eden and Chamberlain. In 1937, he was "promoted" to the newly created post of Chief Diplomatic Adviser to His Majesty's Government, very much to his chagrin.

His successor as Permanent Under-Secretary was Sir Alexander G.M. Cadogan. Cadogan knew the Far East well because he had been Ambassador in Peking in the difficult period from 1934 to 1936. Eden moved him to the Foreign Office as Deputy Under-Secretary of State, where he remained until he was promoted to Permanent Under-Secretary as of January 1, 1938. Cadogan was one of Chamberlain's great admirers and he was far more pliant than the independent-minded Vansittart. Cadogan remained at his post until 1946.

2.2.3. Legations and Consulates.

Great Britain maintained a legation in The Netherlands at The Hague. The British Ministers from 1928 to 1933 were Sir Odo Th. Villiers Russell, from 1933 to 1938 Sir Charles H. Montgomery and from 1938 to 1948 Sir George N.M. Bland. In contrast to the British Government, which considered the legation in The Hague a second-rate position, the Dutch Government considered their Minister in London one of the key figures in their Foreign Diplomatic Service. The Dutch Minister in London from 1913 to 1937, Squire R. De Marees van Swinderen, had been Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1908 to 1913. He retired in 1937 at the ripe old age of 77 years. His successor was Johan P. Count of Limburg Stirum, a scion of Dutch nobility who had been Governor-General in the Dutch East Indies (1916 - 1921) and Minister in Berlin (1927 - 1937). He was 64 years old when he arrived in London, where he was to stay until 1939. In September 1939 he was in his turn, succeeded by Squire Edgar F.M.J. Michiels van Verduyken, who was promoted to the post of Ambassador to the Court of St. James in 1942. He had the distinction of representing his Government during the period when it was in exile at London following the German invasion of The Netherlands.

In the Netherlands East Indies, the British Government maintained a Consulate-General in Batavia with consulates in Semarang and Surabaya, Medan and Padang on Sumatra and Makassar in the Celebes. In Batavia, the British Consuls-General were W.R.D. Beckett (1913 to 1917), W.N. Dunn (1917 to 1921), Sir Josiah Crosby (1921 to 1931), and Henry Fitzmaurice (1931 to 1939). Fitzmaurice had held consular positions in the Far East, had been British Consul in Medan before his promotion to Batavia, and possessed extensive knowledge of the Netherlands East Indies. He was succeeded by H.F. Chester Walsh (1939 - 1942).

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286 Minutes 3rd meeting DRC, 4 December 1933, PRO/CAB/16/109.


288 Waalwijk, op.cit. 54

289 The Dutch Minister in London, Count van Limburg Stirum, considered Bland as too lightweight for such an important position. But the Dutch Government did not raise a protest and Bland was accepted. See Waalwijk, op. cit., 68
As indicated above, the British Government was not very impressed with the importance of The Netherlands on the world scene. This became exceedingly clear when, in early 1937, the Dutch Government approached the British with a view to promote the status of the Dutch and British Legations in London and The Hague respectively to that of Embassies. As a pretext the Dutch used the fact that the Japanese Government had also asked for their respective legations to be promoted to embassies. One of the Foreign Office civil servants, Sir Frederick Millar, commented "Is Holland, comparatively defenceless in Europe, and quite helpless in the Far East, really as important in world position if it came to a showdown as some smaller but more active and more strongly armed countries like Yugoslavia?" It was a comparison, to which the Dutch must have objected, as it was not exactly the way they felt about their own status in world affairs. They thought their rich colony in S.E. Asia made them an important middle-ranking Power. The official request by De Graeff, Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, addressed to Eden is an example of the self-sufficient and contented view the Dutch had of themselves and their international position. The Dutch request was politely turned down.

2.2.4. The Far East in British Foreign Policy.

British Foreign Policy in the Far East had been dominated by the importance of China. After the Opium War of 1842, Great Britain had acquired a window on China with the excellent harbour of Hongkong, which became a Crown Colony. The Boxer Rebellion against the foreigners in Peking in 1900 invited strong reactions from all western powers and from Japan, resulting in additional Chinese concessions being made to the West. Great Britain obtained a 99 year lease on additional territories around Hongkong and also obtained Wei-Hai-Wei on the Shantung Peninsula as a lease harbour.

The 19th century (after 1815) didn't present Great Britain with any fundamental threats as a super-power. It became known as "the British Century". By 1900, Germany, France and Russia had become real threats, so that for the first time since the Crimean War from 1854 to 1855, Britain felt forced to sign a defence pact with another country. This became the British-Japanese Alliance of 1902 which raised Japan's stature in western eyes considerably. It was Japan, which profited most from China's weakness once Japan had defeated Russia in Manchuria in the Russo-Japanese War from 1904 to 1905. Japan emerged in an even stronger position after the First World War, during which it had been allied to the British against Germany. After the First World War, thanks to a continuous effort, the Japanese possessed a first-class navy, which was the strongest navy in the Pacific. It even outclassed the combined American and British fleets in that area. British naval presence had been considerably reduced once the British-Japanese alliance of 1902 had been signed. In 1911 the alliance was extended by ten years, due to expire in 1921.

Japan proved to be a dependable ally in the First World War, chasing away the German naval squadron at Tsingtao and even assisting in the suppression of an indigenous uprising at Singapore in 1917. Without having received a British request to do so, they also

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399 For the debate on this question between the two Governments see Waalwijk, op. cit., 81 - 90.
400 Quoted in Waalwijk, op. cit. 87. Millar was son-in-law of Dutch Minister De Marees van Swinderen.
401 De Graeff to Eden, 1 February 1937, PRO FO 371/20754/52/56. See also Waalwijk, Ibid, 86.
occupied the German possessions both in Micronesia and in the Marshall Islands (see page 34). In 1917, at the height of the Battle of the Atlantic, Britain asked Japan to provide escort forces both in the Indian Ocean and in the Mediterranean in return for a promise that after the war Japan would have control over the islands in the Pacific previously owned by Germany. The Japanese provided a destroyer squadron for the Mediterranean but turned down a British request for a squadron of KONGO-battlecruisers to join the Grand Fleet in the North Sea. The United States Government was left unaware of this secret agreement which was revealed to them at the Versailles Peace Conference. This resulted in relations with the United States turning sour for more than a decade as the islands under Japanese mandate isolated the Philippines from the United States strategically, and made them practically indefensible.

It was the steady and unchecked economic penetration of Japan in China, however, which became the main problem facing British Foreign policy in the Far East. As Sir John Jordan, British Minister in Peking, stated to Prime Minister Balfour in 1918: "The Far East problem is the problem of Japan's position in China." Conversely, from the Japanese point of view, the problem was the continuous and, to their way of thinking, unwarranted presence of the United Kingdom in China. The British problem on the other hand was the reconciliation of bringing Japan's continuing penetration into China to a halt with the desire to secure Japanese cooperation in naval matters, at least up to 1921. The problem was compounded by growing Chinese nationalism in the twenties. In the post-war period, the British had been able to bask in the glory of the war which had been won against the Central Powers but it became increasingly clear to the Japanese that Britain was a giant on clay feet. The Foreign Office knew that too and played Great Power diplomacy in the Far East without any trump cards. A complicating factor was that relations with the U.S.A were somewhat strained after the Versailles Treaty. In American eyes, this was because of the role Britain had played by obtaining a Japanese Mandate for the ex-German Pacific Islands, and in British eyes because of the alleged desertion of the League of Nations by the Americans.

An important discussion went on in the defence establishment on the question of extending the 1911 Anglo-Japanese Treaty beyond its expiry date in 1921. The CID had considered the possibility of an outbreak of war in the Far East as early as in 1911, the year in which

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65 Gordon, op. cit., 64

66 Waalwijk claims, that Guam was obtained by the United States from Germany. See Waalwijk op. cit. 182. However, this is incorrect, as the United States did obtain Guam from Spain at the conclusion of the Spanish-American War in 1898. The U.S. at that time was not interested in the other islands of the Marianas, which were bought by Germany from Spain in 1899.


69 Ann Trotter, op. cit. 2, note 1.


the first treaty with Japan of 1902 was extended for another 10 years.\textsuperscript{610} Not extending the treaty, however, would have had serious consequences. In an initial document on the pros and cons of terminating the treaty, the Foreign Office concluded that the common enemy to both Japan and Britain in Asia, namely Russia, had disappeared so that there was no longer a solid common interest as such for both parties concerned.\textsuperscript{611} The F.O. even installed a commission in October 1920 to study all the arguments and numerous position papers on the subject were submitted both to the CID and to the 1921 Imperial Conference. The main argument, however, against the renewal of the treaty, as pushed strongly by Canada at the Imperial Conference, was that renewal would incite a worsening of Anglo-American relations, resulting in a disastrous naval race which Britain simply could never win.\textsuperscript{612} During this discussion, the CID introduced on 28 June, 1921 their plans for building the Singapore Naval Base. The Pacific Dominions were duly impressed.\textsuperscript{613}

The termination of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance had serious long-term consequences which were specifically those in the field of psychology. Japan felt rebuffed which resulted in the fanning of racial hatred. This in turn stimulated the militarists to seize power in Japan in the ensuing decades, with the explicit goal of establishing dominance in the Far East over the white supremacists already established over there, in Australia and in the United States.

The Anglo-Japanese Treaty was superseded by the naval treaties, signed at the Fleet Conference held in Washington from 1921 to 1922. (See Chapter 1, pages 32 - 33 and page 97). This conference resulted in three treaties which stabilised the navies belonging to the five largest naval powers in the world, and it also considerably reduced tension in the Far East. The Four Power Treaty legitimized the possessions of each of the signatories in that area. The Five Power Treaty (signed by the U.S.A., Great Britain, Japan, France and Italy) froze the battleship tonnage for a period of 15 years. The Nine Power Treaty recognized the territorial and administrative integrity of China yet did not abolish the extra-territorial rights of the Western Powers, this much to the chagrin of the Chinese.

2.2.5. Japanese aggression against China.

Japanese occupation of Manchuria after the Mukden-Incident (18 september 1931) led to a short arms embargo of Britain against Japan in February 1933, lasting only 2 weeks which was quickly dropped because no other Western nation followed suit. An economic blockade was therefore not seriously contemplated.\textsuperscript{614} Japan's notice that year to leave the League of Nations highlighted the lack of collective security in the Far East and exposed British nakedness in that area. Moreover the F.O. knew full well what the complicity of the \\textit{Gaimusho} (Japanese Foreign Affairs Ministry) in the Manchurian crisis

\textsuperscript{610} "Australia and New Zealand" Memorandum by CID, 3 May 1911, CID Paper No 78-C, PRO CAB/4.

\textsuperscript{611} F.O. Paper for CID: "Anglo-Japanese Alliance" 23 March 1920, CID Paper No 122-C.


\textsuperscript{613} W. David McIntyre: The Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base. MacMillan, London 1979, 29 - 30. To be referred subsequently as McIntyre.

\textsuperscript{614} FO Minute by Ch. Orde, 9 May 1933, FO 371/17167[F3128], also Ann Trotter, op. cit. 5.
meant, as the Intelligence service had broken the Japanese diplomatic code (See subchapter 3.4).

An alternative to appeasing Japan was, of course, closer cooperation with the United States. The British, however, had found the Americans highly uncooperative during the Manchurian crisis. America too had a great deal at stake in China and this inhibited the pursuit of too blatant a policy of appeasement towards Japan, as was advocated by the Treasury under Chamberlain.816 For Britain it was clear, that they could ill afford to appease Japan at the expense of quarrelling with the United States, thereby excluding the possibility of obtaining American support in the looming war with Germany and perhaps even Italy. As Gilchrist stated: "Would it not be better to fight three enemies with America on our side, rather than two without?"816 The Manchurian crisis resulted in the relations between Great Britain and the United States deteriorating even further; those relations had been been problematical from the twenties.817 This undermined the shaky framework of the Washington agreements all the more. A Japanese naval challenge after expiration of the Five Power Treaty in 1937 could only be met by Britain in combination with the United States. There was, however, no consensus for such cooperation as yet.818

A major failure of British foreign policy was the handling of the Abyssinian crisis in 1935. In the twenties and early thirties Italy had been friendly towards Great Britain, which gave the Singapore strategy a credibility which was lost forever after Britain's condemnation of Italy both inside and outside the League of Nations. The ultimate British recognition of the Italian conquest could not restore the relationship to what it had been before the crisis. The awkward handling of the Abyssinian crisis by Sir Samuel Hoare ended his political career and resulted in the unpleasant fact that the Royal Navy now had to face three formidable potential enemies instead of two.819

When he became Prime Minister in May 1937, Neville Chamberlain started a "peace offensive" towards the Japanese, convinced as he was that the main threat to British security lay in Western Europe. He was supported by the British First Sea-Lord, Sir Ernie Chatfield, who watched the growing risk of a simultaneous naval war with Germany, Italy and Japan with dismay.820 Talks started with Mamoru Shigemitsu, Japanese Ambassador in London. This caused real unrest with the Dutch Government, who asked their Minister in London to report on the progress of this rapprochement. The Minister held talks with the F.O. on 1 July 1937 and later informed his Government that the F.O. was not very...

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818 Ann Trotter, op. cit. 16


821 Gordon, op. cit., 66 - 69, 71.
keen on such plans towards a rapprochement. As we now know, these tentative feelers were consequently torpedoed by the Japanese themselves as a result of the incident at the Marco Polo Bridge on 7 July 1937. (See Chapter 6, 644 - 645) Chamberlain however remained convinced that the appeasement of Japan was the best course, as is shown by his reaction to Roosevelt's "Quarantine Speech" of 5 October 1937. (See page 35) In that speech, Roosevelt edged towards an economic and perhaps even a naval blockade of Japan. Chamberlain wrote about this speech to his sister Hilda: "Now in the present state of European affairs with the two dictators in a thoroughly nasty temper we simply cannot afford to quarrel with Japan."

The lack of mutual understanding between Great Britain and the United States became painfully obvious, when the British Government approached their US counterpart to try to get a coordinated response agreed on to the Japanese aggression in China after the incident at the Marco Polo Bridge. American Secretary of State Cordell Hull rebuffed the English diplomatic approach in a rather unpleasant way.

Economically, China was an enormous potential market. However, the interest shown in China by the western powers was out of all proportion both to the value and volume of trade passing her borders and also regarding total foreign investments. After almost a century of attempted Western exploitation, only 2% of world trade went to China. Due to continuing internal unrest, China's potential remained unrealized as greater profits involving fewer risks could be made elsewhere. In 1933, China absorbed 2.5% of British exports and held 5.9% of British foreign investments, with a value totalling £244 million, of which 70% was in Shanghai. Japan had invested about £234 million in China including Manchuria but that represented about 80% of her foreign investments (of which, however, 63% was in Manchuria). In normal times, China took 20% of Japan's exports and similarly Japan was China's best customer. Japan had a higher stake in China therefore than the United Kingdom. British investments in Argentina for example were higher than they were in China. In the last resort, however, Britain's determination to stay in China was not so much related to economic considerations as to the repercussions which a British withdrawal would have had, not only upon the empire (Australia and India) but also on the rest of the world. If Japan's ambition in China could be resisted, then Britain's trade and investments would be saved, and what was even more important, was that the myth about Britain's imperial power might have been sustained. Therefore, the game of poker went on,

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621 Handwritten letter De Marees van Swinderen to MinBuZa with report of discussion with C. Orde, 1 July 1937, no 1397/470. Archief Gezantschap Londen, ARA plaatsingscode 2.05.44, inv. nr. 844.


623 Letter from Neville Chamberlain to Hilda, 9 October 1937. Chamberlain Papers, NC18/1/1023, Birmingham University Library, as quoted in Peter Lowe, op. cit., p. 28.


625 Ann Trotter, op.cit. 18

In this power game, the British also solicited Dutch assistance. On 31 December 1937, Anthony Eden as Foreign Minister had a long talk with Dutch Minister Count Van Limburg Stirum. Eden asked the Dutch Government for a démarche at the American Government to support a British request to get American warships sent to Singapore, in order to give a signal to Japan. (See also page 189). Eden expressed his fear of a Japanese coup de main against Hongkong, which the British were powerless to thwart, and unveiled British plans to send a major part of the British Mediterranean Fleet to Singapore, even though he confirmed what the Admiralty's opinions were. They considered that the fighting qualities of the Japanese Navy were not of a high order but that their superiority in numbers of ships was just too great!

One of the unexpected results of the perceived lack of British action against Japan was the gradual realisation by Dutch Government circles, that because the English did not intervene in China, they might be even less inclined to do so, should Japan show any aggression towards the Netherlands East Indies. British investments in the East Indies were only half of those in China. The Dutch Minister in London reported to his Government: "Shanghai has educated us that we do not have to expect anything from the English in a comparable case. They may effect measures to help their subjects, but they will not come to our assistance!"

The Japanese atrocities in China resulted in a League of Nations conference in Geneva in September 1937. As the Japanese were not present and as no agreement could be reached on any collective actions, it was suggested that a conference should be held for the signatories of the 1922 Nine-Power treaty of Washington. The Dutch Government was approached to host the conference in The Hague, but it refused because of the sensitivity of the whole issue. The Dutch suggested getting Belgium to organise the conference in Brussels as Belgium had no colonial possessions in the Pacific but was one of the signatories. The Nine-Power Conference did, in fact, convene in Brussels on 3 November 1937. Ominously, the Japanese Government declined the invitation to show up there. (See also page 36).

The conference gave the participants the chance to sound out each other's positions. The British Government was represented by Anthony Eden and Malcolm McDonald, the Secretary of Dominion Affairs. The American Government elected to send Norman Davis, Under-Secretary of State, and Dr. Stanley Hornbeck, the Far Eastern expert in the State Department. Lengthy consultations took place between the American and British delegations. The conference ended in failure on 24 November, as the two major powers could not

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828 Letter Graaf van Limburg Stirum to MinBuZa, 31 December 1937, ARA Dept of Colonies I, accession number 2.10.36.051, inv.nr.509, File 11/1/1938 L-1. The British account of this conversation is at the PRO, F.O. 371/21025[F11776/59761].

829 Letter Minister to MinBuZa, 19 August 1937, no 1798/625, ARA Archief Gezantschap Londen, plaatsingscode 2.05.44, inv. nr. 844.

830 Letter of Dutch Minister Foreign Affairs to Minister in London, 19 October 1937, no 6813/807 (K.A.) ARA Archief gezantschap Londen, plaatsingscode 2.05.44, inv. nr. 844.
agree on any common plan of action. The intended goal of obtaining a settlement within the framework of the 1922 Nine-Power Treaty proved unrealistic. The idea of holding such a conference under the prevailing international circumstances proved to be a mistake. The result was a feeling of helplessness, permeating the delegates attending the conference. Eden concluded that the United States Government did not have any clear policy in mind with regard to the Japanese. Moreover, it became obvious to the British Government from the talks between Hornbeck and Sir Robert Clive (British Ambassador in Brussels, who had previously been Ambassador in Tokyo) that Hornbeck was seriously underestimating the Japanese.

2.2.6. The Tientsin Crisis.

The gradual Japanese occupation of the Chinese littoral after the incident at the Marco Polo-Bridge isolated the International concessions in China quite unexpectedly, and made those concessions fairly safe havens for Chinese guerilla forces once the Chinese had reverted to that kind of warfare. This, in turn, caused countermeasures to be taken by local Japanese military commanders, resulting in increased tension between Japan and the western powers, nicely playing into the hands of the military extremists in Tokyo. Tension was particularly high in Tientsin. On 9 April 1939, Chinese guerillas murdered the Chinese manager of the Japanese-sponsored Federal Reserve Bank. The British local police arrested four suspects but refused to hand them over to the Japanese. The matter of their custody then became a real argument both with the Japanese and internally within the F.O., where ambassador Clark Kerr in Chungking strongly argued against the suspects being transferred to the Japanese. On 14 June, the Japanese went into action: the concession was blockaded and British subjects entering or leaving the compound were stopped, searched and maltreated. Public opinion in both Britain and Japan was incited by the affair, and the outbreak of war with Japan became a serious and realistic possibility.

The COS indicated, however, that it was impossible to send more than two capital ships to Singapore (See also p.170). A conciliatory note therefore had to be agreed on with the Japanese when negotiations started in Tokyo on 15 July, 1939 but publicly (in the Commons) Prime Minister Chamberlain declared that, under certain circumstances, a Fleet could be sent to the Far East. The explosive situation was saved rather unexpectedly by two events which happened simultaneously. The first was the Nazi-Soviet Pact

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832 See especially The Eden Memoirs: Facing the Dictators, op. cit. 536 - 540.

833 Clive reported to the Foreign Office, that according to Hornbeck "Britain was too cautious and that Japan did not constitute a serious threat to Britain and the United States" Clive to Eden, 2 November 1937, FO 371/21016[F9046/6799/10].

834 See P.C. Lowe: Origins, op. cit. 78 passim.


announced on 22 August 1939, shaking the Japanese Government profoundly and causing
the resignation of the Hiranuma Cabinet. The second was the beating which the Japanese
Kwantung Army in Manchuria took at the hand of Soviet forces at the battles around
Nomonhan on the Mongolian border, where an undeclared war had been raging for several
months during the summer of 1939. The destruction of an entire Japanese division
(the 23rd Infantry Division) by the Russians caused even the most obdurate warmonger to
pause for some reflection. It resulted in an agreement with the Japanese on Tientsin
which at least, for a while, saved face on both sides. The Craigie-Arita Agreement was,
however, the Far Eastern equivalent of Munich. Sir Robert Craigie was the British
Ambassador in Tokyo at that time and he was most directly confronted with the lack of
clear Foreign policy objectives towards the Far East by both PM Chamberlain and the F.O.
in 1938 - 1940. The agreement reached resulted in the handing over of four Chinese
suspects to the Japanese without them being given any guarantee of a fair trial and also
leaving financial matters to further discussions, causing an outcry not only from the British
Press, Church leaders and the Chinese Government, but also from the public.

The Tientsin crisis was the last time that Britain defied the Japanese without consulting the
United States. It has been pointed out that the reason for British steadfastness had to
do with the availability of information about Japanese foreign policy intentions, thanks to
the Japanese diplomatic code having been cracked in the early thirties. The knowled-
ge that the Japanese government considered that the Soviet-Union rather than Britain
were really the main enemy might thus have embolden the F.O. Anyway, it was only
due to a coincidence of outside events that an Anglo-Japanese war, which was awfully
close in 1939 was averted.

After the Tientsin incident, Europe took first place in British strategy. Calvocoressi has
pointed out, that Japanese commanders at Tientsin had shown considerable restraint as
they could easily have overrun the small British garrison at any time. Lieutenant-General
Masaharu Homma was commander of the Japanese forces in North China at that time.
Homma was later to become conqueror of the Philippines. He had been Military Attaché in
London in the early thirties, and he was reported to be less anti-British than other
Japanese generals such as his Chief of Staff Lieut.-Gen. Tomoyuki Yamashita, the future
conqueror of Singapore.

638 The best description of the Nomonhan battle which was crucial in shaping the destiny of the major
powers in the coming world conflagration is in Alvin D. Cox: Nomonhan: Japan against Russia, 1939. 2
639 Aron Shai: "Was there a Far Eastern Munich?" Journal of Contemporary History, 9:3, July 1974, 161 -
170.
640 See Donald Cameron Watt: "Chamberlain's Ambassadors" in Dockrill & McKercher, op. cit., 141 - 142.
641 Aron Shai, ibid., 168.
642 N.R. Clifford, op. cit., 146 - 147, 149.
644 P. Calvocoressi, op. cit. 868
Once the Japanese had recovered from the shock of the Russo-German Pact (22 August 1939), they once again pushed southwards in order to isolate China even further. McIntyre has pointed out that Japanese foreign policy was far more predictable in that respect in a way that the Pearl Harbor attack was not. Japan systematically yet prudently used every opportunity it was offered by the weakening of the colonial powers due to events in Western Europe. The invasion of Holland by the Germans was immediately followed by far-reaching demands being put on the Netherlands East Indies Government for economic co-operation. Both the fall of France and the entry of Italy into the war in June 1940 led to Japanese pressure on the British to close the Burma-road, and in September 1940 to the occupation of Northern Indochina.

Britain had to bow with the wind. Under those circumstances there was no other viable possibility. On 18 July 1940, the British Government informed the Dutch Government in exile that Britain had no other choice than to appease Japan. The Burma road was duly closed for three months.

2.3. British Defence Policies.

In a democracy, defence policy is generally a derivative of foreign policy. In Great Britain however, due to the catastrophic loss of life during the Great War, defence policy became a derivative of internal policy once the war was ended. Defence expenditures were dramatically decreased following the Versailles Treaty. This resulted in the Royal Navy being unable to fight a future three-ocean war with a one-ocean navy, thereby losing the capability to rule the waves. Although the pace of rearmament was speeded up after 1935, the capability to increase defence forces at short notice up to the force levels required had been irretrievably lost in the interwar years. This sub-chapter deals with the question of how this could have happened.

2.3.1. Defence policy formulation.

As seen above, the CID was charged with formulating British Defence policies. The most important CID subcommittee, which in effect took over its charter, was the Chiefs of Staff (COS) sub-committee. It consisted of the Chiefs of Staff of each of the three services. During the few first years after the end of the First World War endless squabbling between the three Chiefs of Staff took place, revealing strong interservice rivalry. The introduction of the Ten-Year Rule on 15 August 1919 (See below) brought about a strong grip by the Treasury on defence spending. Each Chief of Staff tried to get a piece of the shrinking cake, which was as large as possible. In addition there was the great argument going on between airpower fanatics and those who believed in battleships, an argument which was raging worldwide in all defence establishments possessing a navy, from small powers such as The Netherlands to sizable powers such as Great Britain and the United States.

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645 W. David McIntyre, op.cit. 165.

646 Report on meeting between Dutch Minister Michiels van Verduynen and Undersecretary of State R.A. Butler, 18 July 1940, no 2290/613, Secret Archives MinBuZa, Pol.reports from London no 1, box 26, file 301.

Interservice rivalry became so strong that in 1922, at the Chanak crisis, Lloyd George received contradictory plans from the COS, lacking any co-ordination and bringing back memories of the disastrous rivalries which had previously ruined the Gallipoli campaign. As a result, Bonar Law, who succeeded Lloyd George as Prime Minister in October 1922, installed a special CID committee chaired by the Marquess of Salisbury and charged it "to enquire into the questions of National and Imperial Defence". In June 1923 the Salisbury Committee presented its recommendations. One important recommendation, which was indeed later implemented, stated that the COS should share collective responsibility for advice on defence policy as a whole.

In 1926, the COS Committee delegated some of their responsibilities to a Joint Planning Sub-committee (JPS), which consisted of the Director of Plans of each of the three Services, and their Deputies. The Joint Intelligence Sub-committee (JIS), consisting of the three Directors of Intelligence and chaired by a Foreign Office representative, was established in 1936. These two subcommittees gave the COS the support of the equivalent of a General Staff. One of the ways to reinforce the Chiefs of Staff's collective responsibility was to institute the Chiefs of Staff Annual Review, the first of which was published in 1926. In this Review the COS assessed Britain's strategic commitments and highlighted the inadequacy of its forces to meet them, a pattern which was to be continually repeated for more than ten years. It all resulted from the so-called "Ten-Year Rule".

The Ten-Year Rule had been formulated by the War Cabinet on 15 August 1919, in response to an Admiralty request for guidance in drawing up the Naval Estimates for 1920/1921. The ruling was as follows: "It should be assumed for framing revised estimates, that the British Empire will not be engaged in any great war during the next ten years, and that no Expedtionary Force is required for this purpose."

The Expeditionary Force was the army intended to be sent to the continent in case of need, such as the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) of 1914. The Ruling, therefore, not only affected the navy but also the army. Although it had been intended for just one year, it was invariably renewed annually until, in 1928, Winston S. Churchill, Chancellor of the Exchequer, made it into a permanent on-going assumption. The ruling gave the Treasury an iron grip on defence expenditure during the twenties and early thirties, until it was discontinued after Germany and Japan left the League of Nations in 1933. It were the COS, who blew the whistle on the Ten Year Rule in their 1932 Annual Review. In the wake of Japan's invasion of Manchuria, they stated that instead of "no war for ten years, war might actually begin tomorrow!" Even then, however, the Treasury warned that the
levels of expenditure considered necessary by the service ministries were too high.\textsuperscript{563} The Labour Cabinet officially abolished the Ten Year Rule at its meeting on 23 March 1932 but as Hamill\textsuperscript{564} has pointed out, the Cabinet did nothing afterwards to increase defence spending. They even decided to await the results of the 1934 Geneva Disarmament Conference, lifting the ruling only when the lack of concrete results from the said conference would have meant a further delay in re-armament of 18 months.

In hindsight, the Ten Year Rule had had a nefarious influence on Great-Britain's readiness to face its enemies later on in the decade, especially as it had caused the loss of Britain's industrial capacity to continue providing the country with state-of-the art weaponry in adequate quantities.

Another factor which caused considerable delay in British rearmament was the second Labour Government which came into power after the general election on 30 May 1929. One of the first actions that Ramsay MacDonald, Prime Minister, undertook was to respond positively to American President Hoover's tentative feelers about the reconvening of the signatories of the Washington Five Power Treaty in order to extend shipping tonnage ratios to include cruisers and other light craft. An attempt to do so at Geneva in 1927 had floundered not only because the British had insisted on 70 cruisers, but also due to the fairly strong anti-British views held by Admiral W.S. Benson, the American CNO. This clash had considerably soured American-British relations.

The conflict between the U.S. Navy and the Royal Navy on the cruiser issue was mainly caused by doctrinaire differences. The Royal Navy needed a large number of light cruisers to protect the Empire's long lines of communications.\textsuperscript{565} The United States Navy needed heavy cruisers to wrest control over the seas against the enemy according to Mahanian principles. No agreement could therefore be reached at Geneva.\textsuperscript{566} The Conference failed and resulted in hard feelings between the two English speaking nations, which were to gradually disappear after the successful London Conference of 1930.

In February 1929 a U.S. Naval Bill authorized the building of fifteen heavy cruisers, raising the spectre of another British-American naval cruiser race, which Britain could not win, and therefore could not afford. MacDonald accepted the American overtures, dropped the cruiser limit from 70 to 50 and invited representatives from the five Powers to a Naval Disarmament Conference in London, which took place between 21 January and 22 April 1930. The Conference succeeded yet only because Britain (and the United States) accepted a lower ratio of ship tonnage compared to Japan of 10:10:7 (the Washington standard for battleships was 5:5:3.) This reduced the British lead over their most dange-

\textsuperscript{563} Note by the Treasury on the Annual Review for 1932 by the COS, 11 March 1932, CID Paper 1087-B, PRO CAB 4/21.


\textsuperscript{566} B.J.C. McKercher: "No Eternal Friends or Enemies" Canadian Journal of History, 28 (August 1993, 266 - 271.
rous adversary even further but a naval race with the United States was averted. In hindsight, it would have been better for the democracies if the naval cruiser race had indeed happened. As it in the end, the British and American navies did themselves more harm by adopting the conference results, than their prospective enemy did.

2.3.2. Defence Requirements.

The Mukden Incident on 18 September 1931 had been a clear signal that Japan intended to become aggressive. In Manchuria, however, British interests were not under threat as they were virtually nonexistent there. The real eye-opener was the Japanese-Chinese "Incident" at Shanghai, early in February 1932. About 6000 British subjects resided in Shanghai, managing an investment worth about £150 million. They were protected by two British infantry battalions and a few light warships. The Japanese landed about 50,000 troops to face the Chinese and therefore Britain could not intervene. British Intelligence had been unaware of the Japanese amphibious attack as the Japanese had maintained complete radio silence. The attack was a real shock as it proved Japanese proficiency in large-scale amphibious operations, whilst keeping their adversaries completely in the dark about their activities. The Navy even warned that if Britain was drawn into a war against Japan, it had to evacuate Hongkong, Singapore and Trincomalee and would have to fall back on East Africa and leave India unprotected as well. The Chiefs of Staff warned the Government that "the whole of our territory in the Far East, as well as the coastland of India and the Dominions...lies open to attack".

So it was clear, that Britain should re-arm but the Ten Year Rule had done irreparable harm to Britain's armament industry, which had to expand and modernize first, and also had to rebuild long-lost expertise. On the CID's recommendation, a Defence Requirements Sub-committee (DRC) was established to set priorities in rearmament and to make the necessary assessments. Its charter was to start preparing "a programme for meeting our worst deficiencies for transmission to the Cabinet". As the DRC accepted the priorities laid down by the COS, its main interest was, to a large extent, focussed on the Far East, which the COS had identified as being their first defence priority. The committee consisted of Sir Maurice Hankey, chairman, Robert Vansittard, Sir Warren Fisher (Permanent Under-Secretary to the Treasury) and the 3 defence chiefs. Major Henry Pownall was the Secretary.

The DRC's first report which appeared on 28 February 1934 contained the startling

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689 Memorandum by the First Lord of Admiralty, 5 February 1932. CP 64(32), CAB 24/228.

690 COS Annual Review, 23 February 1932, 1082-8, CP 104(32), PRO CAB 24/229.


692 Ann Trotter, op.cit. 39

693 PRO CAB 62, 15 November 1933, conclusion 56.
conclusion: "We cannot overlook the danger created by our total inability to defend our interests in the Far East. Japan is fully armed both in the material and moral sense. This is not our position."664 Not only the fleet, but also supplies, intermediate ports and the Singapore naval base were all judged inadequate to meet full-blown Japanese aggression so the committee strongly recommended improving Britain's relations with Japan, while meanwhile the United Kingdom was putting its house in order. The Cabinet discussed the report on 14 March 1934. Chamberlain, Chancellor of the Exchequer, objected to the expenditure of £85 million spread out over 5 years to remedy the largest defence deficiencies, and therefore proposed a policy of political appeasement towards Japan so that the Far East could be eliminated from defence calculations.665 The other Cabinet members agreed with his proposition, and the Foreign Secretary was asked to prepare a recommendation to improve Japanese-British relations by offering them a non-aggression Pact. This report appeared on March 16, 1934.666 Foreign Secretary Simon stated in it that the cons of a non-aggression pact outweighed the pros, and that such a pact should be linked to the attitude of the Japanese during the imminent naval negotiations planned to take place in London in 1935. This linkage seemed quite attractive, and plans for either a non-aggression pact or for further expenditure on Far Eastern defence were shelved again.

At that time, there was within the COS little sustained criticism of the Government's foreign policy. As Paul Haggie has outlined in his study,667 the COS retired from the responsibilities of Empire emphasizing that Britain's liabilities should be limited to the defence of specifically British interests, and not to collective security as envisaged by the League of Nations. By voicing these views, the COS found themselves more and more clashing with the Foreign Office. As is illustrated by the matter of security guarantees for the Netherlands East Indies, (page 203 ff this Chapter) the COS maintained this narrow view on Imperial security up to the outbreak of the war against Japan.

Another problem within the COS was the lack of true cooperation between the three service chiefs in formulating a single-purpose strategy for the British Empire as a whole. The senior service, the Royal Navy, had one main strategic goal up to 1939 and that was the fighting of a war 15,000 kilometers away against Japan in order to protect the Pacific Dominions. The Army considered that its first strategic priority up to 1938 was the defence of India's Northwestern frontier against the Soviet-Union. The junior service, the RAF, concentrated on winning a war against Germany by strategic bombing.668 These conflicting strategic aims were never integrated within and by the COS, and made it thus an easy prey for the Treasury to argue against any one or all of such uncoordinated policies.

Although they were divided by the above strategies, the period between 1933 and 1938 saw ferocious in-fighting between the COS on the one hand and on the other the Treasury Department - a struggle for either security or solvency. Great Britain was recovering from the crippling Depression of 1931 but the Treasury thought it was more dangerous to

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664 Report by the Defence Requirements Committee, 28 February 1934. CP 64(34), PRO CAB 24/247. For the discussion of this report in the Cabinet, see 1147-B, DRC-14, PRO CAB 16/109.

665 Ann Trotter, op. cit. 41.

666 Simon, Memorandum of March 16, 1934 CP 80(34), CAB 24/248.

667 Paul Haggie, op. cit., 102

668 See for this observation N.H. Gibbs, op. cit. 775.
damage the recovery of the country by rearmament than to face the three fascist powers' ambitions. Neville Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was by far the most influential and respected person in both Ramsay MacDonald's and Baldwin's Governments and his views rather than the Prime Ministers' that really mattered in foreign policy formulation and defence spending. Just after coming into office, Chamberlain proposed finishing the Singapore base but postponing the strategy of sending the Main Fleet to the Far East. The CID was horrified, and the Cabinet, for once, did not support the Chancellor.

The Chancellor, however, did not back down. It was he, who after becoming Prime Minister and after a review of the 3rd DRC Report in May 1937 formulated British defence policy as: "priority to the Royal Air Force, ... a strong Navy, but directed against Germany and not designed to fight two major naval enemies at once, and an Army designed for imperial policing and small wars, not for continental adventures." As has been seen in the subchapter on British foreign policy, this confirmed the policy of appeasement towards Japan, and talks with the Japanese Ambassador in London commenced. (See page 137).

The gloomy conclusions drawn in the 3rd DRC Report might have reinforced this move. It stated that "unless we can provide a sufficient defence for that emergency [NB.: the interference of Japan in the Far East if Britain got tied up by an European conflict ], Australia, New Zealand, India, Burma, the rich colonies East of Suez and a vast trade will be at their mercy and the Eastern half of the British Empire might be doomed." It was to prove a prophetic statement.

Notwithstanding the continuous meddling by the Treasury department in the re-armament programmes as recommended by the DRC, a real increase in the service budgets was effected. The First DRC Report of February 1934 recommended capital investments of £90 million to redress the greatest deficiencies. The third DRC Report, as amended by the Cabinet in February 1936, decided on investments of £245 million and the investment forecast for January 1937 was even £426 million. These estimates excluded not only the naval construction program for 1936 and 1937 but also additional outlays for the Army.

Summarizing it must be concluded that the three different defence policies existed side by side: one for each service. These policies were not coordinated on a higher, political level, which resulted in recurring conflicts arising between the COS and the F.O. These conflicting strategies also gave the Treasury department the chance to determine (and delay) the speed of rearmament, judiciously using the Ten-Year Rule to back this up. It was only late in 1933 that existing deficiencies were recognised by the DRC. The London Naval Disarmament Conference of 1930 added to the Royal Navy's woes by limiting their numbers of cruisers so drastically that they could no longer patrol all the high seas. It was May 1937, before Chamberlain as Prime Minister, prioritised the claims of the

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66 Ian Hamill, op. cit. 382.
67 N.H. Gibbs: Ibid., 277.
68 3rd DRC Report, PRO CAB 29/117.
70 Malcolm S. Smith: "Rearmament and Deterrence in Britain in the 1930's" Journal of strategic Studies, 1:3 (December 1978), 313 - 331.
respective services. His first priority however was the RAF, not the Royal Navy, who had to be content with the existing One Power standard.

2.3.3. The position of India in Imperial Defence.

Some consideration must be given here to the role played by British India in Imperial Defence.

A number of primarily British scholars have always maintained that it was the Indian Army who prevented the British Home Army from modernization up to the standards of the German Army during the interbellum. The reason for this stalemate was the so-called Cardwell System which maintained a three-to-one ratio between the number of Indian and British soldiers serving in India.674 The Cardwell System meant that each British Regiment maintained at least one battalion in India for at least six years. In the interbellum, however, the Home units had in practice become little more than training battalions for their sister battalions overseas.675. The system resulted in strong ties between the British Army and the British Indian (colonial) Army, something which the Dutch Army and its colonial counterpart lacked altogether. This situation gave the Indian government also considerable weight in Imperial defence policies.

The Indian Army was paid for by the Indian Government and when in the thirties it was decided to send Indian Army units to the Far East and Egypt, the British government had to reimburse the expenditures incurred.676 Of the 252.000 British troops under the colours in 1921, 65.501 (26%) were stationed in India and were therefore wholly financed by Indian tax revenues. This of course alleviated British tax payers.677

In 1938, modernization of the Indian Army became imperative. The Chatfield Committee specifically recommended an expansion of the Indian Armaments industry, including the manufacture of explosives and ammunitions. These recommendations were put into effect, but not every recommendation had been realized in 1941.

In 1939, the Indian Army still fell woefully short of the goals set for it by the Chatfield Committee in terms of equipment and armament. Barua has shown convincingly, however, that in terms of doctrine, the Indian Army had a real edge on the British Army, specifically in terms of the use of artillery for infantry support.678

It must be noted here that some part of the successes achieved by the Indian Army in their campaigns during the Second World War were due to the Indianisation policy of its Officer Corps, which had started in 1919. Although in 1941 this was not fully realised on the general officer level, it had been well accomplished up to the level of regimental comman-

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677 Barua, op. cit., 248.

678 Barua, op. cit., 253 - 257.
ders. That policy was in sharp contrast to those of other colonial armies in the east, such as the Dutch one, for example. (See Chapter 3, page 373 - 374). During the Second World War, the Indian Army expanded to 2,500,000 professional soldiers, sailors and airmen, all volunteers, the largest force of its kind in the world. That impressive force was employed in Malaya, Burma, East Africa, North Africa, Italy, Indochina, and Indonesia, and was to occupy a part of Japan after the Japanese capitulation. The Indian Army formed the core of British Imperial Forces during the Second World War. The Indians wanted to show the world that they could beat other Asians such as the Japanese but also could handle Italian and German forces during the North African and Italian campaigns.

2.3.4. The role of intelligence.

On the subject of intelligence, the British have always been very secretive and even to the present day a number of important Intelligence Archives are still sealed under 50-year or even 75-year rulings. The last few years in particular have seen a number of hitherto secret files being opened, revealing the fact that the British had been successful at breaking important codes used in wireless traffic (so-called Signals Intelligence, or Sigint for short) in the interwar years. According to Denniston, who was Director of the Government Code and Cypher School GC&CS, the British were able to read diplomatic and naval attaché messages during almost the entire interwar period, including Japanese, Chinese and French diplomatic traffic. At the important Naval Conferences at Washington and London, the British were informed about instructions being given to the Japanese delegations by the Japanese government. The Japanese Naval Code had been sufficiently well broken to give the British a reasonable understanding of Japanese intentions up to early 1939.

Since 1929, the British Army maintained the China Intelligence Bureau at Shanghai under Colonel G.R.V. Stewart. They communicated with the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) representatives at Shanghai, Hongkong and Singapore. The SIS did not employ agents but kept in close touch with intelligence operatives from other countries, specifically France, China and also Japan. The Navy had a cryptographical unit in Hongkong. Most code-breaking was, however, done at the GC&CS. In November 1934 that unit was expanded to become the Far Eastern Combined Bureau FECB, which was an Interservice organisation commanded by a Royal Navy Captain. By 1938, thanks to close cooperation between both organisations, Britain was able to decode not only Japanese diplomatic and consular telegrams but also Japan's Naval Attaché traffic and the operational codes of the Imperial Japanese Navy including the Naval Intelligence Officers ciphers. The British government was therefore quite well informed about the complicity of the Gaimusho in a number of Army Incidents, starting with the Mukden Incident in 1931 (See Chapter 6, page 629).

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* A.G. Denniston, op. cit., 54, 57.

** Antony Best: "Constructing an Image", op. cit. 403.

Militarily speaking, however, Britain groped in the dark with regard to Japanese intentions and capabilities. That might partly have been caused by the fact, that neither of the two Intelligence organisations employed enough cryptographers and Japanese-language experts.

According to at least one source, the Admiralty was far less interested in the Japanese Navy than in the nascent German Navy, as Japan was considered a "second-rate" naval power. This evaluation was reinforced by the so-called Vivian Report. Captain J.G.P. Vivian was the British Naval Attaché in Tokyo, who on his return wrote a rather denigrating report about the Japanese Navy. In it Vivian noted "I have to strain my imagination to believe that these people are capable of springing a technical surprise of any importance on us in war.". The really disturbing fact, however, was not the racial nonsense in the Report but the fact that it was taken seriously at all within the Admiralty, which even copied it and sent it to the F.O. and other Departments. The Admiralty's assessment of the Japanese Navy was consequently that of a second-rate fleet, unable to launch a large expedition towards Singapore. The common belief within the Admiralty was that if an Anglo-Japanese war started the IJN would methodically move south step by step to Hongkong, and would send a few surface raiders into the Indian Ocean, while the main battlefleet would remain in home waters to guard against hostile moves by the US Navy. The fact that the IJN would employ surface raiders like the Germans did is a nice example of "mirror-imaging": assuming that the enemy will do exactly, what one expects them to do!

British human intelligence on the IJN was weak and it became even weaker when reciprocal visits by warships were ended in 1936, due to the way the unrestrained Japanese intelligence gathered information when visiting British warships. Moreover, concerning new naval construction, the NID was misled by a double agent who, for example, maintained that Japan were constructing imitations of German pocket battleships. British Intelligence on the Japanese Navy was therefore flawed, resulting in exaggerated expectations of British naval power being better over an enemy who was considered to be inefficient and inferior in quality of operations, even acknowledging a numerical superiority in numbers. Neither the Americans nor the British were remotely aware of the construction of four Japanese superbattleships since 1938.

One of the weaknesses of British Intelligence was the lack of Counter-Intelligence in the Far East. Once the consular code was broken the British were well aware of the role consuls could play both in spying, and in the cooperation they offered to German and Italian agents. As far as may be ascertained, British counter-intelligence against consuls

683 Wesley K. Wark: "In search of a suitable Japan: British Naval Intelligence in the Pacific before the Second World War" Intelligence & National Security, 1:2 (1986), 189 - 211.

684 Wark, Ibid, 190, 192, 194, 206.

685 For the original report, see Captain J.G.P. Vivian: Efficiency of the Japanese Navy. 18 February 1935, PRO ADM 116/3862.

686 A. Best: "Constructing an Image", op. cit., 413.

687 Wark, op. cit. 201.

688 Wark, op. cit., 204, notes 67 and 68.
was only effective once, when Japanese spying activities were intercepted at the Suez Canal in the interwar years.888

As the British Secret Services did not employ any agents, the lack of specific information about the IJN can be explained away because their only sources of information were the naval attachés in Tokyo. That excuse does not, however, hold for the IJA and the two Japanese air services, as these could be watched when in action and above China in a full-scale war after mid 1937. In that case the problem was that there was a flood of information on all things Japanese but most of it emanated from Chinese sources and China was a power, for whom, militarily, the British didn't have the slightest respect. When the Chinese, therefore, fought better than could have been expected and the Japanese performed less well than Western observers had foreseen, it was the Japanese who were judged to belong to a second-rate army. The Chinese victory in the battle at Tai-erh-chwang in April 1938 was therefore used to illustrate the weakness of the IJA.889 The same applies to the two air forces, who in a report by the Sub-Committee on Air Warfare of the JIC, dated June 1939 were still regarded as being second class force, whose only real experience was against the inept Chinese.889

Part of the problem were the Chinese themselves who, for propaganda purposes, claimed victory every time the Japanese withdrew. Not all Japanese offensives were really intended for Clausewitzian purposes (the destruction of the enemy), and in particular after 1939 these offensives were more like rice raids than anything else. Once a certain region had been plundered of its resources, the Japanese withdrew and the Chinese General Staff claimed victory! This also happened after the Japanese evacuated Nanning in September 1940 in order to concentrate their troops on the FIC borders.(See Chapter 5, page 534 - 535). When Chinese witnesses therefore accurately reported on the combat performance of the new Navy-Zero fighter in the spring of 1941, their reports were not believed.

What British Intelligence did correctly evaluate properly, however, was the IJA's ability to execute flawless amphibious operations. That had already been noticed, when, on 7 February 1932 an expeditionary force of one IJA division disembarked at the mouth of the River Yangtze near Shanghai smoothly, without breaking radio-silence.890 The IJA repeated this feat by landing 2 divisions in Hangchow Bay in November 1937 and another expeditionary force for Canton in the Bias Bay in South-China in October 1938. The capability of the IJA for surprise amphibious landings directed towards Hongkong or even Malaya and British North Borneo induced British Intelligence to collaborate with the despised Chinese to set up an organisation of Chinese coast-watchers around the South China coast and around Hainan. By the spring of 1941 this organization was all in place and were producing a stream of information on both IJA and IJN moves. That proved invaluable when tracing not only Japanese moves into Southern FIC in July 1941, but also in the build-up to war in October and November 1941.890

889 A. Best: "Constructing an Image" op. cit. 414.
890 A. Best, Ibid, 413 - 414.
890 A. Best, Ibid, 407.
890 A. Best: "This probably over-valued military power", op. cit. 78.
As has been shown, the main British source of information was from Signals Intelligence. Unfortunately, however, in mid-1939 the FECB/GCCS were thrown into a crisis because the Gaimusho introduced a new encryption machine (code-named PURPLE by the Anglosaxxon secret services), which could not be decrypted at all. The simpler RED-code for consular traffic remained still in use. Moreover, in May 1939 the IJN changed its existing "44"-code by the far more complex JN-25 code. Thus British Intelligence lost track of both Japanese Foreign Diplomacy messages as IJN messages.60 While strenuous efforts were undertaken to break PURPLE and JN-25, British Intelligence extended its source base to the Chinese and French. From mid 1939 onwards close cooperation was agreed with the French secret services in FIC, who did in fact employ agents and were therefore not dependent of Sigint.65 Moreover, the British expanded their network of radio direction-finding stations (HF/DF) around the South China Sea. The problem, however, was radio silence, which the Japanese were consistently to be able to maintain in a very strict sense. In May 1940 the JIC noted that an expeditionary force of 9 battleships with smaller units and an IJA expeditionary force of 6 - 10 divisions could be launched against Malaya or the NEI with little forewarning, which was an unsettling conclusion.66

In 1941, however, Winston Churchill, Prime Minister, and as such at the highest British decision-making level, dispersed all fears concerning Japanese capabilities. Churchill consistently dismissed reports issued by the Naval Intelligence Division NID.67 In May 1941 he wrote a note to the War Cabinet Defence Committee: The Japanese would behave like the Italians. They would enter the war when they thought we were on the point of defeat, so that they could gather the spoils without danger to themselves.68 By his forceful personality, he convinced many doubting Thomases that Japan indeed was a second-rate power.

Because they were still able to read the Japanese consular codes, the FECB noted with delight that the Japanese Consul-General in Singapore reported rather accurately on the growing defence strength in Malaya and Singapore in two telegrams on 23 September 1941. In addition, he mistakenly reported, that Sir Robert Brooke Popham, the British Commander-in-Cief, had been given full responsibility for the protection of the NEI.69

In late August 1940, an American military delegation arrived in London in order to watch over and report on British morale while the Battle of Britain going on. The Americans also came, however, with an unexpected offering which was about sharing the information, with the British obtained from breaking the Japanese diplomatic PURPLE-Code.70 From November onwards, important decoded messages were to be passed on to the Foreign Office from the US War Department via the British Embassy in Washington. The British

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60 A. Best: "This probably over-valued military power", op. cit. 69.
65 A. Best, Ibid., 69 - 70.
74 A. Best, Ibid., 74.
67 A. Best, Ibid., 76.
69 PRO CAB 69/2 DO 30(41) War Cabinet Defence (Operations) Committee Meeting 15 May 1941.
85 A. Best, Ibid., 85.
70 A. Best, "This probably over-valued military power", op. cit. 80. 81.
window on Japanese diplomatic traffic was thus reopened after a lapse of a year and a half but only through an American glass panel. That most unsatisfactory situation ended in March 1941, when an American intelligence mission presented the GCCS with a copy of their own PURPLE machine.\footnote{A. Best, Ibid., 81.}

One of the measures undertaken by the British was propping up Dutch morale in the NEI by giving them access to important information regarding the Japanese. In the early thirties, there had been close cooperation with Dutch Intelligence services.\footnote{A. Best, Ibid., 70.} In April 1940, the Dutch authorities made a tentative approach to discuss the great increase in Japanese spying activities. The British Government, however, harboured fears about the penetration of Nazi sympathisers within the NEI Government and gave the Dutch the cold shoulder. In November 1940, doubts about these sympathies were removed, however, and Colonel J.A. Verkuyt, the Dutch cryptographic expert, came over to Singapore for talks. There he revealed that the Dutch had also cracked the PURPLE code, and were working on the JN-25 code with some success.\footnote{PRO ADM 199/1477 C-in-C China to DNI, 18 Feb. 1941, telegram 0344Z/18.} This resulted in closer cooperation between the two Intelligence Services.\footnote{A. Best, "This Probably Over-Valued Military Power" op. cit., 80.} As a result of this, it was agreed that GCCS decrypts of messages exchanged between the Japanese (Yoshizawa-) delegation in Batavia and the Gaimusho were transferred via the British Consul-General in Batavia to Mr. Van Mook, the Dutch delegation leader at the economic talks with the Japanese.\footnote{A. Best, Ibid., 72, 80.} This cooperation lasted from March to June 1941, and partly explains the steadfastness of the Dutch delegation in the face of Japanese pressure.

Another area in which close cooperation was accomplished was that of Japanese spying, originating from Japanese consuls. In November 1940 a decoded message from the Japanese Consul at Sandakan (British North Borneo) contained a lot of secret information on the Brunel and Miri oil fields, recommending that they should be given first priority in any Japanese offensive.\footnote{A. Best, Ibid., 70.} A telegram from Gaimusho to all consular posts, intercepted on 20 January 1941, gave the order to intensify all intelligence, propaganda and political agitation in S.E. Asia. The Dutch pulled a major punch when Major Hachida of the IJA was arrested in Surabaya on his way to Japan from Australia in March 1941. He had numerous documents in his possession about Australian defence establishments.\footnote{A. Best, Ibid., 81.}

In the fall of 1941, British Intelligence nonetheless had failed to project into the minds of the British decision makers an adequate picture of Japanese capabilities. The main problem was Intelligence digestion, as the information provided about the prowess of the Japanese armed forces provided by the British attachés in Tokyo was now really accurate, in contrast to Vivian's reports. Their information was, however, evaluated - and rejected as unreliable - by both Intelligence HQ in the Far East, dominated by old China hands, and in London. The British had complete faith in their own superiority and therefore in Japan's relative inferiority, clouding their judgement. Moreover, the tendency to underestimate both Japanese capabilities and intentions was doubly risky, because it argued against the need to increase British intelligence sources, and it induced those in power to fill in the gaps in
their knowledge with suppositions. Summarizing, the interpretation given to any intelligence collected led to complacency instead of challenge and complacency led to disaster.™

In November 1941, Churchill and his Cabinet therefore concluded that Japan was up to commit some acts of aggression but they also had concluded from such factors as the rainy monsoon and the lack of bomber coverage by fighters from the Southern FIC airfields, that the Japanese amphibious fleet assembling in the Gulf of Siam was aiming not for Malaya, but for Thailand itself. (See also Chapter 5, page 555).

The available sources for research have not indicated as yet, whether in the interwar years British Intelligence had also broken Dutch diplomatic and military codes, as has been reported about the French diplomatic codes. The GCCS must surely have possessed the means for doing so, but the British Government might have considered The Netherlands too insignificant to make it worthwhile investing scarce manpower in breaking codes and monitoring traffic. Moreover, The Netherlands were known for their free Press, and much information could be obtained straight from open public sources. This subject might be a matter for further research.

2.4. Naval Policy: Main Fleet to Singapore.

The Royal Navy had responsibilities all over the world. According to the doctrines of the American strategist A.T. Mahan, it should have been able to wrest control of the seas from any country attempting to challenge Great Britain, as it had so successfully done in the preceding centuries. Even in the interwar years, Britain had still "ruled the waves" worldwide, although admittedly the Americans had local ascendancy in the Eastern Pacific and in the North Atlantic, and the Japanese in the Western Pacific. At the time of the 1918 Armistice the British Grand Fleet totalled 42 modern capital ships compared to the rest of the world with 44 (of which 16 for the U.S.A, 9 for Japan, 7 for France, 5 for Italy)™ The United Kingdom was the naval superpower at that time. Both the United States and Japan, however, were building big new battleships, which by 1925 would have made Great Britain a second-rate naval power. In that year, Great Britain only had one post-Jutland capital ship (HMS HOOD) of over 40,000 tons with 15" or 16" guns. The United States, however, would then possess 12 of such ships, and Japan even 8.™

This problem had to be faced by both the political and naval leadership of the Royal Navy. The consequences of actions taken by the leaders responsible are the contents of this sub-chapter on interwar British naval policy. Political responsibility lay with the First Lord of Admiralty, who could be compared to a Minister or Secretary to the Navy in other countries and who was also a member of the Cabinet. The First Seaward, who was comparable to the Dutch Naval Chief of Staff and the American Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) was responsible for the naval aspects of plans to be made. He was also a member of the COS by title and therefore also of the CID. Winston Churchill was First Lord of the Admiralty when war broke out in Europe in 1939.

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™™ Neidpath, op. cit. 23 - 24.
2.4.1. Naval Strategy in the Twenties.

The strategic thinking of the Royal Navy was strongly oriented towards protecting the extended lines of communications between the far-flung possessions of the Empire and its Dominions, more so than achieving mastery of the seas by destroying Japan's combat fleet as prescribed by Mahan. The Royal Navy needed a lot of cruisers to be able to control shipping lanes. Great-Britain did not have a battlefleet in the Far East since 1902, and therefore had to concede mastery of the Western Pacific to the Japanese. Trade protection rather than real mastery of the seas was strongly emphasized in an Admiralty paper, prepared in 1921, which stated that "the maintenance of the sea communications is vital to the successful prosecution of the war and to the very existence of the Empire."\(^\text{70}\) Being limited by the number of cruisers available as a consequence of the London Disarmament Conference of 1930 meant that the task was impossible. This was the real nemesis of the Royal Navy.\(^\text{71}\) The naval doctrine of giving first priority to the protection of the sealanes was to make British naval strategy in the Second World War by nature a very defensive strategy, and runs as a theme through the whole of this chapter.

The main theme, however, is the Royal Navy's own development, gradually changing from its archetypical role as described by Mahan of being an instrument to wrestle control of the seas from any adversary to becoming a navy whose primary goals were regional superiority and an abiding concern to protect the lines of communications between the Empire's far-flung possessions. That development had started to happen at the end of the nineteenth century but was strongly reinforced by the First World War, which could only have been won by mobilizing the Empire's resources and transporting them to the battlefields of Western Europe in convoys. In contrast, the U.S. Navy, starting from humble beginnings at the time of the Spanish-American War, consequently pursued their goal of naval superiority over any foe as Mahan had defined, without any undue worries about lines of communications. Of course, each nation's own geographical background and history determined their different naval strategies as these evolved during the interwar years.

In order to protect lines of communications worldwide, the Royal Navy had sub-divided all seas and oceans between a number of Naval Stations. The battlefleets were divided between Home Command and the Mediterranean, in order to counter the German and the Italian fleets respectively. The lines of communications were protected by cruiser flotillas based at naval stations in other parts of the world. The areas under consideration in this thesis were divided into 5 Naval Command areas: China, Australia, New-Zealand, East Indies, and America and the West Indies. The last command area covered the whole of the Eastern Pacific from pole to pole, and included the Western Atlantic and the Caribbean. Naval Command headquarters were in Bermuda. China Station covered the Netherlands East Indies, the South China Sea and the Western Pacific including Japan. Its naval headquarters were in Hongkong until 1939 and thereafter in Singapore. The East India Station covered the Indian Ocean excluding the Australian west coast. Their headquarters were at Trincomalee in Ceylon. The Australia Station covered the Australian coasts, Eastern New-Guinea and the Solomons, and had its headquarters in Sydney. The New

\(^{70}\) Empire Naval Policy and Co-operation. Naval Staff Paper for 1921 Imperial Conference, Feb. 1921. CID Paper No 131-C.

Zealand Station comprised New-Zealand and the mid-Pacific including the Hawaiian Islands and all islands south of them. Its headquarters were in Auckland.\textsuperscript{711}

The Admiralty based its organisation, and the whole of its "raison d'\'être" on the assumption that it alone was responsible for defending the Empire. In this concept there was no room for Dominion navies. That had been a source of growing friction well before the First World War, when Australia and New Zealand had themselves felt that they were inadequately protected. It was Australia therefore, which, shortly after the Armistice, sounded out Admiral Jellicoe and the Admiralty, trying to find out what were the naval defence requirements of the Pacific Dominions.\textsuperscript{712}

Although Singapore was not headquarters of a Naval Station in the interwar years, it was very important to British naval planning. Stationing a fleet large enough to dominate the Japanese fleet in peacetime was impossible both for financial and for economic reasons, therefore it was vital that such an option was available should an emergency occur. This line of reasoning was the origin of the "Main Fleet to Singapore" strategy. Before the First World War, Singapore had just been a coaling station, the China Station's main base having been Hongkong. Hongkong, however, was far too exposed to Japanese inroads and was therefore much too vulnerable. Singapore, at the tip of the Malay Peninsula, had on the other hand a deep-water harbour and was strategically located with respect to both the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. In June 1921 the British Government therefore decided in June 1921 to build a large naval base there.

Going back to the important Imperial Conference of 1921, there was the vexing problem of what had to be done about the two upstart navies: The United States and Japan. In the heyday of the Empire, a fleet able to deal with the U.S.A. would have to be based at home, and another fleet large enough to contain the Japanese would have to be based in the Far East. That was the famous "Two Power Standard", adopted by the British Government in 1889 in order to contain the French and Russian navies, which were, at that time, the second and third largest navies in the world.\textsuperscript{713} The Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 had allowed a one-and-a-half power standard to be brought into being, which was sufficient to contain Germany. Although in 1900, the China Station had housed Britain's third most powerful fleet squadron, there were no British capital ships in the Far East after 1905. This policy was instigated by Admiral Sir John Arbuthnot Fisher, First Sea Lord, and after Fisher's demise, it was pursued by Winston Spencer Churchill who was First Lord of the Admiralty up to 1914. It meant that the vital eastern Empire was stripped of much of its naval defences in order to provide the home waters with the naval strength required to fight out a Mahanian battle with the German Hochseeflotte. The safety of Hongkong, Australia and New Zealand depended therefore on Japan's naval power instead of Britain's. This hard fact greatly alarmed the two Pacific Dominions and was recognised as

\textsuperscript{711} See map 2 "Naval Command Areas and associated RAF Commands, September 1939" in S.W. Roskill: The War at Sea, Volume I, London 1954, opposite page 43.

\textsuperscript{712} W.David McIntyre, op. cit., 4.

\textsuperscript{713} See Arthur J. Marder: From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow. The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era. Volume I: The Road to War, 1904 - 1914, London 1961, 123 - 125. Subsequently referred to as Marder: Dreadnought, I. For the two-Power standard, see CID "Military Needs of the Empire in a War with France and Russia" 12 August 1901, PRO CAB 38/1/1A.
such by the CID as early as in 1909.\textsuperscript{74}

While the fact that the fleet was concentrated in home waters ensured Britain victory in the Great War, its long-term implications were disastrous for the Eastern Empire. Once reduced, British naval presence east of Suez wasn't again increased to the levels they had had at the turn of the century, until 1945, in spite of the alienation of Japan in the 1920s. Singapore was equipped to function as a modern naval base in the thirties but the British didn't assign any significant naval forces to the Far East to take advantage of it.\textsuperscript{75}

Trying to return to a Two-Power standard after the war was impossible. The United States had developed a production capacity which outmatched that of Great Britain by a factor of five. Britain could never win a Naval Arms race against the United States. Moreover, the war had squandered Britain's prosperity, increasing the national debt by a factor of twelve. Lastly, a war with the United States was unconceivable anyway. The Admiralty therefore concluded that Britain would have to adopt a One Power standard. Politically speaking, this was an expedient decision because of the financial constraints as illustrated by the Ten-Year Rule.

It must be pointed out that the main reason for American naval expansion during the First World War was not due to any desire to replace British hegemony but was rather a question of getting irritated about the fact that Britain insisted on the Royal Navy's right to search neutral vessels on the high seas in the event of a maritime blockade. The United States maintained the freedom of the seas as had been proclaimed by the famous Dutch lawyer Hugo de Groot (Hugo Grotius) in the 17th century. British interference with U.S. freighters during the blockade of Germany had been the main reason for Congress to vote for the Fleet Law in 1916 (See page 79).\textsuperscript{76}

The underlying reason for the Admiralty to adopt a One Power Standard was however, that Admiral Sir David Beatty, the First Se lord, had come to the conclusion that a naval race with the United States was a losing proposition and that an entente or alliance with them would be far more logical. The Admiralty therefore committed themselves to attaining equality with the United States Navy, rather than aiming for naval supremacy.\textsuperscript{77} Equality with the U.S. Navy automatically meant superiority over the Japanese Navy, the third most powerful navy in the world at that moment. Beatty capably argued his vision at the Imperial Conference in July 1921, when the Dominion Prime Ministers, with the exception of Canada, argued in favour of a renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty. Canada, with its long and undefended border with the United States, could not risk a war with its powerful neighbour which might have been the inevitable outcome of such a renewal. Anti-Japanese feelings were then running high in the U.S., as was demonstrated by the California Immigration Laws (See pages 27 - 28). However, at a secret session with the Prime Ministers, Beatty pointed out that in the event of war with Japan, the U.S. would be incapable of sending a fleet to the Far East, as they lacked a battleship base in the

\textsuperscript{74} CID: "Standard of Defenses at British Defended Ports in Distant Seas" 23 April 1909. PRO CAB 38/15/56C.


\textsuperscript{76} B.J.C. McKercher: op. cit. 260.

\textsuperscript{77} "Naval Policy"; Paper by First Se lord, 7 January 1920, PRO ADM 167/61.
It was therefore imperative that a base be built at Singapore in order to protect the two Pacific Dominions. The Imperial Conference gave this plan their full approval. It did not mean, however, that a complete halt to the laying down of capital ships was called for. In October 1921, the Royal Navy ordered four new battle-cruisers at a cost of approximately £60 million pounds, for completion in 1926.

The next problem was of where to locate that fleet. Logically it should have been based in the Far East but there was still no repair base capable of handling a big battlefleet whereas there were lots of emotional arguments against leaving the fleet 15,000 miles away from its homeland indefinitely. The Admiralty therefore recommended splitting the fleet between the Mediterranean and home waters. Anyway, the Mediterranean fleet could if necessary be send quickly enough through the Suez Canal to the Far East. It must be remembered that British India was the jewel in the Empire's crown and that the Indian Ocean was a British lake with the Dominions of South-Africa, Australia and India around her shores with Britain controlling the entrances at Aden, Singapore and the Cape. After the battlesquadrons had left for the European theater, however, the base facilities at Trincomalee, Singapore and Hongkong had not been modernised. Lord Jellicoe, who had gone on a tour of the Pacific Dominions and India in 1919 to advise on their naval problems, reported that the docks at Hongkong and Colombo could not even accommodate a dreadnought, nor could the dock at Singapore handle any modern battleship.

Worse still, there were no oil storage facilities at those bases, and the British battlefleet had converted from coal to oil in the meantime. Without having a modern eastern naval base, Britain was unable to exercise her naval power either in the Indian Ocean or in the Western Pacific, and Britain's possessions over there would be taken hostage either by the United States or by Japan. Lord Balfour drew attention to that unsatisfactory situation at the Imperial Conference in 1921. As the Japanese fleet had both oil-fired and coal-fired battleships and the British fleet only possessed oil-fired battleships, Australia and New Zealand were unprotected until bases with oil storage facilities became operational.

The Japanese fleet, however, was not the only threat to the integrity of the Eastern Empire. The Royal Navy, in particular, feared the rival U.S. Navy being able to take over the protection of the "white" Dominions in the Pacific in the not too distant future.

The Admiralty considered three possible locations for a well-equipped Far Eastern base: Hongkong, Sydney and Singapore. Hongkong was the traditional fleet-base of yore but it was not only too close to Japan but it also resembled Port Arthur too much. Sydney had an agreeable climate, a good industrial base and a friendly population but it was just too far away from the probable battle-grounds in the Malay Barrier area. Singapore was the best geo-strategical location, offering sufficient protected anchorage in the "Old Strait" to the North of the island of Singapore to accommodate the whole fleet. At the Imperial Conference in 1921, Singapore was accepted as the new base for a British eastern fleet. The choice of Singapore was only partially based on fear of the Japanese. Britain needed the base anyway to retain at least enough potential to be able to protect its global lines of

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716 Imperial Conference 1921, 14th and 15th Meetings, 4 and 5 July 1921, PRO CAB 322.


721 Admiralty Board Minute 939, 22 September 1919, ADM 167/56, see note 16, p. 26 in Ian Hamill, op. cit.
communication, which were the Empire's lifelines. The Admiralty, however, understood that conflicting demands might be put on the Royal Navy, if the naval equivalent of a two-front war at sea had to be waged. In 1921, that was still a hypothetical matter; by the end of the following decade it had become a real nightmare.

2.4.2. Origins of the Singapore Strategy.

The Washington Naval Disarmament Conference, which had been initiated by incoming President Warren Harding in July 1921 at the same time as when the Imperial Conference gathered in London, was covered in chapter 1, page 25. It was the result of a growing realisation in both America and Japan that a naval arms race would be ruinously expensive, and that resulted in giving all parties a common base of understanding, making possible the concluding of three Washington Treaties.

The Royal Navy in effect gave up its two-Power standard, and replaced it with a One-Power standard, namely, equality with the United States. It had already become clear from the so-called "Seabattle of Paris" that the Royal Navy would be outclassed by the U.S. Navy's building programmes at some time in the mid-twenties anyway. The Washington Treaty offered the Royal Navy equality with the U.S. Navy at least, instead of inferiority which was almost guaranteed. Compared to the chief European naval powers of that time, however, the Royal Navy still had more than a Two-Power standard. In order to protect the British Far Eastern Empire against any adversary with a battlefleet, Britain had to divide its fleet and send a contingency to the Pacific. The One Power standard assured Britain's inability to gain naval superiority in Home waters as well as in the Pacific at one and the same time. Such consequences resulting from the Washington Treaty became painfully obvious, however, only at the end of the thirties.

Once the fear of a naval arms race against the United States - the only major cause of potential Anglo-American hostility - was removed, the Admiralty could concentrate on just one hypothetical enemy: Japan. It was Beatty's predecessor as First Seaford, Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, who had produced an incisive analysis of such a war in the Far East. He clearly realized that Britain's chances of moving its battlefleet to the Far East would be strongly dependent not only on the situation in Europe but also the existence of European Powers allied to Japan. The basic assumption of British naval strategy was that the battlefleet must be retained in European waters. As can be seen in chapter 4 on Australia, Lord Jellicoe had arrived at a conclusion in his Report on the Far Eastern

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722 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 46.

723 CID Paper no 131-C.

724 This refers to the open clash between the British and American Naval Chiefs of Staff during the peace negotiations in Paris in March and April 1919. The American Naval Programmes of 1916 and 1918 transferred maritime supremacy to the United States to the detriment of the Royal Navy. See Raymond Callahan: "The Illusion of Security: Singapore 1919 - 1942" Journal of Contemporary History, 9:2, (April 1974) 70 - 71.


726 "Future Naval Programme", memorandum for Board of Admiralty by First Seaford, 24 March 1919, PRO ADM 167/58.
situation which was diametrically different to the above. His conclusion was, that even in peacetime, British naval forces in the Pacific needed to be adequate to handle the Japanese, which in effect meant having a fleet there consisting of something like 8 battleships and 8 battle-cruisers plus the supporting infrastructure required. Of course, looking at his background as commander of the Grand Fleet at the Mahanian apotheosis which the battle of Jutland really was, his conclusions could not have been otherwise. However he also recognized the danger of Japanese penetration in the Netherlands East Indies. On that subject he wrote: "Any foothold of Japan in an island of the Dutch East Indies possessing a good harbour would constitute the most serious threat to Australian sea communications to the westward, and to Singapore, and is not to be thought of." He saw more clearly than others that the First World War ally would become the enemy in an upcoming struggle, as his report was strongly critical of Japanese aims. As current thinking at the Admiralty was centred on a main fleet being based in European waters, his recommendations fell on deaf ears.

The Admiralty, however, needed a strongly defended base in the Far East and in a paper written just before Jellicoe’s report came in, the Admiralty staff had recommended that Singapore was just such a base, because "it is sufficiently far from Japan (2,900 miles) to make an overseas attack a very difficult undertaking." The Admiralty Board accepted the conclusions stated in the memorandum in September 1920. At the end of that year, the Admiralty had a naval plan in place, based on the battlefleet being transferred from European waters to Singapore in time of need, and also on enough oil storage facilities being available to make it possible for the Main Fleet to give battle. This was the foundation for the “Main Fleet to Singapore” strategy.

A conference attended by the Commanders-in-Chief of the 3 Naval Stations in the Far East at Penang in March 1921 endorsed the Jellicoe Report and agreed with Singapore being selected as a fleet base. They also recommended that a number of measures be taken, which were deemed necessary in order to defend Singapore until the main fleet arrived.

It should be noted that, from the start, the Singapore base was meant to be a defensive base, rather than an operational one against the Japanese fleet in its home waters. The distance to Japan (2,900 nautical miles) was too great anyway. The Royal Navy envisaged a "guerre de course" from Singapore against Japanese communication lines, resulting in Japan being gradually worn down by a distant blockade, rather than a "Jutland-style" battle being waged against the Japanese fleet as long as Japan did not attack Singapore. The Royal Navy assumed that, as the Japanese battlefleet was inferior to the British Main Fleet anyway, it would play the same game as the Hochseeflotte: the battlefleet would stay in harbour, and the British fleet only had to protect the lines of

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727 Jellicoe Report, 12 August 1919, Australia, ADM 116/1834.
728 Neidpath, op.cit. 30 - 31.
729 Naval Staff: "Imperial Naval Defence" Paper for Board of Admiralty, 4 August 1919, PRO ADM 167/59.
730 East-India Station, China Station and Australia Station.
731 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 49-50.
732 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 68, 210 - 212.
communication against Japanese raiding forces. Even in 1941, it was maintained that a distant naval blockade could ruin the Japanese economy within one and a half years after the outbreak of war.\textsuperscript{73} The British plan was therefore to force Japan to its knees by a distant blockade, just like Germany had succumbed to a similar blockade in the previous war. The British main fleet at Singapore was to all purposes a "fleet in being", primarily present over there to protect Australia and New Zealand from Japanese invasion and to protect the Empire's communication lines in the Indian Ocean. Note the strategic differences between the above and the American war plans (War Plan ORANGE specifically), which aimed at complete destruction of the Japanese battlefleet as Mahan had taught.

Critics of British Naval Strategy have rightly pointed out that the Third Phase of the British War Plan, namely the distant blockade of Japan, showed a lack of integration with British military and air forces. Like the U.S. Navy, the Royal Navy considered that a war against Japan was primarily a maritime affair, but, in contrast and unlike the U.S. Navy, no coordination with other Services was seriously attempted. A critic such as Sir Herbert Richmond had pointed out before the war that in the event of a war with Japan, Britain needed a national strategy and not just a naval one.\textsuperscript{74} The Admiralty's Eastern War Plans do not actually contain much information on these aspects. The 1931 Eastern War Plan was the most complete one with regard to the Third Phase of a war with Japan.\textsuperscript{75}

While the main fleet was still steaming towards Singapore, the base however had to be protected from the might of the Japanese battlefleet, if it had chosen to bear down on the base. The defence clearly needed 15" guns to duel with capital ships at a 40,000 meter range. The Navy wanted eight of those coastal guns, the War Office only four. After much bargaining, a compromise was reached in April 1924, providing for six 15" guns.\textsuperscript{76} Moreover, a "peacetime fleet" at least had to be based at Singapore.\textsuperscript{77} According to plans drawn up in December 1923 by Captain Dudley Pound, Director of Plans at the Admiralty staff, the peacetime fleet would consist of the three fast battlecruisers HOOD, RENOWN and REPULSE with a screen of 6 to 8 cruisers and 12 destroyers to accompany them.\textsuperscript{78} The plans foresaw that the Main Fleet with 11 capital ships would arrive within 42 days, the strategy agreed upon to up 1937. That would give the British a margin of four over Japan's 10 capital ships. Even such sound plans, made in the quietness of the twenties, did not propose sending all the capital ships to the Far East however, as 3 of

\textsuperscript{73} Early in February 1941 the British Ministry of Economic Affairs published a document titled "Japan's Economic Position in case of War", in which the effects of a distant Naval blockade on the Japanese economy were analysed. The Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs offered a copy of this document to his Minister at the Court of St. James on 28 February 1941, who had it filed in the archives of the London Legation, now at the Archives MinBuZa, inventory number 1411.

\textsuperscript{74} Christopher Bell: "How are we going to make war?: Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond and British Far Eastern War Plans" Journal of Strategic Studies, 20:3 (September 1997), 129.

\textsuperscript{75} The Eastern War Plans can be found in the Admiralty Archives, Plans Division, starting from the 1920 War Plan [ADM 116/3124] to 1923 [ADM 116/3124], 1924 [ADM 116/3125], 1931 [ADM 116/3118], 1933 [ADM 116/3475] and 1937 [ADM 116/4393].

\textsuperscript{76} Ian Hamilton, op. cit., 54.

\textsuperscript{77} At the Penang Conference of March 1921 a supporting base in Papua-New Guinea or N.W. Australia (Darwin) was recommended for this squadron. See also Ian Hamilton, op. cit. 50 - 51.

\textsuperscript{78} James Neidpath, op. cit. 86, 88, Ian Hamilton op. cit. 94.
them were still to be retained in home waters. The purpose of the three battlecruisers was not initially to give battle with the Japanese main fleet, but to protect against attacks by Japanese cruisers or battlecruisers on convoys on their way with Indian reinforcements to Singapore, and also against attacks on the oil stocks at Colombo and Rangoon which were considered vital in order for the main fleet to be able to reach Singapore at all.

It was an excellent plan because it would mean a defended naval base with a fleet, which would have a stabilising influence upon the Far Eastern political landscape. It would also have created an infrastructure which could have been used by the main fleet, and which would have resulted in at least a core of the fleet not only getting accustomed to navigating in South-East Asian waters but also fighting under tropical conditions. It would furthermore have impressed Japan by British commitments to put teeth in its Empire defence. Moreover, it would lessen the disruptive political impact which sending the main fleet would have on Japan. Having a local squadron was also in line with the other two colonial powers, which maintained sizable fleet contingents in the Far East. The Dutch had already positioned the greater part of their small fleet in the East Indies, the Americans had their Asiatic Fleet in Manila Bay. The plan was, however, dependent on the completion of a naval base at Singapore, the construction of which had not even started at that time. By the time the base was actually completed almost 15 years later, Britain was no longer in a position to be able to have such a fleet based at Singapore.

The trials and tribulations encountered in order to realise the naval base during those 15 years are dealt with in the next sub-chapter. During all of that time the Singapore strategy was the core of British naval planning but the plan of basing a battle-squadron at Singapore was quietly dropped. It was made even more improbable by the Abyssinian crisis. In October 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia. A third potential enemy appeared all of a sudden, a fact which had not been foreseen at all. The Ethiopian war influenced and compromised eastern strategy which was founded on the assumption that the whole of the Mediterranean fleet would be leaving for Singapore in the event of a crisis with Japan. This now was called into question. Admiral Sir Ernie Chatfield, First Sea-Lord at that time, informed the COS that if Italy went to war, then there could no longer be any question of defending British interests in the Far East.\footnote{In effect, ships from the China Station, Australia and New Zealand were expedited to Aden and Gibraltar in 1935! See W. David McIntyre, op. cit. 125}

\subsection*{2.4.3. The Far East Appreciation of 1937.}

The Imperial Conference in June 1937 was very important in defining British naval policy. In February 1937, in anticipation of the Conference, the COS had prepared a comprehensive review of national and imperial defence in two documents, namely the "Review of Imperial Defence" and the "Far East Appreciation" (See below). Both documents reconsidered the Singapore strategy in the framework of accepted priorities, which, after much debate, were accorded by the COS as follows:\footnote{PRO CID 1305-B. See also N.H. Gibbs: Grand Strategy, Vol. 1, 410.}

1. Security of Imperial communications throughout the world.

2. Security of the United Kingdom in the face of German aggression.


5. Security of India against Soviet aggression.

Note specifically in this list of priorities the first one: Security of communication lines. It was to pervade British naval thinking in the following years.

The security of British interests in the Far East, including those of the Dominions of Australia and New Zealand, was dependent on Singapore. In the event of a war with Japan, the latter would be faced with the certainty that it had to fight a fleet action off Singapore once the British battlefleet had arrived, at a great distance from her own repair bases. Japan would therefore require considerable superiority, which she did not possess, hence it was unlikely that Japan would commence any major operations against Singapore. Japan might, on the other hand, carry out raids against Singapore aimed simply at damaging the base facilities.

As the COS said: "We would expect Japan to ... make full use of commerce raiders to attack our trade in the South China Seas, Pacific and Indian Oceans, to cause anxiety and dislocation on certain of our trade routes and force dispersion upon our forces. To this end, Japan might endeavour to operate naval forces from temporary bases in (British) Borneo and the Netherlands East Indies, where a number of suitable positions is available." The COS did not therefore contemplate, the Japanese having studied Mahan so that they would try to destroy the British main fleet. The COS assumed that once the fleet actually arrived at Singapore, the security of the Dominions, including British India, would be assured. Subsequent naval action would depend upon the result of testing the Japanese Navy's efficiency. That formulation illustrated the way the COS doubted the real fighting efficiency of the Imperial Japanese Navy. There is nothing in the COS planning about wrestling control of the Western Pacific from the Japanese. The loss of trade routes in the China seas would not be dramatic for the British Empire, but Japan with her known dependency on imported goods would suffer slow economic strangulation, resulting in her demise in a year of two. According to the COS: "In the economic sphere, therefore, we enjoy very definite advantages over Japan; advantages that in the long run should prove decisive." The COS did also consider the possibility of Britain being involved firstly in a war simultaneously with Germany and Italy, secondly with either one or the other combined with Japan, or thirdly even a simultaneous war with all three powers. They found it difficult, however, to forecast the effects of any such simultaneous wars, due, in addition, to the involvement of France and some other minor powers.

In June 1937, the COS prepared a detailed appreciation of the situation in the Far East. It was mainly based on the assumption of a one-to-one war against Japan, but it also took the effects of hostile European powers into consideration. Interesting conclusions in this appreciation were that a war like that would be primarily a naval one, not requiring any

741 N.H. Gibbs, Ibid., 411.
742 N.H. Gibbs, Ibid., p. 412.
743 PRO CAB 53/31, COS 596.
employment of sizable contingents of the British Army or the RAF. Another conclusion was that, should hostilities occur, then it would be vital to get the British main fleet out to the east as fast as possible. An allowance of 70 days was made for the fleet's passage from home waters to Singapore. This was the origin of the famous slogan "Seventy days to Singapore". A third conclusion was, that it was considered unlikely that Japan would adopt any offensive strategy at all. The COS appreciation did consider the possibility that Japan might capture Singapore before the main fleet arrived. According to McIntyre, it was therefore decided not to show the Appreciation to the members of the Imperial Conference.

Even without the obvious clarity that hindsight provides, it remains intriguing that according to that appreciation, Japan was thought to be doing nothing while the Main Fleet was on its way to Singapore, which could take up to three months after the outbreak of hostilities anyway. The Royal Navy had enough experience of interchanging fleets. It was accepted at that time that switches between the Home Fleet and the Mediterranean Fleet were quite feasible, but those between the Far East and either the Mediterranean or the Home Fleet much less so. The attitude taken by the Japanese Navy during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 to 1905, when they waited for the Russian fleet to show up in Japanese home waters, had perhaps coloured the British appreciation.

At the Imperial Conference, the Australian and New Zealand delegations had in-depth discussions with the COS. (See Chapter 4, pages 462 - 464) Admiral Sir Ernle Chatfield, the First Seaward, reiterated that in the event of war with Japan, a battlefleet would be sent to Singapore even if that meant that in the last resort, the Eastern Mediterranean would have to be abandoned. Chatfield considered it unwise to station part of the battlefleet at Singapore in peacetime because of the political and practical problems that would result. The political problem would be an immediate deterioration of relations with Japan which would consider such a move as a decidedly unfriendly act in the context of early 1937. The administrative problems were the state of unreadiness of the Singapore Naval Base and the problems involved in accommodating the crews without loss of morale, as they were so far from home. He promised nevertheless that in the event of war starting in the Far East, up to eight capital ships would be sent over there, even if a Japanese attack coincided with aggression against British interests in Europe.

2.4.4. Secret staff conversations with the U.S. Navy.

The outbreak of the Chinese-Japanese War following the incident at the Marco Polo Bridge on July 7, 1937 taxed Royal Navy resources which were already on the meagre side. The RN was seriously challenged by Japan which announced a maritime blockade of the Chinese coast. All Chinese ships were to be searched for weapons. The blockade did not apply to foreign ships but in order to ascertain that Chinese ships were not flying a foreign flag in disguise, the Japanese Navy stopped and searched all foreign ships except when

744 PRO CAB 53/31, COS 596, paragraphs 74 and 114.
745 See W. David McIntyre, op. cit., 131.
746 N.H. Gibbs, Ibis 416.
747 Minutes of meeting 209 of COS, 1 June 1937, CAB 53/7.
escorted by a warship, which had to be able to confirm the ship’s nationality. The British Government did not recognise the naval blockade but quietly acquiesced in order not to "embitter the Japanese needlessly." The cruiser, HMS DORSETSHIRE, was, however, sent to China to show the flag. There was some diplomatic noise about the size of the Japanese boarding parties and about the propriety of informing the Japanese of the routes and destinations of British vessels in Chinese waters beforehand, but the Japanese Navy enforced its naval blockade uncontested.

As the F.O. did not consider that sending one cruiser to China would be any deterrent to Japanese aggression, the Admiralty was asked for its views on the possible dispatch of two capital ships to the East. Their answer was negative. Even two capital ships would be no match for the Japanese Navy and if reinforcements were to go east, they needed to be of sufficient strength to match the Japanese Navy’s full power. This was the old "concentration of force" argument based on Mahan’s doctrine which Chatfield had used before: a fatal "all or nothing" strategy, which was finally superseded in the autumn of 1941 by sending HMS PRINCE OF WALES and HMS REPULSE to Singapore. The naval staff dismissed the option that if the Japanese battlefleet was to come out of its lair, the small British battlesquadron could be withdrawn to East or South Africa, there to await the arrival of the main fleet. That actually happened, however, in April 1942 when the Eastern Fleet took refuge at Mombasa when the Japanese Combined Fleet broke into the Bay of Bengal.

After collective action against Japan, as proposed at the Brussels Conference in November 1937, failed, the British Cabinet really wanted to discuss the option of sending a small fleet to the Far East. Cadogan saw Chatfield on 26 November 1937. Chatfield was afraid that a small fleet would be defeated by the Japanese Navy before the Americans could get involved. He therefore preferred to send a British force strong enough to cope with the Japanese which meant eight to nine battleships. That would mean mobilisation. A token force was only sensible in combination with American support. Britain was willing to enter staff conversations with the Americans on that subject and indicated this to Cordell Hull, American Secretary of State. The rape of Nanking and the subsequent sinking of the US gunboat PANAY in the Yangtze River stirred American public opinion. Eden proposed sending British and American battle fleets to the Far East. Orders were given to the British battle fleet in the Mediterranean to prepare for departure to Singapore. Sir

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744 Letter temp. Minister Texeira in London to MinBuZa The Hague, dated 2 September 1937 no 1896/681. This letter is accompanied by the Japanese communiqué to the F.O. on the Japanese naval blockade. ARA Archief Gezantschap Londen, accession code 2.05.44, inv.nr. 844.


750 Paul Haggie, Ibid. 112.

751 Memorandum on Reinforcement of British Naval Forces in the Far East, 11 September 1937, ADM 1/9909. See also PRO CAB 24/272 CP 270(37), 12 November 1937.

752 The Royal Navy did not escape either. The British Yangtze gunboat HMS LADYBIRD was shot at by Japanese shore batteries causing casualties and considerable damage. Paul Haggie, Ibid, 115

753 Lowe, opus cit., 33 - 34

754 Peter Calvocoressi, op. cit., 840.
Ronald Lindsay, the British Ambassador in Washington, discussed the matter with both Roosevelt and Hull on 16 December 1937. (Page 35) The American President wanted plans for a naval blockade to be worked out in staff conversations. In his view, the blockade line would run from the Aleutian Islands through Hawaii over Guam to Hongkong and north of the Philippines with the Americans being responsible for the Pacific Ocean area and the British for the South China Sea. The blockade was to be implemented after the next serious outrage by Japan. Roosevelt advised against sending the British battle-fleet to Singapore at that time, but welcomed a reinforcement of (heavy) cruisers and destroyers for the British China Station with (heavy) cruisers and destroyers. He promised to send a squadron of U.S. cruisers on a "courtesy visit" to Singapore.755 A senior American staff officer, Captain Royal E. Ingersoll, Director of Plans of the U.S. Naval Staff, was dispatched with utmost speed to meet his counterpart in London, Captain Tom Phillips RN and was ordered to work out arrangements. He also met Anthony Eden and the First Sealord.756

The talks between Ingersoll and Admiral Chatfield, held on 3 January 1938, revealed the different ideas both parties had on how to contain Japan.757 Chatfield explained that if he encouraged them to do so, the Cabinet was ready to send a sizable fleet to the Far East: nine battleships, one battlecruiser, two aircraft carriers, fifteen cruisers, fifty-four destroyers and ten submarines.758 Singapore however was not yet ready to repair the heavy ships. Dispatching that large fleet from the Mediterranean was tentatively planned for 15 January 1938. It would mean the temporary abandonment of Malta and Cyprus, and partial mobilisation of the navy. While the British stressed the importance of taking immediate action because their fleet was ready, Ingersoll explained that the U.S. Navy was more interested in developing "a long-term strategy aimed at harnessing Japanese aggression. The U.S. Fleet, with only 85% of the complements on board, was not yet on a wartime footing."759 When, therefore, on 4 January the question of a combined blockade was discussed, no firm understanding was reached. It was tentatively agreed that Britain would monitor all shipping bound for Japan between Singapore and Fiji, including the Philippines, and that the U.S. Navy would do the same on the line Fiji - Hawaii - Westcoast. Moreover, the US Pacific Fleet would be moved over to Pearl Harbor.760 France would not participate but British ships could use French ports in the area. To maximize the impact on the Japanese, it was the intention that the two fleets should reach Singapore and Pearl Harbor at about the same time. When Ingersoll departed on 13 January 1938,

755 Ambassador Lindsay to F.O., 17 December 1937, telegram 481/482/483, FO 371/20961{F11201/9/10].


758 Records of conversations with Captain Ingersoll. PRO ADM 1/9822. This is a copy of Ingersoll's Report on his mission to his superiors. The Admiralty record is in ADM 116/3922. The "Record of Conversations" signed by Ingersoll and Capt. Sir Tom Phillips on 13 January 1938 is printed as an appendix to L. Pratt, op. cit. 760 - 763.

759 L. Pratt, op. cit., 755.

760 At that time, the US Pacific Fleet was based on the US West coast, mainly at San Diego, with San Francisco as a secondary base and Bremerton Navy Yard in Washington as the main repair base. See also Ingersoll's testimony in the Congressional Report on the Pearl Harbor Attack, Part 9, 4272 - 4280.
an agreed record of the conversations was signed by Ingersoll and Phillips. It spelled out the coordination between the two powers if the Japanese were to resort to open warfare.

The Ingersoll mission was important. It was the first signal to Great Britain that President Roosevelt was getting alarmed about Japanese moves. It was shrouded in deep secrecy and when hostile elements in the Navy Department leaked the mission to Congress, the uproar that followed made it difficult for the President to employ new initiatives towards Britain right up to 1939. Nothing further came of official co-operation with the Americans. Informally, an exchange of technical and tactical information was continued by the British Admiralty without insisting on American reciprocity. In 1938 and 1939, British Naval Planners and the U.S. Naval Attaché in London secretly exchanged information on a variety of subjects, including the Japanese Navy.

Chamberlain however was already opposed to mobilizing the British Fleet due to events in Europe and he decided not to act on the Chatfield proposal. No fleet - not even a small one - was to be sent to Singapore. Haggie has rightly pointed out that Great Britain had forfeited the chance to respond to American initiative with regard to Japan, an opportunity which did not occur again until the summer of 1941. In hindsight, it would easily have been possible to have impressed the Japanese by sending a (heavy-) cruiser force to Singapore. It would have shown British resolve at very little expense. Chatfield’s reasons for sending a large fleet was sound enough, but it was based on the assumption that America would look the other way if the Japanese fleet’s full force descended on the small British fleet in the South China Sea, thus uncovering its flank toward the Americans in The Philippines and beyond. In 1937, that scenario of American indifference was already unrealistic, as Chatfield knew. Why he insisted on mobilizing the Navy and sending a large fleet, knowing that it was politically impossible for Chamberlain to do so without full American support, remains a mystery. That was the moment of truth for the “Main Fleet to Singapore”- Strategy, even if it had not “the” Main Fleet but only a cruiser squadron. The Navy was ready, there were staff talks with the Americans and there was a certain degree of coordination of all naval movements agreed by them, yet the political decision to dispatch (part of) the fleet was not made. Again in hindsight, both the COS and the Cabinet failed the British nation in that vital hour.

2.4.5. Sending a Squadron or a Fleet?

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761 James Neidpath, op.cit. 144


763 See Malcolm Murfett, op. cit., 179 - 182, 198 - 202, 281 - 282. This resulted in the U.S. Navy obtaining information about Asdic and later on the German magnetic mines.

764 L. Pratt, op. cit., 759.

765 Lowe, op.cit. 37

766 Paul Haggie, Ibid., 119

767 L. Pratt, op. cit. 757.
The statement made by the Japanese Prime Minister, Prince Konoye, on 3 November 1938 about Japan's claims to a "Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" resulted in renewed pressure being put on the Admiralty by the F.O. to send a small squadron of capital ships to the Far East. It was initiated in a telegram to Lord Halifax by Sir Robert Craigie, ambassador in Tokyo. Sir Clark Kerr, British Ambassador in China, and the Henry Fitzmaurice, British Consul-General in Batavia, gave his suggestion their full support. The squadron would not have to match the Japanese in numbers as, according to Craigie, any fleet squadron at all would have a deterrent effect upon the Japanese. The Fitzmaurice Memorandum, dated 27 January 1938 gives a sharp analysis of the failings of the "Main Fleet to Singapore"-strategy. In his opinion, even a small squadron would have been a deterrent, as it would have increased Japanese insecurity about the latent threat the U.S. Pacific Fleet posed. The F.O. therefore suggested to the COS the employment for this purpose of the four old and obsolete R-class battleships, which would be phased out anyway in 1942 once the 5 battleships of the KING GEORGE V-class were completed. Admiral R. Backhouse, who had succeeded Chatfield as First Sealord, did not like that idea at all as, in his opinion, those ships were no match for the Japanese. His argumentation was rather defeatist however: Neither as it exists now, nor as it will be when the present contemplated expansion is completed, can the British Fleet be regarded as adequate to meet with success, alone and simultaneously, the navies of Germany, Italy and Japan." No consideration is given at all to the allied French navy. He also stated that a large part of the fleet had to stay in Home waters, not only for political reasons, but by the needs of training and the welfare of personnel. A typical peacetime argument.

Meanwhile, within the CID considerable discussion was going on about the Far East. Chatfield, who was then Minister for Coordination of Defence, strongly expressed his view that it was essential to send a large fleet to Singapore, pointing out the considerable Anglo-French superiority in capital ships. The CID thereupon decided to set up a Strategical Appreciation Committee (SAC) to consider the whole strategic situation. The SAC consisted of Chatfield as chairman, the three service ministers and the COS.

Backhouse, First Sealord, drafted a memorandum for the SAC, in which he explained that at that stage, he could only make 5 capital ships available to be sent eventually to the Far East at a month's notice. Moreover, those ships would have been the rather heterogeneous force of three QUEEN ELISABETHs, HMS RODNEY and one R class battleship. This fleet would later be reinforced by HMS RENOWN and another "R" class ship. In the ensuing discussion in the SAC it became clear that Backhouse was more pragmatic.

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760 Telegram Craigie to Halifax, 14 December 1937, DBFP, 3rd Series, Vol. 8, doc. 338.
761 DBFP, 3rd series, vol. 8, 543 - 548.
763 Admiralty to Foreign Office, 29 March 1939, PRO ADM 1/9909.
764 Paul Haggie, Ibid., 133.
765 Note by the First Sealord on the dispatch of a Fleet to the Far East. SAC 4, 28 February 1939, CAB 16/209.
766 The Royal Navy possessed 4 old and outmoded so-called R-class battleships: HMS ROYAL SOUVEREIGN, REVENGE, RAMILLIES and RESOLUTION.
than Chatfield. Backhouse was not against sending a smaller force of capital ships, as long as it was going to be used to safeguard the lines of communication rather than to confront the amassed Japanese battlefleet's power.

Backhouse and Chatfield clashed violently at the SAC on this issue, with Chatfield maintaining that "it would be better to lose the Empire by fighting than by default." Backhouse wrote in an internal memorandum "that it would certainly be very serious if Singapore fell to the Japanese, but it would not necessarily mean, in my opinion, the loss of the Eastern Empire for all time." Backhouse was still willing to send a smaller fleet to Singapore, instead of the main fleet.

Before Backhouse retired from office due to ill health, he appointed Rear-Admiral Sir Reginald Drax to his staff, who was reputed to be decidedly unorthodox in his attitudes. Drax loathed the indecisive and ponderous reports produced by Plans Division and the CID. He also studied the Far East problem, and came up with an indictment of Chatfield's strategy of sending a large battlefleet as victory over Japan could only be considered possible if Britain sent almost her total strength of capital ships. Drax recommended that in the event of a three-Power war, the Home Fleet should be one battleship more than the number of German battleships but the Mediterranean fleet should be powered to the limit in order to deliver a knock-out blow to the Italian battlefleet in 2 to 3 months time. Afterwards the fleet would steam to Singapore. Meanwhile, a force of two fast battleships, one aircraft carrier and a flotilla of TRIBAL-Class destroyers would be expedited to the Far East. His proposal shows an uncanny resemblance to Churchill's decision to send a similar squadron to Singapore in October 1941. (See page 178-180). Churchill, however, in his position as First Lord at that time, sent an unofficial paper to Chatfield in which he argued that not even a cruiser squadron should be sent to Singapore as long as the United States did not come in against Japan. Of course, both Drax and Churchill underestimated the Japanese but Drax' proposal showed a flexibility, which was lacking not only in the Admiralty's Plans Division but also in Chatfield, not to mention Churchill. When his mentor Backhouse disappeared, Drax's plans, however, fell on deaf ears.

Nevertheless, the seeds had been sown. The shibboleth of the "Main Fleet to Singapore", which had dominated British naval strategy for almost two decades, was crumbling. Other options could be discussed more freely within the naval Staff.

Encouraged by Churchill, the SAC agreed to have the Americans informed of the fact that in the event of a three-Power war, it would be impossible to send a battlefleet to Singapore. The German occupation of Prague in March 1939 added urgency to this communication. The British Government reacted by giving a unilateral and public guarantee of the integrity of Poland, to be followed by guarantees for Romania, Greece and Turkey. Those guarantees increased the need to keep the British Fleet in the Mediterranean and were
therefore quite a setback to the Singapore strategy. To contain the Japanese, the British Government asked the American Government to return the Pacific Fleet, then on spring exercises in the Caribbean, to its home waters, preferably to Pearl Harbor. (Its normal home base was San Diego). Roosevelt complied, by ordering the Pacific Fleet back to San Diego one month in advance of its planned return but he refused to send the fleet to Pearl Harbor.

In order to inform the Americans about the British fleet plans, Commander T.C. Hampton from the Admiralty’s Plans Division was quietly dispatched to the United States early in June 1938, where in deep secrecy he met Admiral Leahy, U.S. Chief of Naval Operations, Rear-Admiral R.L. Ghormley, Director of Plans, U.S. Navy, and the British Naval Attaché in Washington, Captain Curzon-Howe, at Leahy’s home. The American Director of Naval Intelligence had not been invited, in order to avoid the kind of embarrassment which leakage of the Ingersoll talks had caused in 1938. At this meeting Leahy also received the Royal Navy signal books from Hampton, as a sign of the Royal Navy’s trust in the U.S. Navy as its future ally. No reciprocity was required.

At the second meeting on 14 June 1939, Leahy stated as his personal opinion, that if the two nations found themselves allied to one another, then the United States ought to be responsible for the Pacific and Britain for the Atlantic. In that case the U.S. Pacific Fleet would move to Singapore, along with a nominal token force of British ships. The informal talks brought home to the Americans that they could no longer rely on a British battlefleet being in the Pacific and this realization was subsequently integrated in American plans, especially RAINBOW 3, which was the principal war plan of the U.S. Navy until November 1940. (See Chapter 1, page 87, 89). McIntyre maintains that this secret discussion may have had a dangerously misleading effect on the British concerning the American view of the importance of Singapore.

Although the participants were very cordial towards each other at these secret meetings, the Americans refused to give any guarantee about their possible involvement in any British - Japanese conflict as an ally. Of course, Leahy and Ghormley had to take Congress into consideration, as U.S. Congress was still strongly isolationist, they could not therefore give any assurance about Congress’ lines of action. The conclusion can be drawn, that, although the role of the Americans as guardians of the Pacific became more obvious as time went on, the British Government had no certainty whether or to what extent the Americans were prepared to become involved in possible hostilities with Japan.

Haggie has pointed out that it still seems strange that, although the Americans were informed that the “Main Fleet to Singapore” Strategy was gravely jeopardised, the

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780 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 464 - 465.
781 Malcolm Murfett, op. cit., 225.
782 Records of meetings with the United States’ CNO, 12 and 14 June 1939, ADM 116/3922, also P. Lowe, Origins 97 - 98, and S.E. Morison, Op. cit., 49
783 W. David McIntyre, op.cit., 156.
784 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 478
Dominions most affected were not told anything at that stage. Neidpath states, however, that the Australians somehow got wind of the precarious naval situation and that there was a telephone conversation on this subject between Australian Prime Minister Joseph Lyons and Chamberlain on March 20, 1939. Hamill traced that conversation to a blunder made by the CID Secretariat. A telegram was sent to the Australian Government, reiterating the pledge made by the Imperial Conference in 1937 but leaving the size of the fleet to be determined by the circumstances at the time. That communication soothed the credulous Australians for the time being.

Secret talks however were not restricted to the United States, but also took place with the French. On 25 April 1939, the situation in the Far East was discussed with a French Naval delegation in London. The British delegation, led by Captain V.H. Danckwerts, deputy Director of Plans, Naval Staff, explained to the French that Italy was the straw which was breaking the camel's back. Great Britain could not afford to fight Germany, Italy and Japan all at the same time. Considerable care was taken not to inform the French delegation about the Singapore strategy. According to Hamill, no previous staff talks with the French Navy about cooperation in the defence of the Mediterranean had been held. The Admiralty was afraid that the French would shrink away from any mutual defence if the full implications of the Singapore strategy were known to them. Indeed, as foreseen, Vice-Admiral Jean Odendhal, leader of the French delegation, was of the opinion that the Eastern Mediterranean should not be given up in order to sail the British Mediterranean Fleet to Singapore as the British proposed. This reinforced British Naval Officers' opinions, that the presence of a British Fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean was necessary.

The outbreak of war in Europe caused the Japanese to issue a declaration in which they proclaimed that they were neutral, coupled with the "friendly advice" to the belligerent powers to withdraw their troops and warships from China. The Admiralty, and Vice-Admiral Sir Percy Noble, the local British commander, strongly urged the withdrawal of at least the five gunboats bottled up in the Japanese-controlled part of the Yangtze river. The F.O. however balked. President Roosevelt had indicated, that the United States should at least keep troops and ships in The Philippines and he also expressed the hope that England and France would do likewise. The result was a compromise. The gunboats were indeed withdrawn and once agreement was reached with Japan, the Tientsin concession was eventually evacuated in June 1940, although Britain and France kept troops and ships in the Shanghai concessions.

2.4.6. Involvement of the Dominions, 1939.

According to W. David McIntyre, the unpleasant truth about the inability of Great Britain to fulfill its pledge, dramatically came to light at the Pacific Defence Conference, which took

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78 Paul Haggie, Ibid 144, 146.

79 The CID Secretariat had sent inadvertently a copy of the Minutes of the 348th Meeting of the CID to Mr. Stirling, the Australian Liaison Officer at the Cabinet Office. See Ian Hamill, op. cit., 470.

80 James Neidpath, op. cit. 150.

81 Ian Hamill, op. cit. 465 - 466.

82 W. David McIntyre, op. cit. 150.
place at Wellington, New Zealand, from 14 to 27 April, 1939. The British position was outlined in the COS-Appreciation dated 1 February 1939, entitled "New Zealand Co-operation in Imperial defence", which was demolished in a brilliant analysis by Carl Berendsen, a New Zealand civil servant, who argued that even if the main fleet were to reach Singapore, then the base would possibly be occupied by the Japanese in the meantime. The ensuing discussion could not dispel the N.Z. delegation disbelief, that the fleet would ever be sent even if the U.K. happened to be at war with all three fascist states. Air Vice Marshall A. Longmore RAF, head of the British delegation, conceded this which was a rude shock to both the New Zealand and Australian service chiefs present. The full implications of that message, however, became obvious only after that conference.

Nevertheless, as a result of the conference, some positive measures were taken. Australia and New Zealand started aerial reconnaissance from New Guinea to Tonga, with the New Hebrides as dividing line. It was hoped, that a Japanese coup de main against Australia, New Zealand or Fiji would thus be discovered in time. Moreover, New Zealand reinforced Fanning Island, Western Samoa and Tonga and dispatched an Infantry brigade to Fiji. Australia sent reinforcements to Nauru, the New Hebrides, the Solomon Islands and Norfolk Island.

The Tientsin incident in April 1939 demanded a new appraisal of the Far Eastern situation which had become even more desperate than in 1938, and the COS appreciation was very pessimistic. They declared that "If we were unfortunately to find ourselves at war with Japan, without the active co-operation of the United States of America, it would be essential for us to take what steps we could to protect our sea-communications in the Indian Ocean against raids. In these circumstances, we should be prepared to recommend the despatch of two capital ships to the East." It was clear that Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, who had replaced Backhouse as First Sealand, was even more cautious about sending forces to the Far East than Chatfield had been. His new Deputy of Naval Staff, Vice-Admiral Tom S.V. Phillips, who fiercely resisted any idea of sending a "flying squadron" to the Far East, supported Pound’s ideas. One must at this point consider the irony of history, however, as Admiral Phillips himself commanded just such a flying squadron to its doom less than three years later.

On 19 June 1939, both Cadogan and Chatfield objected to the negative picture painted by the COS who, in effect, argued that without the United States’ active support, nothing could be done. In both east and west the situation was threatening and it was not at all clear when and where the first blow would come. Hitler stepped up his agitation around Danzig, using British detraction to the Tientsin incident to the utmost. If war broke out in

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700 W. David McIntyre, op.cit., 151-155. This conference was hosted by New Zealand’s Deputy Prime Minister Peter Fraser, who had in his entourage Walter Nash, the Minister of Finance, Frederick Jones, the Minister of Defence, and Carl Berendsen, head of the Prime Minister’s Department. Also in attendance were Sir Harry Batterbee, UK High Commissioner in Wellington, and Sir Harry Luke, Governor of Fiji. The UK Delegation consisted of Air Vice Marshall Sir Arthur Longmore RAF, Vice-Adm. Sir Ragnar Colvin RN, who had just been appointed the CNS of the RAN, and doubled as the head of the Australian delegation, and Maj.-Gen. Pierse Mackesy. The Australian delegation consisted next to Colvin of Colonel Vernon Sturdee of the Army GHQ and Wing Commander George Jones,RAAF.

711 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 474.


730 Peter Calvocoressi, op. cit. p. 863.
the Far East, Pound was willing to send to Singapore the two NELSON's and the five obsolete R-class battleships to Singapore. In that case, Pound would not commit the Mediterranean battleships to a Drax-like knockout blow of the Italian battlefleet, a conclusion which very much annoyed Vice-Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, the fighting C-in-C of the Mediterranean Fleet.\textsuperscript{784}

The problem about sending even that fleet contingent was that it would still be inferior to the Japanese battlefleet. In a report written in June 1939, the COS assessed the efficiency of the Japanese Navy as being 80 per cent compared to that of the Royal Navy because Japanese maintenance of weapons systems was believed to be less thorough.\textsuperscript{785} The COS also maintained in the report that the fleet should not venture too far away from the Singapore base to entice the Japanese to do battle within the action radius of the British torpedo bombers. As Neidpath has shown, the thinking of the Naval Staff was rather cloudy on the issue of air superiority, because if air power was really so essential to British success, then Japan's carrier-borne airstrength also had to be taken into consideration.\textsuperscript{786} In April 1939 British estimates in April 1939 stood at 457 first-line carrier-borne Japanese aircraft versus 218 British ones if Britain were to send all its aircraft carriers to Singapore. Even with convoluted Naval Staff thinking in this air like this, there could be no guarantees whatever of British superiority around Singapore.

In November 1939, the Far East situation was again surveyed by the COS together with representatives of the Dominions and India. Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, prepared a memorandum on Australian naval defence, in which he described Singapore as a fortress, armed with five fifteen-inch guns and garrisoned by nearly 20,000 men. It would take an army of at least 50,000 a minimum of four months to conquer it. As the distance from Japan to Singapore was just as great as that from Southampton to New-York, he considered it unlikely that Japan would transport an army over that distance. If Britain were to send a superior fleet to Singapore then the Japanese would be trapped.\textsuperscript{787} In answer to a direct question from Richard Casey, the Australian representative, Richard Casey, Churchill confirmed that there would be no question of sending powerful naval forces to the Far East, simply on the mere threat of an attack. Churchill told him though, that if the choice lay between defending the Middle East or the Pacific Dominions, it was clear that "our duty to our kith and kin would take precedence," which was in effect a reiteration of the priorities as has been discussed at the Imperial Conference in 1937.\textsuperscript{788} The Dominion representatives acquiesced to Churchill's statements with much anxiety, but for their Governments it was sufficiently reassuring to start sending their best troops to the Middle-East, bariring their own local defence. They agreed to strengthen Singapore, however, so that it could hold out for six months.\textsuperscript{789}

\textsuperscript{784} Paul Haggie, ibid., 157

\textsuperscript{785} Situation in the Far East. COS Report 24 June 1939, COS Paper 931.

\textsuperscript{786} James Neidpath, op.cit. 147

\textsuperscript{787} Minutes of 8th meeting with Dominions representatives, 20 Nov. 1939, PRO CAB 99/1.

\textsuperscript{788} W. David McIntyre, op.cit., 163, Ian Hamill, op. cit. 480 with reference in note 196 to PRO WP(39) 135, CAB 683.

\textsuperscript{789} Minutes of meetings of COS, 4 and 11 January 1940, CAB 79/3
On 16 April 1940, Captain Alan Kirk USN, the American naval attaché in London, called on Admiral Tom Phillips, the Vice Chief of Naval Staff, to discuss Far Eastern strategy. The US Navy was concerned, that if Germany attacked The Netherlands, then the Japanese might take over the Netherlands East Indies. Kirk suggested that if The Netherlands were invaded, then the US Pacific Fleet would immediately steam at once to Manila, to block the Japanese move. The problem was, that Manila did not have adequate docking facilities. Kirk asked about the facilities at Singapore. Phillips of course jumped at the opportunity and promised full British support if the Pacific Fleet arrived in the South China Sea.

Both the French collapse in June 1940 and the Italian declaration of war dramatically changed the situation dramatically. With the powerful Italian Fleet as an enemy, it made British presence in the Mediterranean and the Middle East areas very vulnerable. It became more than academic, that Japan would secure the use of the great natural harbour at Cam-Ranh from the French, which would transform Singapore from being a secure fleet base to becoming an exposed outpost almost overnight. This was a potential calamity, which had to be addressed. The British Royal Navy did not have the capability to carry out a naval blockade along the French Indochina-coast, let alone to attempt to take over the colony from the Vichy French, as had happened in New-Caledonia, Syria and the Lebanon in the Middle East.

On June 26, the Cabinet agreed to a memorandum prepared by the COS including a draft telegram to the Pacific Dominions in which it was plainly stated "We must therefore retain in European waters sufficient naval forces to match both German and Italian Fleets and we cannot do this and send a fleet to the Far East". It was the qualified, yet formal end to the "Main Fleet to Singapore" strategy. The English Government also asked the Australians to send an Infantry Division to Malaya. Of course, the Australian Government were upset and their High Commissioner in London, Stanley Bruce, minced no words to express his dissatisfaction.

In a personal letter Lord Ismay again explained the reasons for not sending the fleet, reiterating Churchill's statement made in the previous November when he said that a Fleet would of course be sent if a direct attack was made on Singapore, on Australia and/or on New Zealand. British irritation at what they perceived as being Australian inflexibility was rising, however, as Haggie expressed: "Even at this late stage the Australians clung to the chimera of insisting on fixed pledges in changing circumstances."

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800 This interesting American approach is discussed in Leutze's *Bargaining for Supremacy*, 129 - 130 and in a short summary in W. David McIntyre, op. cit. 163. The PRO does not contain files in which notes about this discussion could be located.


802 The Dutch Consul General in Singapore H.M.J. Fein discussed the British options with Vice-Adm. Sir Percy Noble on 6 July, 1940, and reported this discussion to the Governor-General. Archives Consulate-general Singapore, Secret Archives MinBuZa, DZ/G.A.,box 19, inv. no 1.

803 WP(40)222, 25 June 1940,CAB 669; Cab 185(40), 26 June 1940, CAB 65/7, Caldecote to Australian Government, June 28, 1940. DAFP, Volume III, document 459, 517 - 518.

804 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 481.

805 Ismay to Bruce, 4 July 1940, CAB 79/5.

On 11 August 1940, Churchill, who had become the new Prime Minister, thought it wise, however, to send a personal message to the Prime Ministers of Australia and New Zealand with the explicit promise:

"If ... contrary to prudence and self-interest, Japan set about invading Australia and New Zealand on a large scale, I have the explicit authority of the Cabinet to assure you that we should then cut our losses in the Mediterranean and proceed to your aid, sacrificing every interest except only the defence and safety of this Island on which all depends." (for a more thorough discussion of this issue see also page 478).

Churchill badly needed the Australian troops in the Middle East and that statement kept them there. It must also be pointed out that Churchill gave a hedged promise that the main fleet to Singapore would only sail from the Mediterranean if the Dominions were attacked on a massive scale. A Japanese guerre de course on their lines of communication was not covered by that guarantee notwithstanding that, according to the Admiralty, that option was the most likely course of action for the Japanese Navy to pursue.

In November 1940, after the successful air attack on the Italian battlefleet at Taranto, the overall naval situation improved. R.A. Butler, chairman of the interdepartmental committee on the Far East and Under-Secretary of State at the F.O., therefore suggested that the time had come to move a battleship and an aircraft carrier to Singapore as had been planned by the COS in the summer. Halifax forwarded his memorandum to the First Lord, A.V. Alexander. His answer was predictable: due to the raider situation in the Atlantic, any capital ships which could be withdrawn from the Mediterranean would have to do convoy work. Although plans had been made to strengthen trade protection forces in the Indian Ocean, it was not possible to spare even a single battlecruiser and a single carrier for that area. Alexander concluded: "We must put first things first, and we must concentrate our forces on beating Italy and Germany. The Navy, despite Taranto, is still stretched to the utmost in coping with this task. Surely the real deterrent to Japanese aggression in the Far East can only be found in the willing and open co-operation of the United States." Can't "His Masters' Voice" (Churchill) be heard in this statement?

2.4.7. Singapore and the U.S. Navy, 1940.

That co-operation, however, was still a long way off. The United States naval attaché in Bangkok had attended the (First) Singapore Conference in October 1940 in strictest secrecy as an observer. A United States Naval Liaison Officer was consequently attached to the staff of China Station in Singapore and a British officer attached to the flagship of the US Asiatic Fleet at Manila. In London, Rear-Admiral R.L. Ghormley, American special Naval Observer, started preliminary discussions about the forthcoming staff conver-
sations, which were to start in Washington in early 1941. Also in Washington, Captain A.W. Clarke RN, the British naval attaché, had been permitted by Admiral Stark to have an unprecedented look at the United States War Plans. On 29 October 1940, Admiral Stark showed him a preliminary draft of "Plan Dog" (page 50) with its gloomy view of British prospects in the Mediterranean and Far East. Singapore obviously had no place in American war plans for the Far East. It had been clear to the British COS that the presence of American observers at staff conferences like the one in Singapore (see below) risked the possibility of frightening the Americans away from sending the Pacific Fleet to Singapore once the weakness of that base was reported, but it remains unclear whether the American observer's report from the First Singapore Staff Conference had anything to do with this. Nevertheless, at its meeting on 10 December 1940, the Admiralty decided to put pressure on the Americans not only to strengthen their Asiatic Fleet by adding two capital ships but also to base them at Singapore.

Loudon, the Dutch minister in Washington, reported to his Government that the American Navy was of the opinion that Great Britain would not on their own be able to defend Singapore in the event of a Japanese attack. According to American estimates, Japan would attack Singapore with a force of 100,000 men and with part of its fleet. Such a powerful assault would defeat the British over there, who lacked the forces necessary to survive such an onslaught. To the Americans, it was clear that in the event the Netherlands East Indies would consequently be lost too. On the basis of this information, the Dutch Foreign Minister prepared a memorandum which informed the Dutch Cabinet about the vulnerability of Singapore as seen through American eyes.

The issue of basing American capital ships at Singapore was immediately raised by the British delegation at the start of the staff conferences in Washington in January 1941 but the Americans wanted none of it. President Roosevelt had instructed the American delegation that the United States would "stand on the defensive in the Pacific". Churchill was very annoyed that the British delegation had started the argument in the first place. His primary objective was to get the Americans involved in the war, if necessary on their terms.

The result of the secret Anglo-American staff talks was an agreement on a "Germany First"

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81 Notes of meeting between Adm. Ghormley and Admiral Bellairs, 24 October 1940, FO 371/24710.
82 Butler (Washington) to Halifax, 31 October 1940, annex to Cab 283(40), 6 November 1940, CAB 65/10. The assistant naval attaché, Captain Clarke, was impressed by the "settled resistance" of the Americans to move their fleet to Singapore.
83 W. David McIntyre, op. cit., 174
84 Minutes of meeting held at Admiralty, 10 December 1940, ADM 199/1232.
85 Telegram Loudon to Van Kieffsens, 11 December 1940, no A.U. 393. London Archive MinBuZa, Secret Archives, DZ/AJ 6 (box 34)
87 Minutes by Churchill, 12 and 17 February 1941, ADM 199/1932.
strategy, which consequently meant a defensive strategy in the Far East. No agreement could be obtained on basing part of the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Singapore. The differences of opinion on this subject were summed up in the statement: "It was agreed that for Great Britain it was fundamental that Singapore be held; for the United States it was fundamental that the Pacific Fleet be held intact". The U.S. Pacific Fleet was however to act offensively to interfere with Japanese operations against Singapore. It would also reinforce the U.S. Atlantic Fleet in order to release British units for the Far East.

Perhaps because the American attitude had sown some doubts in British naval circles, the Admiralty initiated an investigation into the readiness of repair and maintenance facilities for the British Eastern Fleet, if it suddenly had to set sail for Singapore. The first squadron would consist of "Force H": the Gibraltar-based battlecruiser and aircraft carrier as foreseen in previous plans, accompanied by a cruiser and five destroyers. Approximately one month thereafter the main body of the fleet would follow: the two NELSONs and three R class battleships, ten cruisers, twenty-seven destroyers, and ancillary vessels. They would proceed to either Trincomalee, Singapore, or "Secret Anchorage T" (Addu Atoll in the Indian Ocean). The Admiralty was obviously beginning to have second thoughts on the suitability of Singapore as a base in the changing context of 1941.

More alarming was the attitude of the American Navy towards Japan, as the British were soon to find out. Admiral Danckwerts of the British COS Delegation in Washington visited Admiral Kimmel and his staff at Pearl Harbor. The Americans did not favour direct operations against either Japan, the Kuriles or Formosa. The plan was to get to grips with Japan by means of a series of carrier-supported attacks being made on the Japanese Mandate islands but Danckwerts was not impressed by the quality of planning for such attacks. No quick results could have been expected against the Japanese battlefleet from such an approach. Kimmel also expressed his doubts about the wisdom of transferring a sizable part of his fleet to the Atlantic, a transfer which was in full progress at the time of Danckwerts' visit (Chapter 1, page 91).

2.4.8. Planning for the British Eastern Fleet, 1941.

Once the BISMARCK was sunk in May 1941, the prospects of sending a fleet to Singapore improved. The naval planners suggested sending a fleet of 7 capital ships (3 battlecruisers and 4 unmodernised battleships of the R Class), 1 aircraft carrier, 10 cruisers and 24 destroyers to the Indian Ocean. This was almost the same fleet strength as had been promised to the Dominions in the 1937 appreciation. The Admiralty planners

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888 The "Germany-First" Strategy was known to the Dutch Government. It is mentioned explicitly in the comments of the Dutch Naval C-in-C Furstner on the results of the Fourth and Fifth Singapore Conferences. See his letter to Minister of Defence, 17 May 1941, Archive London Legation, Secret Archives MinBuZa, D2/GA, box C8, inv.nr. 1415.

889 Paper British-American Staff Conference BUS(J) 30, 27 March 1941, CAB 99/5. See also Peter Lowe, Origins, 190 - 197.

890 Dispatch of a Fleet to the Far East. 14 April 1941, ADM 1/11855.

891 COS Paper 308, 14 May 1941, CAB 80/28.

892 W. David McIntyre, op.cit. 183.
assumed that the Eastern Fleet would finally be stationed in Manila Bay in order to better protect Hongkong and to act as a “Fleet in being” astride the expected Japanese advance.\textsuperscript{83} Churchill had not then been informed about the “Main Fleet to Manila” deviation, but contacts with the U.S. Navy on that subject had been made.\textsuperscript{84}

Meanwhile, following the Japanese occupation of southern Indochina, pressure increased to have a fleet sent eastwards. The naval planners foresaw sending the fast and modernised battlecruiser HMS REPULSE and the 4 R class unmodernised battleships ROYAL SOVEREIGN, REVENGE, RAMILLIES and RESOLUTION. In order to contain the TIRPITZ and the 2 German battlecruisers, the most modern units of the fleet had to remain in home waters.

Churchill disliked the idea of sending the old battleships. He maintained, contrary to the advice of the Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, the Chief of Naval Staff, that a small but fast battle squadron should be despatched to the east. It had struck him that destroying the BISMARCK required three battleships, and he thought it obnoxious that the TIRPITZ in Norway had 4 modern battleships tied up in the North Sea. He correspondingly reasoned, that sending a modern KING GEORGE V class battleship would also tie down a number of Japanese battleships, and would thus be a “decisive deterrent”. As he stated, a battleship of the KING GEORGE V class, a battlecruiser and a fast modern aircraft carrier would have “a paralysing effect upon Japanese naval action.”\textsuperscript{25} His opinion was strengthened by the recommendations made by a war council which was held at Singapore on 29 September 1941 and was chaired by Churchill’s special envoy Duff Cooper. The conference recommended sending a few modern battleships as a deterrent.\textsuperscript{85}

At the Cabinet’s Defence Committee meeting on 17 October 1941, Churchill again pressed for 2 modern battleships. The REPULSE had just arrived at Durban on convoy duty and could be sent east. The Assistant-CNS Admiral Sir Henry Harwood (Pound was away on an Inspection Tour) and A.V. Alexander, the First Lord, opposed this by pointing out, that the TIRPITZ analogy was a false one. The German ship was threatening British convoys and the proposed British Eastern Fleet was meant for convoy protection, not convoy raiding.\textsuperscript{86} The Vice-CNS, Admiral Sir Tom Phillips, maintained that a couple of modern ships could be combined with the four old R class battleships, as the Japanese also had modern battleships as well as old ones in their battlefleet. Churchill asked the CNS to come back with a proposition to the next meeting, which was to take place on October 20, 1941.

At that meeting, Pound argued that the Japanese would not be deterred by one modern


\textsuperscript{84} Cowman, op. cit., 81, 86.

\textsuperscript{85} Minute from PM to First Sea Lord, 25 August 1941, in W.S. Churchill, The Second World War, Volume 3, 768 - 769.

\textsuperscript{86} Telegram C-in-C Far East to WO, 1 October 1941, discussed at COS(41), 348th meeting, 9 October 1941. CAB 79/14

\textsuperscript{87} W. David McIntyre, op.cit., 185, lan Hamill, op. cit., 486. The minutes of this meeting at PRO COS 65th Meeting, 17 October 1941, CAB 69/2.
battleship as they could easily use four of their older battleships to escort their invasion convoys. In order to compel them to use modern units as well, and thus to uncover Japan proper, a few modern British battleships were needed, such as HMS NELSON and HMS RODNEY. Churchill however refused to give in and, as a compromise, Pound decided to order the PRINCE OF WALES, then on convoy duty near Capetown, to proceed to Trincomalee (Ceylon) in expectation of further political developments. It was a clear political decision made by Churchill, in the hope of impressing not only the Japanese but also the unruly new Prime Minister of Australia, John Curtin.

The Naval Staff was therefore overruled but found consolation in the fact that Churchill allowed HMS RENOWN and 4 R Class battleships to move to the Far East. They hoped that Japanese naval efficiency and morale would be low, like the Italians had been. They also judged Japanese battleships to be inferior to British models. These factors, if proven true, might have made the advance Force Z the deterrent which Churchill had in mind. He hoped that their presence at Singapore might at least prevent a Far Eastern war for the time being. As even Churchill knew, winning that war needed far more ships and planes.

It was also intended to send the new aircraft carrier HMS INDOMITABLE with the battleship squadron to Singapore. The ship was working up her company when she was damaged by accidental grounding off Jamaica on 3 November 1941. It is debatable whether the ship could have provided adequate aircover for the battle squadron as she had obsolete Fulmar and Martlet (American F4F Wildcat) fighters on board which were no match for Japanese Zero's, as was proven near Ceylon early in April 1942. Moreover, the carrier HMS ARK ROYAL had been lost in the Mediterranean in November 1941, and that gap had to be filled somehow anyway.

The PRINCE OF WALES and the REPULSE were to be reinforced in due time. The naval staff worked out a plan to send the 4 old R class battleships and the battlecruiser HMS RENOWN to the east, making for a total of 7 capital ships early in 1942. This was in line with the 1937 appreciation. Admiral Phillips, the Vice-CNS, had been appointed as the new Commander-in-Chief of the British Eastern Fleet. It was his decision not to wait until the RENOWN could join the two other capital ships on their way to Singapore but to go with the PRINCE OF WALES and the REPULSE, which met at Colombo on 28 November 1941. While those two ships were heading for Singapore, Phillips left by plane to meet Admiral Hart, C-In-C of the US Asiatic Fleet in Manila in time. On 2 December 1941, the two capital ships, escorted by four destroyers, sailed up the Johore Strait and anchored at the naval base, with the RENOWN and the four R Class battleships still steaming towards Trincomalee. At last, the advance squadron of a main fleet had arrived at Singapore.

Ending this sub-chapter, something has to be said about the British Navy as a fighting force. Notwithstanding the austerity of the twenties and early thirties, the ships which had been built passed the supreme test: war itself. Morale in the Royal Navy was never broken.

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*PRO COS 66th Meeting, 20 October 1941, CAB 69/8.
*Cowman, op. cit., 88.
*Cowman, op. cit., 89.
and remained consistently high.

The limiting factor to expanding the Navy quickly turned out to be industrial capacity. In the lean years after the Washington and London Treaties, many shipbuilding yards had disappeared and quality and experience of the workforce had deteriorated.\(^{632}\)

Although British technology brought improvements in Asdic, they proved to be overestimated. Radar, however, was a different matter. Shipborne radar had not yet been installed in the British cruisers which fought in the Malay Barrier, nor was it of any help to the hapless PRINCE OF WALES in the South China Sea. There was, nevertheless, one glaring failure in British weapons design for ships, and that was the failure to develop a tachymetric Anti-Aircraft fire-control system.\(^{633}\) Its lack resulted in poor Anti-Aircraft fire-control on British warships, and consequently losing many valuable ships, including the PRINCE OF WALES and the REPULSE. Whereas a new American battleship like the USS SOUTH DAKOTA succeeded in shooting down 36 Japanese attacking planes within half an hour during the Battle for the Solomons, the anti-aircraft fire from the two British capital ships near Kuantan dismally failed in disrupting the Japanese air attacks. The presence of a single modern Anti-Aircraft cruiser like the Dutch HNMS JACOB VAN HEEMSKERK could have changed the course of History.

2.5. The Singapore naval base and its defence.

Due to the importance of the Singapore base to the integrity of both the British Dominions and the Netherlands East Indies, it is imperative to cover the subject of the construction of the naval base and its defences against any outside attacks in some depth. This sub-chapter therefore deals with the actual execution of the plan to establish a fortified base on Singapore Island.

2.5.1. Origins.

The origins of the Singapore base were laid in the period from 1919 to 1921. Lord Arthur Balfour, the Prime Minister at that time, Lord Arthur Balfour, specifically requested the Cabinet's Standing Defence Sub-committee to report on the relative merits of Singapore versus Sydney.\(^{634}\) On 16 June 1921, after much discussion, the Cabinet approved the outline of its Far Eastern Naval Policy founded on a base at Singapore. This was just in time for the Imperial Conference which opened on 20 June 1921. James Neidpath\(^{635}\) has discussed in depth the two main reasons for the base and these were in no way dependent on the assumption of a war with Japan. Had that been the case, then the construction of the base would have been hampered by the Ten Year Rule. The first reason was the unacceptability from the viewpoint of Grand Strategy that the Royal Navy's superiority would only be local and not global, as long as there was no suitable base in the Far East.

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\(^{634}\) "Naval and Military situation in the Far east" Standing Subcommittee Paper of 3 May 1921 by Mr. Balfour. S.S. 2, CAB 34/1.

\(^{635}\) James Neidpath, opus cit., p.43 - 50.
to accommodate their largest capital ships. The second reason was the fear that the growth of the U.S. Navy would result in the exposed dominions (Australia, New-Zealand and even Canada) seeking protection of the United States, a fact that was also completely unacceptable. The Cabinet recommendations were accepted at the Imperial Conference of 1921 (See page 155 - 156).

The choice of Singapore as a naval base had three consequences. Firstly, docks and repair facilities had to be provided in order to accommodate the Royal Navy's largest capital ships, including HMS HOOD. Secondly, enough oil storage had to be provided to keep a main fleet operational for a year. In 1920, Singapore only had coal stocks and there were no oil storage facilities at all east of Suez. Thirdly, fortifications needed strengthening to withstand a siege lasting at least 42 days, the time estimated for the Mediterranean fleet to reach Singapore. In 1920 the Singapore defences consisted of five 9.2" guns and four 6" guns to thwart a Japanese coup de main by armoured cruisers and a landing party of 2,000 men on Keppel Harbour, the commercial port of Singapore.

The actual siting of the Naval Base became an object of discussion when the Federated Malay States Railways decided to build a causeway linking Singapore Island to Johore. The Admiralty did not object but the location of the fleet anchorage in the so-called "Old Strait" to the east of the causeway meant that the War Office had to reinforce the land front of the base at Johore as well. When the Straits Settlement Administration thought it wise to inform the Sultan of Johore about the possible location of the base, he volunteered information about Japanese fishing boats having been observed taking soundings in the whole of the Old Strait during the 1914-18 war. What was even more ominous, was the fact that 30,000 acres of land were leased to Japanese interests in rubber! (Moreover the Sultan claimed that every Japanese employee was a trained soldier.) Anyway, at a conference at Fort Canning in Singapore on 30 January 1922, a site was selected for the future base at the mouth of the Sungei Sembawang (Sembawang River), which therefore had to be diverted. CID approval of the chosen site was given in December 1922.

At the Imperial Conference in October 1923 plans for the naval base were discussed in extenso. The only person in authority who raised the fundamental question about the viability of the Singapore scheme, however, was General Jan Christiana Smuts, Premier of South Africa. He enquired whether Great Britain would dispatch a fleet to the Far East if it was threatened in home waters. The British Cabinet responded by pointing out that salvation in that case would lie in American hands only. With foresight Lord Balfour declared: "If there were an European combination against us at the same moment as war was declared against us by Japan, we should be in a position of extraordinary difficulty; but even so, I should think against such a combination we might find allies, and the fact that Singapore could hold out for a good many weeks, possibly for a good many months, might be a very strong inducement to a Power like the United States to come in quickly and to go and help before the situation in the Far

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54 CID Paper No 145-C. Enclosure No 1, "Oil Fuel". Quoted in Neidpath, op.cit. 53, note 107. See also Gordon, op. cit. 79.
55 James Neidpath, op.cit. 83ff.
56 W. David McIntyre, op. cit., 26ff.
57 W. David McIntyre, op. cit., 28, 33. Also maps on that page of the original 1922 base plan and the plan of the truncated scheme adopted in 1926.
East had been entirely and irretrievably altered.  

The Dutch authorities, who formulated the Defence foundations for the Netherlands East Indies in 1927, used almost exactly the same line of reasoning as, unknown to them, the British Cabinet had taken in 1923. (See Chapter 3, page 352.) Because the United States' reinsurance policy did not work that way from 1939 to 1942, both Empires would be mortally wounded by an insurance policy for which they did not pay sufficiently.

2.5.2. Singapore: the paper battles.

Singapore was exempt from the non-fortification provisions of the Washington naval treaty and the project was discussed at length at the Imperial Conference of 1923. At that time, it was assumed that the base could be built within a few years and there was little urgency in planning.  

Alas, the base became a subject of political controversy in the period thereafter. The first Labour Government halted all work on the base after their accession to power in March 1924. The cancellation was a matter of principle for Labour but it caused a deep split in the Commonwealth, with Canada and India being unruffled, South Africa strongly in favour of cancellation and Australia and New Zealand strongly against cancellation. McIntyre however maintains that the decision did not at all impede the planning activities for the base which were actually in progress at the time.

Far more threatening was the discussion in professional circles on the primacy of the capital ship in any future conflict. When air force enthusiasts even within the Royal Navy started arguing about the relative merits of battleships, the building of the base was in obvious danger. A very outspoken critic within the naval brotherhood was Admiral Sir Percy Scott, who maintained that the airborned torpedo, the submarine and the mine had made the free movement of capital ships impossible. Another Admiral, Mark Kerr, maintained that the aircraft carrier would eventually take over from the battleship, as has in fact happenend.

Very serious also, of course was the argument of the RAF, as expressed by their chief, Sir Hugh Trenchard that Britain's home defence against the growing French Air Force was more urgent than spending a lot of money on base facilities at Singapore. He argued cogently that it might be true that torpedo-bombers could not sink a battleship, but they could definitely damage it and a Japanese battleship damaged near Singapore had to steam 2900 miles back to the nearest base offering repair facilities. The debate on this issue between the Chief of Staff of the Royal Navy (Beatty) and the Chief of Air Staff (Trenchard) in the COS and in the Curzon commission (See below) raged throughout.

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840 Imperial Conference, 9th meeting, 17 October 1923. CAB 32/9. For quote see also J. Neidpath, op. cit. 77 and note 117.

841 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 79

842 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 134 - 158.

843 W. David McIntyre, op. cit., 39 - 45.

844 For a review of the debates between experts at the Royal United Service Institution's meetings and in the Press, see James Neidpath, op. cit., 57 - 61.

845 James Neidpath, op. cit., 96
1925. Churchill sided with Trenchard, because planes looked cheaper than the fixed defences.

Of course, there were also objections to the enormous investments needed to build the base. It has been well-documented that as Chancellor of the Exchequer Winston Churchill pared down the investment costs considerably. This point is discussed in more detail in the next sub-chapter.

The Army had argued from the start, that Singapore would be exposed to an attack from the north and therefore pleaded for a defensive line in southern Johore on the Malay Peninsula, which of course would result in an increase in investments. Last but not least, there were the Pacifists and those who became members of the League of Nations Union in Great Britain believing firmly, that the League of Nations would mean the end to all wars. Many of them voted for Labour in the election, putting Labour in power early in 1924.

When the Conservatives regained office later in 1924, a subcommittee of the CID had to be set up to discuss the raging argument between the Royal Navy and the RAF on whether heavy guns or aircraft would give the naval base the best protection. Churchill, who had earlier been Secretary of the Air and was now Chancellor of the Exchequer saw to it that there was adequate representation of the Air Force view at the Commission meetings, and got himself onto the commission as a member. The commission, named the Curzon-Commission after Lord Curzon, its chairman, delivered an interim report in February 1925, recommending the installation of a floating dock, preliminary site preparation, and the provision of a water supply to the site. By also using the commercial harbour facilities, Keppel harbour on the southern side of Singapore Island, the possibility of stationing a battlecruiser squadron there in the early thirties became realistic.

After that, the Curzon Commission investigated the air versus navy argument in its final report in July 1926. It recommended reducing the number of heavy (15") coastal artillery guns from 6 to 3 and constructing a chain of airfields between Singapore and Calcutta via Rangoon. That recommendation had the virtue of being cheaper than the original plan (an investment of £ 7,750,000 in stead of £ 11,000,000). As part of this "truncated scheme" the numbers of shipyards, quays and stores were also reduced, limiting the possibility of receiving and supplying a main fleet of over 100 warships at Singapore. The truncated scheme is discussed more deeply on the next page but it is clear that it was politically expedient for the Cabinet to accept it, as the Federated Malay States offered to pay £ 2 million for the base just in time, and the Cabinet had to show the impending imperial Conference of 1926 something of substance. The truncated scheme was therefore

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*See Chapter 4 "Guns versus Air" in W. David McIntyre, op. cit. 69 - 85.


* W. David McIntyre, op. cit., 34.


* W. David McIntyre, op. cit. 62
approved by the Cabinet on 3 August 1926,\textsuperscript{61} and thereafter passed by the Imperial Conference later that year.

In 1927 another commission, chaired by Lieut.-Gen. Sir Webb Gillman, investigated the defence requirements of Singapore for the War Office. Gillman was Inspector General of Artillery. The Gillman commission recommended in its final report of October 1927 only minor modifications of the coastal artillery configuration\textsuperscript{62}, but its activities resulted in a further postponement of the installation of the heavy guns. When the results of coastal gun trials held by the War Office became known in December 1928, another possibility for delaying the installation of the 15" guns presented itself, which was then fully exploited by W. Churchill.\textsuperscript{63}

The Gillman Commission's Final Report, which appeared on 1 March 1928, reflected on the changing strategical situation. No longer was there the assumption that a battlecruiser squadron would be based at Singapore. Overland attack from Malaya was definitely ruled out: Singapore's main dangers were envisaged as being landings on Singapore Island by raiding parties and bombardments by the Japanese battlefleet. In hindsight, the Gillman Commission Report was shortsighted and incorrect, further aggravating a strategical situation, which was already serious enough in itself.

When in June 1929, the second Labour Government came into office, another committee was appointed, aptly named the Fighting Services Committee. Its recommendations were presented at the CID-meeting on 25 July 1929. On the insistence of their respective governments, that meeting was attended by the High Commissioners of Australia and New Zealand.\textsuperscript{64} In expectation of positive results from the second Naval Disarmament Conference to be held in London in 1930, the committee recommended slowing down the work in progress at Singapore.

As that Conference did indeed prove to be successful, the decision was taken at the Imperial Conference of 1930 to further postpone work at the base for a period of five years, be it with misgivings by the New Zealand Government.\textsuperscript{65} However, the contracts for the completion of the graving dock had been signed and did not allow for cancellation without a large indemnity.\textsuperscript{66} The small Dominion of New Zealand, which had made a substantial financial contribution to the work in progress, was therefore able to prevent

\textsuperscript{61} W. David McIntyre, op. cit., 51.
\textsuperscript{62} W. David McIntyre, op. cit., 82, Ian Hamill, op. cit. 193.

\textsuperscript{63} During coastal defence artillery trials at Malta and Portsmouth, serious technical and operational deficiencies came to light. James Neidpath, op. cit. 116, W. David McIntyre, op. cit. 83 -84., Ian Hamill op. cit. 193.

\textsuperscript{64} Ian Hamill, op. cit., 285 - 288.

\textsuperscript{65} The New Zealand Government was placated by the promise of an extensive appreciation on technical defence matters by the COS, not unlikely to that requested by the Dutch Prime Minister in 1936. This appreciation, "Imperial Defence as affecting New Zealand" appeared in March 1931. See W. David McIntyre, op. cit. 101.

\textsuperscript{66} Investments had already been made up to April 30 1930 to the amount of £ 2,477,000, of which only £ 344,000 had come from the UK's exchequer. Cancellation of the project would have resulted in an indemnity of £ 3,306,000. See Ian Hamill, op. cit., 150.
halting the ongoing work on the base.\textsuperscript{57} At the time of suspension, the only additions to the pre-war defence of Singapore (Keppel Harbour) had been the installation of two six-inch guns at Changi Point right at the entrance to the channel leading to the naval base on the north side of Singapore Island in Johore Strait and the construction of a number of airfields.\textsuperscript{58}

2.5.3. Financial limitations.

The total estimate of construction costs at the start of the project in 1924 was put at £15.5 million with £160,000 for preliminary site preparation. On 27 March 1923 the Cabinet had sent an appeal to the Dominions and to the Asian Colonies to ask for contributions. Only Australia, New Zealand and the Straits Settlements had reacted positively.

In the new Conservative Cabinet at the end of 1924, W.S. Churchill held the position of Chancellor of the Exchequer. In his new role as the nation's financial watchdog, Churchill aimed directly at the investments needed for the Singapore base. With his well-known flamboyance, he maintained that:

1. there was no possibility of war with Japan.
2. if Japan were to enter into a war with Britain, they would be economically too weak to survive for any length of time.
3. the Admiralty greatly overrated Japan's naval strength.
4. if Japan were to continue their building programme, their navy would become so strong that in the long run the Royal Navy would be incapable of beating the Japanese.

Based on these assumptions Churchill waged a vigorous campaign against any hasty construction of the Singapore base in the years to come.\textsuperscript{59}

Urged by Churchill as Chancellor of the Exchequer, the CID set up a “Singapore sub-committee” on 5 January 1925 aimed at reporting on the siting and defence of the base and the time to its completion.\textsuperscript{60} At their meeting on 30 March 1925 and on the subcommittee's recommendation, the CID decided to spread the construction of the base out in two phases, the first providing a dock (without extensive repair facilities) and oil storage, and the second phase completion the base fully. After the first phase, a battle squadron, but not the main fleet, could be based at Singapore. The decision was in line with the Ten Year rule, and consequently work to expand the base to its full capacity was deferred for as long as the Ten Year rule applied. Work to accommodate the main fleet could therefore only start after the abrogation of the Ten Year Rule, which happened in 1932.\textsuperscript{61} So the Admiralty started a construction program to be spread out over 8 years, based on Phase 1 and called the "Truncated" scheme, to which the Cabinet had given their approval on 3 August 1926. That approval was greatly assisted by a timely gift of 2 million pound, offered by the Federated Malay States for the project. In 1927, another contribution of £1 million

\textsuperscript{57} Ian Hamill, op. cit., 322 - 323.

\textsuperscript{58} Minute by Director of Operations and Intelligence for CIGS, 1 October 1930, WO 32/3632.

\textsuperscript{59} Ian Hamill, op. cit. 159 ff.

\textsuperscript{60} CID, 193rd Meeting, 5 January 1925, PRO CAB 24/172

\textsuperscript{61} CID, 198th Meeting, 30 March 1925, PRO CAB 24/172.
was made by New Zealand. In that year, the Commonwealth countries had paid more for the base under construction than had the mother country, Great Britain. In effect, the combined contributions from New Zealand, Hongkong and the Federated Malay States and Straits Settlements paid almost half the cost of the truncated scheme and kept the whole project alive. The contract included levelling the site, diverting the River Semba-wang, dredging the prospective fleet anchorage in the Old Strait, and constructing a dry-dock and 2000 feet of wharves. Churchill remained opposed to the construction right up to the end of his tenure as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Due to his opposition, the result was that the (Conservative) Baldwin administration from 1924 to 1929 effectively delayed the construction of the base and not Labour.

At the end of 1930, nine years after the original approval of the Singapore plan, about £4 million had been spent on the base and its defences and a further £10.5 million had to be spent just to complete the truncated scheme with its limited accommodation potential for only a battlecruiser squadron only. In order to harbour the main fleet, an additional £4.5 million had to be spent. The contract with the local construction firm, which could not be halted, was due for completion in 1935. By then, a floating dock was present in the Old Strait and oil storage facilities were being provided. Those facilities were only defended by two regular infantry battalions, 12 antiquated Horsley bi-plane torpedo-bombers and a few flying boats. It was all together not very impressive.

Not only the Mukden incident on 18 September 1931, but in particular the Shanghai crisis of January to May 1932 indicated a change in the Far Eastern situation. Singapore was defenceless, and the British Government could therefore not interfere in any credible way. The Government was anyway not in an aggressive mood towards Japan. The Ten Year Rule, however, was definitely shelved on 23 March 1932. Unknown to everybody, the Western Powers still had ten years left to put their house in order.

On 11 October 1932, the Cabinet accepted recommendations made by the COS, that work on the defence of the base should start forthwith on the basis of guns plus aircraft, as the Coastal defence Subcommittee had suggested. Cabinet approval was provisional however, as no new expenditures could be incurred until the results of the Geneva Disarmament Conference were known in 1933.

2.5.4. Changing Defence Assumptions.

In the early thirties, events both in South East Asia and at the Admiralty resulted in

862 Ian Hamill, op. cit. 240.

863 The contract amounted to £3,721,474; the work had to be completed in seven years. See James Neidpath, op. cit., 107.

864 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 174.

865 James Neidpath, op. cit., 120.

866 In its Final Report on 24 May 1932 the committee strongly emphasized the need for co-operation between the three Services in the defence of Singapore. See W. David McIntyre, op. cit., 109.
changing defence assumptions about Singapore.

In 1931, a combined services exercise was held around Singapore. Contrary to all expectations the attackers succeeded in carrying out a successful night landing on Singapore Island itself. The defenders had relied on air reconnaissance giving them adequate warning of the "enemy's" approach but this failed dismally. Vice-Admiral W.H. Kelly, C-in-C China Station, reported the ominous results of the exercise. The conclusion drawn by the interservice conference which evaluated the exercise was devastating. All the fixed defences (five old 9.2 inch guns and six 6 inch guns) were obsolete, the RAF had only six flying boats and eight antiquated Horsley double-wing torpedobombers, and fighter aircraft were non-existent. Kelly concluded: "In so far as Naval interests are concerned, there are no defences." However, no undue haste was displayed in reinforcing Singapore or the fleet, as the malicious conflict between the Air Ministry and the Admiralty paralyzed decision-making at Cabinet level until October 1932.

At the Admiralty, a new and energetic CNS had been appointed: Admiral Sir Emile Chatfield. He acted on rumours of a Japanese coup de main on Singapore by sending the mine-layer HMS ADVENTURE, and by recommissioning HMS TERROR, a First World War monitor mounting two 15" guns. The TERROR received orders to anchor at the entrance to the Old Strait, because up to that time, Keppel Harbour was only defended by 6" and 9.2" guns due to the postponement of the 15" guns. Chatfield also changed instructions to the C-in-C China Station, resulting in the abandonment of Hongkong in the event of war with Japan, and in the concentration of the China Station ships on Singapore. On 31 March 1933 under his leadership, the COS recommended to the Government that the truncated scheme be immediately restarted. Together with the secretary of the CID, Maurice Hankey, and the Australian High Commissioner Stanley Bruce, he convinced the CID to accept the COS recommendations, which in turn allowed the Cabinet to agree to the truncated scheme being fully resumed on 12 April 1934. Almost fifteen months after Shanghai, the urgency of completing the Singapore base was at last recognized.

Kelly's successor as C-in-C China Station, Vice-Admiral Sir Frederick Dreyer, was not very impressed by the situation he inherited in 1933, and accordingly assailed the Admiralty with a stream of telegrams, letters and reports which irritated the Naval Staff in London. Dreyer held a staff conference at Singapore from 23 to 27 January 1934 with the C-in-C East India Station, the First member of the Australian Navy Board and the Commodore, New Zealand Division. The conference debated the strategy as outlined by the Admiralty, which was based on a Main Fleet at Singapore once they arrived from the Mediterranean after 38 days at sea. Possible assistance from Allies was considered. However, the United States were still in the grip of isolationist sentiment, and France was an uncertain ally who regarded Germany and especially Italy as being far more dangerous to her own security than Japan. The Netherlands were incapable of defending their rich Far East possessions and were therefore more of a liability than an asset. Russia was still ostracized by the Western democracies because of her violent revolutionary ideology. Germany, however, had not yet rearmed, and the arrival of the main fleet was therefore still assured in the

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888 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 336 - 342.

889 W. David McIntyre, op. cit., 111 - 112.
event of trouble with Japan. The final Conference Report, however, stressed the necessity of the presence of a few battlecruisers in the Far East in combination with about 20 submarines and an aircraft carrier. Again, the lack of even a small squadron at Singapore was clearly recognized as being a serious deficiency.

Dreyer himself and his small staff spent a considerable amount of time working out a strategy to defeat Japan with or without Allies if war broke out. This caused much irritation at the naval staff in London which did not give a Pacific strategy much consideration after the arrival of the main fleet at Singapore. Dreyer even advocated a scheme to exchange confidential information by wireless with the commander of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet. That was rejected by the Admiralty, however, on the grounds that it might arouse Japanese suspicions.

Admiral Dreyer on board his flagship visited Japan at the end of 1934. The reception was warm and friendly but the Japanese avoided displaying their latest weapons and ships at all costs, in order not to impress the British visitors. The myth about the inferior Japanese therefore continued to influence the Royal Navy unabatedly. It was even reinforced by a report from the Naval Attaché in Tokyo, which the Admiralty widely circulated in 1935. Captain G. Vivian RN reported, that "The Japanese have slow brains. Teachers ... have assured me that this is fundamentally due to strain put on the child's brain in learning some 6,000 Chinese characters before any real education can start ... The inertia shows itself by an inherent disability to switch the mind from one subject to another with rapidity ... I am convinced that it is for this reason that the Japanese people are a race of specialists ... All the other foreign Naval Attachés are firmly convinced that the unwillingness of the authorities to show more (of their ships and weapons) is due rather to the barrenness of the cupboard than to any secrets it may contain." It may have formed the basis of Admiral Tom Phillips' opinion as Chief of Naval Staff that the Japanese should be rated even lower than the Italians in efficiency - an opinion which probably cost him his life.

The importance of Malaya and of the southern coast of Siam, in the defence of Singapore was only gradually becoming appreciated although it had been recognized by the Naval Staff in 1921. General wisdom at that time however was, that such an approach by the Japanese seemed highly unlikely, because the time interval before the main fleet could interfere still being set at 42 days. Even then, a Japanese landing was expected somewhere along the more hospitable west coast of Malaya. It was only after army manoeuvres in 1936 and 1937 under close scrutiny by Colonel A.E. Percival, Chief of Staff Malaya Command, that the GOC Malaya, Lieut.-Gen. Sir William Dobbie, reported that contrary to common informed opinion at that time, the monsoon period might well be the most likely

670 Stephen Roskill: Reluctant rearmament, 187 - 188.
671 C-in-C China Station to First Sea Lord, 29 January 1934, ADM 116/3121.
672 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 362 - 363.
673 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 367.
674 Report by Captain G. Vivian to DNI, 18 February 1935, ADM 116/3862, also quoted in Stephen Roskill, Reluctant Rearmament, 188, and in Ian Hamill, op. cit. 363, who claims that even Admiral Chatfield was influenced by the Vivian Report.
675 James Neidpath, op. cit., 152 - 156.
season for an attempted Japanese landing on the East coast of Malaya. It was also noted that as long as the Japanese were unable to obtain an airfield nearby where they could station shore-based aircraft, Singapore would be safe.

This assumption was shattered by the combined services manoeuvres early in 1938. From 2 to 15 February, the aircraft carrier HMS EAGLE and two heavy cruisers of the China Station (HMS NORFOLK and HMS DORSETSHIRE) undertook operations against Singapore from the South China Sea. The Fleet Air Arm attacked on two successive nights by sailing undetected within 135 miles from Singapore and launching their bombers from the carrier. The airfields on Singapore Island were bombed successfully at dawn without any opposition. A night landing party from HMS NORFOLK even captured the famous Raffles Hotel in the center of Singapore without meeting any opposition. The only consolation for the defenders was the submarine reconnaissance patrol in the Singapore Strait which intercepted every ship approaching Singapore. General Dobbie recommended increasing both anti-aircraft defences and reconnaissance patrols flown over the South China Sea, and better coordination between the services at Malaya HQ. Back in London, the Director of Plans of the naval staff recommended the installation of radar stations, which at that time could detect aircraft at a distance of 130 miles and ships at 60 miles. However, in December 1941, only 9 radar stations out of the 18 planned were operational. It can therefore be concluded that almost 4 years before the two British capital ships were sunk the problem of lack of coordination between RAF and Royal Navy had been clearly recognized.

On February 14 1938 the "KG 6", (King George VI dry dock) was opened with due ceremony. The Sultans of Johore and of the Malay Federation, who had contributed so much in funds towards the base, were in attendance. Three American light cruisers, the USS TRENTON, MEMPHIS and MILWAUKEE, were also present and very welcome, although they had not been invited. President Roosevelt had sent them as a "demonstration" in the direction of Japan because of the full-scale war then going on in China. The dockyards however were still far from completion. The press reported the existence of 18" coastal batteries, a story which was not contradicted by any authorities, and which contributed to public opinion still believing in the myth of the impregnable "Fortress Singapore."

In reality, however, the base as it was then, with just one graving dock, was meant to serve a peacetime fleet of 4 capital ships with auxiliary vessels. This was based on the "Red" or Truncated Scheme of February 1923, which foresaw a graving dock, a floating

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677 At about this time Percival delivered a very interesting lecture to officers participating in the manoeuvres to test the defences of Singapore. The typescript original is with the Percival Papers in the Imperial War Museum. The text of this lecture is reproduced in Appendix II of Louis Allen's book: Singapore 1941 - 1942, 2nd ed. 1993, 272 - 287.

678 W. David McIntyre, op. cit. 137.

679 Ibid., p.137, note 48.

680 In an article in the United Services Journal of 16 December 1937, Sir Herbert Russell declared the Singapore fortress impregnable. The article was excerpted in the Dutch Het Marineblad, 53 (1938), 107.
dock, at least 6000 feet of wharves, and oil storage and other naval facilities. Rather maliciously, Murfett thinks it was arguable whether Singapore at that stage could justifiably have been termed a first class naval base at all. The Americans were at least aware of the limitations of Singapore as a naval base. (See pages 175 to 177).

Malaya Command became impressed by Japanese combined operations at landings along the coasts (Amoy) and rivers in China in 1937 and 1938, (This Chapter, page 151) and started putting the defence of Singapore into the larger framework of the defence of the whole of the Malay peninsula. In a new appreciation, dated 19 July 1938, Dobbie acknowledged the vulnerability of Singapore in the event of a Japanese combined operations landing on the east coast of Malaya during the monsoon. In this document he showed a prescient awareness of the ease of the Japanese outflanking defending positions on roads in rubber plantations and in the Malay jungle. Dobbie had become aware of the fact that the Japanese possessed large numbers of armoured landing craft including tank landing barges. Moreover, Malaya now possessed a network of metalled roads, which were to facilitate the Japanese reverting to mechanised warfare, to a level to which British forces were not equipped. From Intelligence reports Dobbie understood that landing on the east coast of Malaya was also the Japanese plan for the conquest of Singapore.

Achieving the required depth in defence in Malaya itself would, however, require drastic reinforcement in resources. He asked, in effect, for up to 8 additional battalions, 20 armoured cars (only 4 were present) and 15 tanks (of which there were none). The General Staff considered that these requests were reasonable, but in the light of the developing Munich crisis, nothing could be spared for the Far East at that moment.

These worries were reflected in the Joint Planning Committee's Far East Appreciation of the Joint Planning Committee of the COS in May 1937, prepared for the approaching Imperial Conference, and issued before the Dobbie Report in July 1938. In this appreciation (See page 164 of this Chapter,) the possibility of a Japanese landing in Northern Malaya was analysed for the first time. Because Dobbie's full Report appeared in November 1937, the assumption in the Appreciation referred to a Japanese landing on the west coast of Malaya under cover of the Japanese carrier air force. It was finally recognized that Japan would be able to conquer Singapore before the arrival of the main fleet. The problem was the fast expansion of the German and Italian navies in Western Europe, which necessitated keeping a larger number of capital ships in Europe than had been foreseen in the twenties. The Appreciation, however, concluded, that if both Italy and Germany were unfriendly in a war situation with Japan, then the Mediterranean Fleet

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882 The Japanese landed in force at Bias Bay, 35 miles from Hongkong, in October 1938, and at Hainan in February 1939.


would abandon that sea and proceed to Singapore.

One of the consequences of the shift towards more air power in defence planning was the siting of additional airfields. In order to take maximum advantage of the very limited range of aircraft, the RAF insisted on choosing airfield sites very close to the eastern shores of the peninsula, running from north to south at Kota Baru, Gong Kedah, Kuantan and Kahang. Those sites were selected without prior consultations with the Army, and they just happened to be in areas not only unsuitable for defence but also highly vulnerable to enemy landings due to their proximity to the coast. Interservice cooperation was certainly not optimal.

Another possibility, which in fact kept most of the British troops in Singapore, was for the Japanese to land in Sarawak, occupying the oilfields of Brunei and Miri and the airstrip and harbour at Kuching. From that base the Japanese would be able to attack Singapore in force, using 2 divisions and their landing craft, to land between Singapore City and Changi, with subsidiary operations around the mouth of the Old Strait, which was also the entrance to the Singapore Naval Base at Sembawang.

Major-General H.R. Pownall, Director of Military Operations and Intelligence designate, admitted to Dobbie that Japan could conquer Singapore. In effect, the military attachés at Tokyo and Chungking gave him far better intelligence about the Japanese Army than their own naval colleague did to the naval staff. For example, Major G.T. Wards, the assistant military attaché at Tokyo, stated that contrary to the opinion held by other western observers *"the Japanese Army as it is today is a formidable force, well able to cope with any opposition likely to be met with at the present time in the Far East." But Pownall doubted whether Japan would attack because of their entanglements in China and their fear of American interference on their flank. As Neidpath has clearly illustrated, this was the standard argument by the "Middle Easterners" up to December 1941, in order to deny Malaya the reinforcements it needed.

How did Malaya Command assess the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA)? After the disaster of Singapore it became clear that British assessment of the IJA had been totally wrong. Malaya Command did indeed consider that the IJA was only a third-rate army, coming somewhere between the Italians and the Afghans. The Indian Army had no fear of the Pathani tribes and had defeated Italian forces even five times larger in the Cyrenaica desert and in Ethiopia. According to Ferris, Malaya Command was strongly influenced by reports on the Sino-Japanese War from officers stationed in Shanghai. Consequently, due to universal underestimation of the Japanese foe, the training of troops in Malaya

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8- Ong Chit Chung, op. cit., 179.


10- James Neidpath, op.cit., 163


12- John Ferris, op. cit., 249.
lacked reality.

The War Office were not the only authority in London to underrate the Japanese Army. The British officers at Malaya Command tended to do likewise. They based their opinion on the lack of effectiveness of the Japanese Army to subdue China, without realising the effects of the enormous distances, the lack of any infrastructure and the effects of the guerrilla war on the Japanese. In April 1941 Colonel G.T. Wards, British military attaché at Tokyo, visited Singapore and gave a lecture on the fighting qualities of the Japanese Army. At the end of the lecture, Army Commander Major-General L.V. Bond, rose to declare that Ward’s views were unduly pessimistic and that he disagreed with them entirely.

The problem was not how accurately the capabilities of the IJA by the British attachés, but was that these attachés could not induce the War Office and Imperial Staff to abandon the mental paradigm that only armies capable of fighting a war of attrition in Western Europe were first-class military powers. Messengers such as Colonel Ward were therefore dismissed as defeatists.

Another frequently but wrongly used argument was that of the economic weakness of Japan, aggravated by her Chinese adventure. On 15 July 1939, Major-General F.S.G. Piggott, the British Military attaché in Tokyo delivered an appreciation, stating that Japan could send an expeditionary force of 250,000 men southwards at very short notice. In the margin of the Report somebody from the MI-2 Department had pencilled the following lines: “Superficially this appreciation is correct ... Where, in our opinion, this appreciation fails is, that no account has been taken of the weakness inherent in Japan’s position - especially her adverse economic situation. We feel accordingly that, in assessing the potential menace of Japan, the fact should not be lost sight of that her economy had been severely taxed by the strain of two years of hostility in China."

When the war in Europe broke out in September 1939, notwithstanding the clear signals from Tokyo, Malaya still had only 14 battalions and 8 squadrons with 90 firstline aircraft in total. Compared to that, the Netherlands East Indies were armed to the teeth!

Another consequence of the outbreak of war in Europe was the further weakening of the China Station. In June 1940, the Admiralty decided to withdraw the 4th and 8th submarine flotillas from Singapore and Colombo respectively. The 4th was a force of 15 submarines which had practised wolf-pack tactics against Japanese invasion forces in the South China Sea. In hindsight this withdrawal was a tragic mistake.

In summary, during the middle thirties, the assumptions on which the defence of Singapore had been founded, proved to be untenable. Coastal defence guns had to be augmented by airplanes, which needed additional airfields. The existing opportunities for a Japanese invasion at the Siamese border required the defence of the whole of the Malayan Pensin-
sula which was the backdoor to Singapore. The risks of unopposed Japanese landings taking place on islands under Dutch rule and close to Singapore were also considerably increased. Although all those factors were recognized, Singapore was still not adequately defended in September 1939, and it could not under any circumstances be described as being a fortress such as the British press was accustomed to do.

2.5.5. Conflict between Churchill and the COS.

Major-General L.V. Bond succeeded Dobbie as G.O.C. Malaya Command in August 1939. He noted in horror the increase in the time scale envisioned to get the main fleet to Singapore from 42 days to 70 and later on even to 90 days. It would give attackers ample time to approach Singapore from the north and in order to contain that danger, the whole of Malaya had to be defended. Colonel A.E. Percival, then Chief of Staff to the GOC Malaya Command, wrote a staff appreciation entitled "The strategical problems of Singapore" which outlined the danger of a Japanese attack from the north quite clearly. He therefore asked for tanks but was informed by the COS, that they did not consider the provision of a tank unit justified.

In his Appreciation of 13 April 1940 General Bond maintained that as the Royal Navy was unable to defend the coasts, he would need 4 infantry divisions and 2 tank regiments to hold the northern frontier for several months. If those demands could not be met in time then he proposed that all responsibility for the defence of Malaya should be transferred to the RAF. Even when the RAF proved unable to destroy the Japanese landing fleet, they could still be held responsible for the fact that Japanese airbases in Malaya itself should not be operational at any time. The COS agreed with the analysis made in their Far East Appreciation of August 1940. The defence of Singapore rested not only on its coastal batteries but also on the defence of the whole of Malaya and that became increasingly clear also outside the COS. Due to the continuing lack of any fleet at all at Singapore, the COS even recommended that the responsibility for the defence of Malaya should be given to the RAF, which needed to be strengthened to 336 frontline aircraft, supported by an army of 18 battalions. As the Battle of Britain was beginning and the RAF did not have a single Spitfire or Hurricane east of Suez, the only advice the COS could give was to strengthen the garrison by sending the 8th Australian Division to Singapore rather than to the Middle East.

Alas, the contents of that Memorandum on the Far East Appreciation dated 15 August 1940 became known to the Japanese when on 11 November 1940 the German surface raider ATLANTIS intercepted the Blue Funnel cargo liner AUTOMEDON on its way to Singapore carrying top secret surface mail for Malaya Command on board. The ship was shelled before it was stopped and the officers charged with its secret mail were either killed or incapacitated. The contents of the secret mail bags were later presented to Vice-Admiral Nobutake Kondo, Japanese Vice-Chief of Naval Staff by Vice-Admiral Paul Wenneker, German naval attaché in Tokyo, in person. The AUTOMEDON Incident was

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87 Louis Allen, Singapore 1941 -1942, op. cit., 45.
89 COS Memorandum: "The Situation in the Far East in the Event of Japanese Intervention against us" 15 August, 1940. COS Paper no (40) 592 (Revise) PRO CAB 80/15.
90 Louis Allen, op. cit., 3, 4.
one of the worst intelligence catastrophes which befell the British.\textsuperscript{901} The Japanese
therefore go to know that British airpower in Malaya was limited to 336 aircraft up to the
end of 1941.\textsuperscript{902}

The COS appreciation also resulted in a major disagreement with Churchill. General Sir
John Dill, the C.I.G.S. defended the COS advice in his memoranda of 3 and 8 september
1940. Churchill however, in a memorandum dated 10 September\textsuperscript{903} maintained that the
fleet really was able to defend Singapore, and could be made available from the Mediterranea
nean at short notice. He also said that the threat of the United States Pacific Fleet, the
greater attraction of the Netherlands East Indies, and their involvement in China would
certainly restrain the Japanese from attacking Malaya. On 19 September 1940, a frank
exchange of opinion on this subject took place between Churchill and the COS. Admiral
Pound impressed upon Churchill that it was out of the question to dispatch an adequate
fleet, and Sir John Dill outlined the possibilities the Japanese had of landing their troops in
northern Malaya unopposed and investing Singapore at leisure. Churchill however
remained unconvinced. In his view, the air threat to Singapore was exaggerated as the
Japanese had not proven themselves to be formidable opponents in China. London was
able to hold out against determined German air attacks so what was wrong with a fortress
like Singapore?\textsuperscript{904} The Chiefs of Staff failed to convince Churchill, and the Australian 7th
Division was sent to the Middle East, with the consent of the Australian Government

In his Memoirs, written in 1951, Churchill maintained that he had believed that Singapore
could be defended, until a telegram was received from General Wavell on 19 January
1942 observing that the landward side of Singapore was virtually undefended. Churchill
wrote: "It was with feelings of painful surprise that I read this message ... So there were no
permanent fortifications covering the landward side of the naval base and of the city! Moreover,
even more astounding, no measures worth speaking of had been taken by any of the commanders
since the war began, and more especially since the Japanese had established themselves, to
construct field defences. They had not even mentioned the fact that they did not exist."\textsuperscript{905} The
great statesman must have had a lapse of memory, to put it mildly, when he wrote these
sentences. The PRO Records show unequivocally that his Chiefs of Staff had informed
him correctly about the situation in Malaya in the previous few years. Moreover, that was
not the first confrontation between him and Sir John Dill and the latter was relieved quite
soon after another clash. In his Memoirs, Churchill who was still wrathful accuses the
C.I.G.S. of withholding information on the true state of Singapore defences.\textsuperscript{906} History's
verdict of history, however, goes against Churchill and vindicates Sir John Dill. It is a pity,
though, that the COS did not draw the ultimate conclusion when Churchill spurned their
advice in September 1940, by offering their joint resignation.

\textsuperscript{901} James Rusbridger, \textit{Encounter}, May 1985, 9 - 12, Gordon op. cit., 76 - 77.

\textsuperscript{902} S. Woodburn Kirby: \textit{The War against Japan}, Vol. 1, London 1957, 54.

\textsuperscript{903} Minute by Prime Minister regarding 7th Australian Division, 10 September 1940, COS Paper No (40)732,
CAB 80/18.

\textsuperscript{904} COS (40) 317th Meeting, 19 September 1940, CAB 79/6.

\textsuperscript{905} W.S.Churchill: \textit{The Second World War, Volume IV: The Hinge of Fate}, Cassell London 1951, 42 - 43.

\textsuperscript{906} See Churchill Memoirs, Ibid., 44 - 45.
The second clash between Churchill and the COS happened on 28 April 1941, when Churchill sent them a directive, in which he in effect abandoned the higher priority Singapore had over the Middle East as it had been the case since the Imperial Conference of 1937.\(^{97}\) The first paragraph of that directive reads: "Japan is unlikely to enter the war unless the Germans make a successful invasion of Great Britain, and even a major disaster like the loss of the Middle East would not necessarily make her come in, because the liberation of the British Mediterranean Fleet which might be expected, and also any troops evacuated from the Middle East to Singapore would not weaken British war-making strength in Malaya. It is very unlikely, moreover, that Japan will enter the war either if the United States have come in, or if Japan thinks that they would come in consequent upon a Japanese declaration of war. Finally, it may be taken as almost certain that the entry of Japan into the war would be followed by the immediate entry of the United States on our side. These conditions are to be accepted by the Service Departments as a guide for all plans and actions".

On 1 May 1941 the Joint Intelligence Committee had sent a Report to the COS about the strategic options open to Japan.\(^{98}\) In that report, a number of arguments as used by Churchill to defend his policy of giving Malaya the lowest strategic priority were in fact rebutted. The J.I.C. maintained that the Japanese were in the position, of launch a military operation against Malaya or the Netherlands East Indies with 6 to 8 divisions at short notice, and an additional 13 divisions thereafter without seriously hampering their operations in China. It was estimated that even with an oil embargo, Japan could fight a war in S.E. Asia for up to nine months, long enough to conquer Singapore in fact. It also indicated clearly that an embargo would compel Japan to drive south, rather than north into Siberia, as Churchill and many others had thought up to November 1941.\(^{99}\) The report was discussed by the COS on 4 May 1941, but evidently it caused only Sir John Dill to react towards Churchill.

In a paper for Churchill dated 15 May 1941 the C.I.G.S. observed that Singapore should have priority over Egypt since its security could be more easily achieved. He stated with remarkable foresight: "Quite a small addition at Singapore will make all the difference between running a serious risk and achieving full security. The same resources put into Egypt would add comparatively little to the strength of its defences ... If we wait till emergency arises in the Far East, we shall be too late."\(^{100}\) Dill maintained, that in the last resort, it would be better to lose Egypt than to hold it at all costs, which would endanger both the United Kingdom and Singapore. Dill also pointed out, that Churchill's Directive dated 28 April reversed the promise made to the Australians in 1939, and again on 11 August 1940. Neidpath agrees that Churchill had to decide when to implement the promise made to the Australians, but that he waited too long, so that his attitude towards the Australians could easily be interpreted as having been dishonest. It could however also be argued that Churchill was prepared to take greater risks with Australian security, because he held the Japanese in low esteem.\(^{101}\) Dill however again lost the argument and was replaced by Churchill not

\(^{97}\) James Neidpath, op. cit. 175, note 40.

\(^{98}\) "Future Strategy of Japan" Report by Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, 1 May 1941. J.I.C. Paper No (41) 175 Revise. Annex to COS (41) 159th Meeting, 3 May 1941 PRO CAB 79/11.

\(^{99}\) James Neidpath, op. cit. 185 - 186.

\(^{100}\) James Neidpath, op. cit. p.178.

\(^{101}\) James Neidpath, op. cit. 179
long afterwards. The arguments Churchill used to concentrate on Egypt can be found in his very readable memoirs. Strategically, however, British interests in both the Middle East and the Far East were interdependent. As Admiral Tom Phillips had pointed out in the autumn of 1941, a Japanese fleet in the Indian Ocean would sever the 12,000 mile trip around Africa to the Middle East as securely as any German/Italian victory in the Mediterranean would do.

Strategically, in the critical period from May 1939 to December 1941, Singapore ended up at the bottom of the reinforcement priority list. Winston Churchill, Prime Minister, was responsible for this state of affairs, because the COS disagreed with his priorities yet were overruled by him a number of times. Churchill appeared to be running the war as his own show and did not tolerate dissenting opinions, as was proven by the relief of Sir John Dill.

2.5.6. The Defence of Malaya in 1941.

Even before the European disasters of June 1940, the Far Eastern Commanders had been greatly concerned about the weakness of the forces at their disposal in Malaya. The common lack of resources and an incompatibility of temperament between Air Vice Marshal J.T. Babington, the Air Officer Commanding, and Lieut.-Gen. L.V. Bond, the GOC Malaya exacerbated strategic differences of opinion. Both officers and the C-in-C China Station were, however, in full agreement that the COS Appreciation dated August 1940 was inadequate, particularly in the air. Their force recommendations were discussed at the Singapore Conference in October 1940 when Australia and New Zealand were also in attendance and an alarming report on the actual force levels was sent by the C-in-C China Station on 31 October 1940.

Another development was the appointment in October 1940 of a Commander-in-Chief Far East. Recalled from retirement was Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, then 62 years of age. The purpose of this appointment was to secure greater defence co-ordination and to resolve interservice disagreements. The C-in-C had no control over the two naval stations (East Indies and China) and so the appointment in fact added another decision layer to an already somewhat complex process. Efforts to improve local defence were hampered by the lack of interest shown by the local Governor who had to adhere to the policy decided upon by the Overseas Defence Committee in London that as Malaya was the Empire's chief dollar earner, priority should be given to the production

912 Alex Danchev: "Dilly-Dally" or having the last word: Field Marshal Sir John Dill and Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill” Journal of Contemporary History, 22 (1987), 21 - 44.
914 Gordon, op. cit., 80 - 81.
915 Gordon, op. cit., 80 - 82.
916 See Memorandum on the Defence of Malaya, 13 April 1940, WO 32/9368 and Bond to Babington, 14 March 1940 and 19 March 1940, AIR 2/7174. See also Paul Haggie, ibid. 183
917 Report by C-in-C China on Singapore Conference, 31 October 1940, ADM 1/11183.
918 See especially Kirby: Singapore, The Chain of Disaster, London 1971, 57
197

and export of rubber and tin rather than to local defence measures.909

The German invasion of Russia had dramatic consequences for Singapore. Churchill pledged to supply material aid to the Russians, and therefore Far Eastern requirements were given an even lower priority. As far as the crucial subject of air reinforcements was concerned, in September 1941 a clear warning was given by the Secretary of State for Air, that with commitments to Russia being twenty squadrons of medium bombers, fifteen squadrons of light bombers and fifteen squadrons of fighters up to July 1942, the goal of 336 aircraft over Malaya could not be attained until at least the middle of 1942.909 The continued lack of modern first-line aircraft really doomed the colony. The stream of Allied War material to Russia was just starting to flow in the second half of 1941, and this had a decisively negative impact on the problem of reinforcing the Far East.921

At the time of Pearl Harbor, the Malayan Air Command possessed no more than 158 first-line aircraft and 88 reserve planes,922 which consisted of one night-fighter squadron, four day-fighter squadrons, two light bomber and two torpedo-bomber squadrons, two reconnaissance squadrons and a small unit of flying boats. Generally speaking, the aircraft were not up to European (or Japanese) standards. The bomber squadrons were equipped with Blenheims, the torpedo-planes were outdated double-winged Vildebeeste and the fighter squadrons were equipped with newly built yet technologically outdated Buffaloes from the United States. The reconnaissance units possessed modern Hudsons and six modern Catalina's.923 The Japanese in opposition were able to launch the Army Air's 3rd Air Division and the navy's 22nd Air Flotilla, with around 500 first-line aircraft. In the air, the defenders were outnumbered by three to one. The Japanese also held a qualitative edge in their pilots' competence. Even when flying a none too modern fighter, an experienced fighter pilot can still emerge victorious from a dogfight with an inexperienced pilot flying a modern plane. Most Japanese pilots, however, were very experienced, flying modern aircraft in contrast to inexperienced Allied pilots in technologically outdated planes. That factor was to prove decisive in the skies above Malaya.

Although radar sets had been installed in southern Malaya and in Singapore, there was still a gap in coverage in the area above the approaches to the airfields in northern Malaya. Radar did not therefore provide the decisive leading edge which had contributed to victory in the Battle of Britain in 1940.924

The British Eastern Fleet was still in its build-up phase. On 2 December 1941, the first two capital ships and four rather obsolete destroyers arrived at Singapore at last. The battlecruiser HMS RENOWN had arrived at Trincomalee (Ceylon) on 4 December 1941.

909 Governor Straits Settlements to Secretary for Colonies, 27 January 1940, WO 32/9368.

910 Secretary of State for Air to President of Council, 23 September 1941, AIR 19/275.


923 W. David McIntyre, op. cit., 194

924 Paragraph 12, page 3, despatch by Air Vice Marshall Sir Robert Brooke Popham, on the period of his tenure as C-in-C Far East, War History Case 7012, PRO ADM 199/12.
The Fleet still didn’t have any aircraft carrier (HMS HERMES was still at Durban on her way east), and three old 6" cruisers from the China Station, three local gunboats and two auxiliary merchant cruisers were based at Singapore. The 8" cruiser HMS EXETER was on her way across the Indian Ocean, as were also the modern 6" cruisers HMNZS ACHILLES and HMAS HOBART. Four old destroyers were stationed at Hongkong. There were no other cruisers, destroyers and submarines except for what the Dutch could and did offer. It was certainly not a battlefleet able to act as a deterrent to the Japanese Imperial Navy. Moreover, at the end of 1941, British naval forces suffered losses which greatly reduced any chances of reinforcing the Far East.\footnote{In addition to HMS RENOWN, four old "R" class battleships arrived in the Indian Ocean in February and March 1942, but by that time they had lost all deterrent value in face of the deadliness of the Japanese Naval Air Force. They were even withdrawn to Mombasa when the Japanese Combined Fleet entered the Indian Ocean in April 1942.} In addition, about 16,000 volunteers from the Straits Settlements and both the Federated and Unfederated Malay States had been incorporated, making a total of around 87,000 troops. There weren’t any tanks available at all. The weakness of that ground force lay in its leadership, both junior and senior, but also and especially in the training of the Indian troops, hardly any of whom held ranks higher than that of recruit.\footnote{In December 1941, the defenders on the ground were stronger than the attackers, at least on paper. In place were 31 battalions, of which 15 were of the Indian Army, 6 Australian, 4 English, 2 Scottish, 3 Gurkha and one Malay battalion. In addition, about 16,000 volunteers from the Straits Settlements and both the Federated and Unfederated Malay States had been incorporated, making a total of around 87,000 troops. There weren’t any tanks available at all. The weakness of that ground force lay in its leadership, both junior and senior, but also and especially in the training of the Indian troops, hardly any of whom held ranks higher than that of recruit.}

With respect to the "Fortress Singapore," it must be stated that such a fortress did not really exist. There were no fortifications anywhere on the island itself. No field works had been provided on the island and only a few pill-boxes had been erected at defiles on the trunk roads leading from northern Malaya into Johore. The coastal artillery consisted of three 15" guns of the Johore battery at the eastern point of the island, and two 15" guns of the Buena Vista battery west of Singapore city. The approaches to Johore Strait were covered by 10 pre-World War I guns of 6" calibre and 3 guns 9.2". Keppel Harbour was protected by 8 guns of 6" and 3 guns of 9.2" also of pre world war vintage. The big 15" guns with all-round traverse were only supplied with armour piercing ammunition to be used against warships whereas the old 9.2" guns with fixed arcs of fire to the south and east only had a limited supply of high-explosive ammunitions for use against troop concentrations. The myth that the Singapore guns were fixed and could only have been fired to seaward should therefore be laid to rest.

In his report on the defence of Malaya of November 1938 (See page 188) Lieut.-Gen. Sir William Dobbie had recommended establishing a line of pill-boxes in Johore, stretching from the River Johore through Kota Tinggi towards Kulai and thence south-westwards to

\footnote{On 13 November 1941, the aircraft carrier ARK ROYAL and on 25 November 1941 the battleship BARHAM were torpedoed and sunk.}

\footnote{Disposition of Allied Naval Forces, 8 December 1941, Appendix 14 in S. Woodburn Kirby, op. cit. Vol. I, 518.}

\footnote{W. David McIntyre, op. cit., 195.}

\footnote{Order of Battle, Appendix 10, S. Woodburn Kirby, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 512.}

\footnote{S. Woodburn Kirby, Vol. I, op. cit., 360 - 362.}
Pontian Besar. That line to the north of Singapore Island was sufficient to prevent enemy artillery from shelling the naval base. Part of that defence line was completed but when Dobbie was succeeded by Major-General Bond, further completion of the line was halted as Bond was more concerned about the in-depth defence of the whole of the Malayan Peninsula.\textsuperscript{930}

One of the remaining mysteries is how much of the Singapore Naval Base had been completed. In order to be equipped well enough to handle a real fleet, the base had to be provided with repair facilities and adequate stocks of oil, food, munitions and whatever else is required by a modern fleet. In 1941, the Americans in effect concluded that Singapore was not sufficiently operational to handle their Pacific Fleet.\textsuperscript{931} It must be remembered, that the nearest first-class British naval base was at Malta, 5926 nautical miles from Singapore.

The four Western colonies in South-East Asia, had pursued various but different strategies with regard to confronting the Japanese menace in employing the indigenous populace in their defence. The Americans went farthest in mobilising indigenous manpower resources to defend The Philippines. They could appeal to the Philippine people’s nationalistic feelings because those had been promised independence for their country in 1945. The French colonial administration of Indo-China used local troops to the utmost, without any promise of independence. The French Indo-china colonial army however was never tested in combat like the others were, with one exception at Langson (See page 533). The Dutch, who, in sheer numbers, had the largest colony of white settlers in S.E. Asia (around 300,000) used conscripts from that group for their Army, reinforced with Dutch volunteers from the homeland, who were mixed with indigenous volunteers who comprised about 70% of the Royal Netherlands Indies Army. Native conscription was introduced late in 1941, and then only in Java and in some areas in the East (See page 411).

Like the Dutch, the British were inclined to defend their colony without recourse to local conscription. In the Netherlands Indies, growing political awareness made the Dutch Government fearful of an Indonesian uprising as the employment of the full potential of Indonesian youth would have resulted in an enormous indigenous army. About 400,000 young native men reached the age of conscription each year! That was the reason that enough indigenous volunteers could be recruited to form the backbone of their Army, and why they did not resort to full conscription of the indigenous population.

At that time, Malaya and Singapore had around five million inhabitants, less than half of whom were Malays. The rest were Chinese and Indians. It would have been a daunting task integrating those various races without any strong patriotic feelings into a coherent native army. Moreover, before the war, the inhabitants of Malaya had been considered to be poor fighting material. Before the war Malaya held together not because of British military power, but rather due to an efficient and caring civil administration run by a white elite and based on racial prejudice and cultural differences.\textsuperscript{932}

\textsuperscript{930} S. Woodburn Kirby, Singapore, op. cit., 32.

\textsuperscript{931} See note 29 on page 13 of Malcolm Murfett's op. cit.

A source of considerable friction in 1940 and 1941 was the attitude held by British civilians: rubber planters, managers in the tin mines and professionals in the cities, all owning their own clubs and sporting facilities, which were closed to those who did not belong to their own inner circles. The civilian governor, Sir Shenton Thomas, had been instructed that the production of tin and rubber was far more important to the generation of cash revenue needed to sustain the British war effort were miners and planters having to serve in the British Army. In 1939, Malaya produced 38% of the world's rubber and 58% of the world's tin. Of her total exports to the value of £131 million, £93 million went to foreign countries, mainly to the United States. Malaya was thus generating dollar reserves to back up British weapons procurement in the United States. The Governor unflinchingly stuck to this instruction up to the end. However, the approximately 30,000 British subjects in Singapore and Malaya provided for most of the officers and staffs for the Malay Volunteers. The Volunteers, however, were no frontline fighting units; they were employed for line-of-communications responsibilities and guard duties. Many eventually fought with distinction to defend Singapore Island.

The mainstay of the defence of Malaya therefore fell on the British Indian Army. It was an excellent fighting force, which had already proven itself in the Middle East, and which were to triumphantly reconquer Burma from the Japanese in 1944 and 1945. Due to the enormous expansion of the all-volunteer Indian Army, it had been decided that the Middle East had first priority for all the best formations, resulting in practically raw recruits to being sent to Malaya. There they were led by young British officers who knew nothing at all about their customs, traditions and languages. All things considered, it is still surprising not that they fought so badly in the Malayan campaign, but rather that some of their units fought well enough to cause the Japanese a number of casualties.

The British command structure for Malaya was quite an awkward one and it was one of the reasons for the catastrophe. A War Council had been instituted, chaired by Sir Shenton Thomas, as Governor of Malaya and the Straits Settlements the titular Commander-in-Chief. As Governor, he was responsible to the Colonial Office in London. His position was identical and fully comparable to that held by the Dutch Governor-General in Batavia.

The three Service Chiefs were members of the War Committee. They were individually responsible to the three Service Departments in London: the Admiralty, the War Office and the Air Ministry. Demands made by the three local Service Chiefs on civilian authority were treated by the Governor's Defence Secretary, who also happened to be Secretary to the War Committee. The civil servant who held that post was C.A. Vlieland, a native of Singapore, who got into a serious conflict with the Army Commander, resulting in his dismissal in 1941.

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624 For a more sympathetic view towards the Governor than offered by most authors on Singapore see Brian Montgomery: "Shenton of Singapore". London 1984. A far more critical assessment of the Governor is in S. Woodburn Kirby, Singapore, op. cit., 40 - 41.

625 These Malay Volunteers numbered around 30,000, of which 5,000 were British, 4,000 Indian, 5,000 Chinese and 16,000 Malayan.


Lieut.-Gen. Bond, the Army Commander, and Air Vice Marshall Babington, the RAF Commander, also clashed regularly at the War Council, as they represented two radically opposite views on the defence of Malaya.\textsuperscript{689} On 8 November 1940, a "Commander in Chief, Far East" was appointed to improve the command structure. That position went to a retired RAF Officer, Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham. In effect, his appointment failed to solve existing command problems, and even raised some new ones. Anyway, Sir Robert replaced both Bond and Babington at short notice by Lieut.-General A.E. Percival (on 14 May 1941) and Air Vice Marshall C.W.H. Pulford (on 24 April 1941) respectively.

In this explosive mixture was dropped Mr Duff Cooper, a personal friend of Churchill, and appointed by him with the instruction to advise on a new command arrangement. He was a former Cabinet Minister and was in close touch with Churchill. He arrived in September 1941 and his high-handedness soon caused trouble between him and both the Governor and Sir Robert. Duff Cooper was instrumental in replacing Sir Robert Brooke-Popham with a younger man, Lieut.-General Sir Henry Pownall, who, however, did not leave London for Singapore until after the Japanese invasion had begun. The COS then instructed Sir Robert to stay on the job, until he was relieved by Pownall on 23 December, 1941. As Gilchrist\textsuperscript{690} has noted, in the very first weeks of war the British C-in-C was a tired old man, unsure whether he was to stay or to go.

A leadership crisis had emerged as well on the naval side of the house. The Admiralty had decided to appoint Vice-Admiral T.S.V. Phillips as the new Commander of the British Eastern Fleet. Sir Geoffrey Layton, C-in-C China Station, was to be replaced by Phillips. He loathed that decision. Layton was familiar with the South-East Asian theatre of war and the possibilities and limitations of both the allies and the enemy. In hindsight, it would therefore have been better if Layton had commanded the nucleus of the Eastern Fleet on its arrival in Singapore. He would not at least have charged the Japanese landing convoys head-on with inadequate air cover such as Admiral Phillips did. He could have been relieved when the British Eastern Fleet had reached its designated strength.

2.5.7. The Defence of Hongkong.

In 1911, a CID Study concluded that the crown colony would not be able to resist a determined Japanese assault for more than a month.\textsuperscript{690} The choice of Singapore as the main Naval Base in the Far East therefore diminished the value of Hongkong. During the whole interwar period, however, discussions raged in the CID about both the position and the value of Hongkong.\textsuperscript{691}

In 1933, Admiral Sir Ernie M. Chatfield had concluded, that Hongkong had to be evacuated

\textsuperscript{689} S. Woodburn Kirby, Singapore, op. cit., 52 - 55.

\textsuperscript{690} A. Gilchrist, op. cit., 28.

\textsuperscript{691} N.R. Bennett: "The Naval Pivot of Asia: An Examination of the place of Hongkong in Britain's Far East Strategy, 1900 - 1914" Journal of Oriental Studies, 7 (January 1969), 73. See also PRO CAB 5/3 CID 121st meeting "Hongkong Strength of Infantry Garrison", 23 November 1912.

but he agreed that the political effects of such a withdrawal would give Japan the wrong message. Britain's hands were tied with respect to Hong Kong just like the United States were with regard to The Philippines. The counter-argument was, of course, that Hong Kong ought to be reinforced to withstand a long siege, in order to be subsequently used as a naval base for operations against Japan, once the Main Fleet arrived at Singapore. Moreover, after the outbreak of the "China Incident", the strategic importance of Hong Kong as an entry port of war materials destined for Nationalist China increased. Those imports were about 6,000 tons a month in the period from July 1937 to November 1938. That stream of goods kept China in the war, and was therefore important to British Far Eastern Strategy.

In October 1938, Canton, and in February 1939 the Island of Hainan were occupied by the Japanese, thereby effectively closing Hong Kong as a port of entry for Nationalist China. Its defence at that time consisted of 4 infantry battalions, 3 coastal batteries and 5 artillery batteries. That was clearly inadequate. No more troops and planes could, however, be spared. In May 1939 General Chiang Kai-Shek promised to assist in an eventual defence of Hong Kong by supplying 200,000 troops but that offer was not taken up, in all probability because the British held the Chinese military in low esteem. Hong Kong retained its standard C-status as a naval base.

In the COS' appreciation of the Far Eastern situation dated 15 August 1940 the Chiefs of Staff recommended withdrawing Hong Kong's garrison if that could be arranged politically. G.A.S. Northcote, Governor of the Crown Colony, even recommended demilitarizing Hong Kong. The COS decided that, for the time being such a withdrawal was out of the question.

Reinforcing Hong Kong however, as demanded by its garrison commander, Major-General A.E. Grassett, was not taken into consideration either, as troops could not be spared anywhere. Grassett, however, found an ally in the newly-appointed C-in-C Far East, Air Chief Marshall Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, who visited Hong Kong in November 1940. Sir Robert demanded 2 additional battalions for Hong Kong, which request was resolutely put down by Churchill on 7 January 1941. Churchill informed the COS that "instead of increasing the garrison it ought to be reduced to a symbolical scale... We must avoid frittering away our resources on untenable positions. Japan will think long and hard before declaring war on the British Empire, and whether there are two or six battalions at Hong Kong will make no difference to her choice. I wish we had fewer troops there, but to move any would be noticeable and dangerous." This note fits what we know about Churchill's views with regard to the Japanese menace in the Far East, which he severely under-rated.

In July 1941 Grassett returned to his native Canada, where he paid a courtesy call on

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842 Galen Roger Ferras, Ibid., 234.
844 Liu, Ibid., 242.
845 PRO, CAB 80/20 COS(40), 834 (JP) "Notes by Sir Geoffrey Northcote, 17 September 1940".
846 PRO CAB 79/7, COS(40), 365th meeting, 29 October 1940.
Canada's Chief of General Staff, Lieut.-General H.D.G. Crerar, whom he told about Hongkong's plight.\(^{33}\) Afterwards, in September 1941, he suggested to the COS in London, that Canada might be willing to supply the 2 battalions required.

In the meantime the situation had dramatically changed. Australia had sent a division to Malaya and the United States were hastily reinforcing The Philippines (pages 76 - 79) which made Hongkong more than an outpost. In Canada, public opinion showed discontent about the lack of action by Canada's military on the fronts, Canadians only being garrisoned in the United Kingdom. The C.I.G.S., Sir John Dill, therefore asked Churchill to approve a demand to Canada to send 2 battalions to Hongkong, and on 15 September 1941, Churchill gave his tentative consent.\(^{34}\) Crerar advised positively and the assignment was agreed to by the Canadian Cabinet approved on 2 October 1941.

The two battalions sailed from Vancouver on 17 October and arrived in Hongkong on 16 November 1941. Five weeks later, they were in Japanese captivity, under which they suffered terribly. They were Canada's only contribution of ground troops to the Pacific Theatre and logically, sending 1975 men on a futile march into captivity aroused much debate in Canada. Perras\(^{35}\) has convincingly proved, that under those circumstances the decision was quite logical, as both British and Canadian governments assumed that Japan had become less dangerous by September 1941, which turned out to be a grave misjudgment of the Japanese leaders, who became increasingly desperate. Expediting those 2 additional battalions was seen to boost the deterrent force in S.E. Asia, and was thus comparable to dispatching of 2 capital ships to Singapore and of the B-17s to The Philippines at one and the same time.

By 25 December 1941 the Japanese 5th Infantry Division had captured Hongkong within two weeks of fighting.

2.6. The security of the Netherlands East Indies.

This sub-chapter deals with the vexing problem of the integrity of the Netherlands Indies as seen through British eyes. Considering how weak Dutch defences were, the security of Singapore was threatened by a Japanese occupation of the NEI. Moreover, the Dutch Government were in search of some kind of tacit understanding with the British Government about a British guarantee for the NEI, who however rebuffed these early overtures.

The war in Europe further complicated matters. The Netherlands became a British ally against Germany but the Dutch colonial Government maintained a strictly neutral attitude towards the new ally for fear of provoking the Japanese. On the other hand, because the Netherlands East Indies were not selfsufficient in weapons production, an accommodation with the British and Americans was needed. The Dutch Government in exile in London was also in a very difficult position due to the intransigence of the colonial administration. This sub-chapter deals with the roles these actors played with the integrity of the incredibly rich colony at stake.

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\(^{33}\) Roger Galen Perras, op. cit., 248.

\(^{34}\) PRO CAB 79/14 COS(41), 319th meeting, 10 September 1941.

\(^{35}\) Galen Roger Perras: Ibid., 256 - 259.
2.6.1. The Pax Britannica.

The decline of the Netherlands as a world power had started in the eighteenth century. It is one of the anomalies of colonial history that, notwithstanding a continuing decline on the world stage, the Dutch were able to secure an enormous empire in S.E. Asia during the nineteenth century, more or less in step with the colonial expansion of the major Western powers. They did so under the umbrella of the "Pax Britannica," with tacit British consent. It was Great Britain, who, for European political reasons gave back to the Dutch their East Indian possessions after the Napoleonic wars. The Dutch, however, had to accept that their tenure of the East Indies was, in a sense, only conditional.

The Dutch understood that, and made the most out of a difficult situation. There were times when the relationship with Britain was strained. Dutch popular sentiment became strongly anti-British during the Boer Wars but official policy with respect to Britain did not reflect those feelings. The Anglo-Japanese Treaty in 1902 caused mixed feelings in the colony, as the Japanese fleet filled the gap left when the British withdrew their battleships from the Far East. It was unclear to what extent Britain could restrain its junior ally, who became very interested in the East Indies after the discovery of oil sources over there. In that respect, the Dutch were in the same boat as the Australians and New Zealanders, who also felt threatened by the Japanese. In June 1914 Sir Marcus Samuel of the Royal Dutch Shell group expressed that attitude when he met Sir A. Nicolson, permanent under-secretary to the Foreign Office, asking for a British guarantee concerning the Dutch islands in the face of Japanese aggression. In return for a guarantee, the Dutch government were prepared to maintain a naval squadron that could be used to assist the Royal Navy in repelling any Japanese attacks on the British Dominions. The Foreign Office turned Sir Samuel down with the argument that such a security guarantee would deeply offend Japan, who were one of Great Britain's allies at that time.

During the First World War, Japan's interest in the Dutch possessions increased. Both Japanese journalists Yosaburo Takekoshi and Hikotaro Hosaka wrote articles in the Japanese press, urging the take-over by Japan of part or all of the Indian archipelago. They found an unlikely ally in W.R.D. Beckett, the British Consul-General in Batavia, W.R.D. Beckett, who disliked the way the Dutch handled German commerce raiders in the East Indies archipelago and therefore urged the Foreign Secretary to increase Japanese involvement in the East Indies after the war. The British (and the Australians) however preferred the Netherlands Indies to remain in Dutch hands, and Beckett's advice went unheeded. After the war, he was replaced by Sir Josiah Crosby.

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951 Nicholas Tarling: "A vital British interest: Britain, Japan and the Security of Netherlands-India in the Inter-War period" Journal of S.E. Asian Studies, 9(2), (Sept. 1978) 180. This article will be subsequently referred to as: Tarling (Vital Interest).

952 Ibid., 182

953 The Foreign Office expert on S.E. Asia, Frank Ashton-Gwatkin recalled that during his visit to the Dutch East Indies at the end of the First World War, Japanese officials he met over there told him there was a saying: "When the old lady dies, we will have our share of the heritage". The old lady was The Netherlands, the heritage was the eastern part of the Netherlands Indies. See Nicholas Tarling; "When the Old Lady dies: Britain and the security of Netherlands India, 1939 - 1940". The South-East Asian Review, 2:1 (August 1977) 55. This particular publication subsequently referred to as: Tarling (Old Lady).

954 Beckett to Grey, 14 October 1916. F.O. 371/2691[235431/31446].
The Washington Treaties of 1921 and 1922, which replaced the Anglo-Japanese alliance, gave the Dutch some reasonable measure of security. (See page 96). The Dutch naturally welcomed the establishment of the Singapore Naval Base because it obviously also improved their security in the region.\footnote{Ambassador Clive at Tokyo to Foreign Secretary Simon, 21 June 1934, no 340, F.O. 371/18567(W666-588/29)} Trade with Japan flourished in the twenties, with increased Japanese investments in the Netherlands East-Indian economy. That continued even more strongly after the Wall Street crash in 1929. This was caused in no small measure by both Dutch adherence to the gold standard and the devaluation of the yen in 1931, the combination of which resulted in dramatic increases in Japanese imports into the East Indies.

The domination of Japanese imports on the East Indies market resulted in Dutch counter-measures being taken. That had to be done with utmost care: the Open Door to the NEI had to be closed very gradually. In August 1933, the Dutch colonial administration proposed measures to control Japanese imports which were agreed upon. The Japanese press concluded that the British were offering the Dutch political and military guarantees in return for commercial advantages at the expense of the Japanese marketshare.\footnote{A.C.D. De Graaff: Van Vriend tot Vijand - de betrekkingen tusschen Nederlandsch-Indië en Japan. Elsevier, Amsterdam 1945, 184 - 189} The Dutch invited the Japanese to a formal Trade Conference in Batavia in 1934, in order to discuss Japan's anxieties. The Japanese delegation, led by Haruichi Nagaoka, a former Minister at The Hague, surprised everybody by issuing a press statement on their arrival in Batavia on June 3, 1934, which stated that the Japanese wished to include the Indies in their Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. On June 6 that was followed by a formal presentation to the Governor-General of a four-point plan to achieve their aims. The irritated Dutch officials refused to even discuss that proposal, and after much posturing, the Conference was adjourned on December 17 1934, with neither an agreement having been reached, nor a new date having been agreed upon.\footnote{Tariing, (Vital Interest), 200.}

The trade negotiations distressed the British and brought about a discussion of strategic issues on the security of the East Indies. Vice-Admiral Sir F. Dreyer, Commander China Station, raised the possibility of the Japanese occupying the islands, thereby threatening the usefulness of Singapore as a naval base. He inquired at the Naval Staff, whether a policy had been defined should such a Japanese move happen.\footnote{Letter, Rear-Adm. G.C. Dickens RN to C.W. Orde, F.O., 22 May 1934, Report by Admiral Dreyer attached. FO 371/18185[F2996/652/23].} Dreyer was also apprehensive about the possibility of a Japanese coup de main on Dutch oil ports. He closed his report with the rhetorical remark:"In 1914 we fortunately had the courage and the resolution to go to war because of the violation of Belgian neutrality. Are we and the others prepared to do the same for Dutch Java, and if so, ought it not to be made clear to the world, including the Japanese?" In reply, the Director of Naval Intelligence wrote a letter to the F.O. about the need to define such a policy.\footnote{Ian Hamill, op. cit., 213.} That letter caused a debate within the Foreign Office about formulating a policy, which did not exist.
At the request of C.W. Orde at the F.O., the matter was investigated by R. Allen, a F.O. expert on Japan. In his interesting report, he noted that the greatest danger of a coup de main would be an Indonesian nationalist uprising, inspired by the Japanese, as that would give them an excuse to occupy the Tarakan and Balikpapan oilfields, using their concession at Sangkulirang Bay midway between the two places as a jump-off base. In that situation, neither the United States nor the League of Nations would intervene. Allen concluded that from the secret talks conducted between Admiral Dreyer as C-in-C China Station and Admiral F.B. Upham of the US Asiatic Fleet. Orde accepted Allen’s conclusion, that the lack of any clear British policy in case of a Japanese coup de main against the NEI, necessitated such a policy being formulated forthwith. The first step was to solicit the opinions of the British representatives in The Hague, Batavia, Washington and Tokyo.

C.H. Montgomery, the British Minister in The Hague, pointed out that the Dutch would decline any offer on the military side in order not to infringe upon their cherished neutrality. Should their neutrality be violated, however, they had to be able to count on British support. The conclusions the other diplomats drew were in line with Montgomery’s argument: the Dutch should not be approached. The Ambassador at Washington was of the opinion that the United States would not come to the rescue if Japan attacked the East Indies, or occupied Hongkong or even Singapore. Such an attack would, however, be very unlikely as long as Japan had a reasonable assurance of access to oil, and as long as Great Britain was not involved in an European war. The F.O. agreed with that position. As a result, no policy was formulated towards the Netherlands East Indies in the event of a Japanese coup de main. As outlined by Tarling, the disadvantage to this attitude was, that no real preparations could be made for joint defence.

2.6.2. Colijn’s secret consultations with the British.

In contrast to Montgomery’s opinion, it were the Dutch, however, who revived the question of the defence of the Netherlands East Indies, in the person of dr. Hendrik Colijn, their Prime Minister. In April and May 1936, he had unprecedented but secret talks with all three British service attaché’s in The Hague. Montgomery duly reported the points discussed to the Foreign Office.

The first meeting was with Major A.C.M. Paris, British military attaché, on 4 April 1936. Colijn asked for advice from the British on the defence of the Netherlands East Indies, declaring that "the inviolability of the Dutch East Indies presented an equal if not greater interest to
England than that of Holland itself.* Colijn must have anticipated the growing realisation by British policy makers, that the security of Singapore was intimately linked to a defence in depth, which required protection of the Dutch islands off the Malayan coast, including Sumatra. He was not the only one, as, in an article in an authoritative periodical, it was noted that "any attack against the Dutch East Indies would be regarded in London as very nearly equivalent to an attack on the British Empire itself".96

Colijn thereupon met Wing Commander H.N. Thornton RAF, the air attaché, on 29 April 1936. Thornton reported an exchange of opinion on how vulnerable warships were to air attack in the light of the direct hit on the minitous armoured cruiser DE ZEVEN PROVIN-CIÆN. Colijn was clearly worried about the weakness of the garrison at Singapore and asked Thornton if a reinforcement by 10,000 KNIL-soldiers would be welcome in the event of real trouble.97 Colijn's remark clearly illustrated that at least he considered the KNIL to be a real army, and surely not a badly armed police army, as some historians wanted us to believe after the war. Finally, on 11 May 1936, Colijn saw Captain C.F. Hamill RN, the British naval attaché. He expressed his fear that Japan would penetrate into Dutch New Guinea and he informed Hamill that the German Dornier seaplane factory was fully booked with German orders until 1942.98

On 22 April 1936, Colijn also had a conversation with Montgomery, in which he stated his objectives clearly. As Colijn was not only Prime Minister, but also Colonial and Defence Minister ad interim, he wanted informal advice from his British friends about investments in the defence of the East Indies which would also supplement British defence of their own possessions. Because the neutrality policy adopted by successive Dutch governments precluded any formal defence arrangement, Colijn made it clear that he was still not in favour of any formal arrangements. Montgomery promised Colijn that he would take that matter to his superiors at the Foreign Office, which he did.99

Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary, however, was less than enthusiastic about these consultations. He stated, "We should encourage the Dutch to take all necessary steps to defend their own colonies, but we must be careful to avoid committing ourselves to their defence..." 100 After much debate at the Foreign Office it was decided to pass on the question of what to do with Colijn's request to the C.I.D., informing their secretary (Hankey) that a prompt reply was needed yet also stressing that any informal advice to Colijn should not be taken to imply any British commitment to the defence of the Netherlands East Indies.101 The Foreign Office also asked the C.I.D. whether Japanese aggression towards the Netherlands East Indies would hurt the Empire's vital interests, and what kind of

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98 See his Report, FO 371/20507 [W 4081/498/29]. Thornton even noted that Colijn was obviously in good health as he smoked 5 big cigars within one and a half hour!
100 Montgomery to Sargent, 22 April 1936. F.O. 371/20507 [W 3583/498/29]
101 As the previous note; papers and minutes attached.
102 See Minutes and Papers in F.O. 371/20507 [W5230/498/29]
assistance Great Britain could offer the Dutch if that question was answered affirmatively.873

Within a short space of time the Chiefs of Staff were able to express an opinion on the strategic importance of the Netherlands East Indies but their reaction also disclosed the sorry state of Britain's defence measures in the Far East.874 "We are of the opinion that the integrity of the Dutch East Indies is vital to our security in the Far East, and the occupation of the Dutch Islands near Singapore by a hostile power would be a most serious event.

We do not, however, recommend that a guarantee of military support under all circumstances should be offered by the Dutch. Even if we intended to come to their assistance, under all circumstances it would be inadvisable to commit ourselves openly to this policy, which would no doubt cause the Dutch to rely on us and take still no action to improve their defences. Moreover, with our present standard of naval strength, a One-Power standard, we are not in a position to undertake any additional commitment ... The time has not yet come however, for us to engage in any fresh undertakings in the form of a pledge of assistance to the Netherlands East Indies".

Summarizing, the COS advised "... that our declared policy should at present be limited to a statement that the preservation of the status quo in the Pacific, including the integrity of the Dutch East Indies, is a major British interest. This should encourage the Dutch to take steps for their own defence, provided that it is not accompanied by any form of guarantee.".

British attitudes towards the NEI had therefore dramatically changed since the days of the Washington Conference, when Lloyd George and Lee had assured the Dutch delegation that England would never allow another power to invade the NEI. (page 94). It is also obvious from this memorandum, that the COS found the Dutch wanting in efforts to improve their defences over the last ten, and they were therefore unwilling to provide the Dutch with a security umbrella. The Chiefs of Staff also admitted that Britain had not done enough to improve its own state of readiness in confronting the Japanese but by comparison, the Dutch had been particularly lax in providing security for their own colonial possessions. This becomes clear, if both countries' defence expenditures for the period from 1934 to 1937 are compared:875 (The £ Sterling was equivalent to about f 9.9.--)  

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<th>Year:</th>
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<td>1937</td>
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874 Defence Problems of Holland and the Netherlands East Indies: Report by the Chiefs of Staff subcommittee, 8 July 1936, PRO/CAB/4/24/CID 1245-B.

875 See Waalwijk, op.cit. pages 121 - 122.
Whilst the British Government had started a crash program of re-armament, the Dutch Government had both absolutely and relatively decreased their own defence outlays in 1937, compared to 1934. The COS therefore had a point.

In an ensuing memorandum, dated 27 July 1936, the COS therefore recommended that staff conversations between them and the Dutch counterparts should only take place if the Dutch Government were willing to invest seriously in the defence of the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies.  

In the Cabinet there were differences of opinion about how to proceed next. Eden won his argument which meant that Colijn should not be given even a hint that the integrity of the Indies really was a major British interest. The expression to be used in discussions with Colijn was, that the integrity of the East Indies was "a matter of concern" to the United Kingdom's government. Colijn should be made to understand that there were many other major British interests in that part of the world; that the British Government could accept no commitment, and that whilst HM Government hoped that the Dutch would take all possible steps to improve their defences, the British Government could make no suggestions based on the principle of collaboration between the Dutch and British Governments. Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, agreed with this watered down version, which however did nothing to resolve the problem. When it next had to be considered, it was in the infinitely graver circumstances of 1940.

2.6.3. The COS and Dutch security.

Once the political argument was settled, the Chiefs of Staff looked at the problem of the defence of the East Indies. The Dutch forces would obviously be unable to fend off any serious Japanese attacks. The only thing they could hope for was that a determined Japanese assault could be delayed by exacting such a toll of the invaders that it would be considered a risky operation by the Japanese. In preparing for such fierce, but localized defence measures, the possibility of British assistance had to be borne in mind in order to facilitate co-operation with Empire Forces. The COS stated: "If the Netherlands Indies were one of our Dominions whom we were advising on defence, we should point out that their security must rest ultimately on the powers of the British Fleet to control sea-communications in the area in which they lie, and that their primary responsibility was to provide for their own local defence during the period before reliance."

For a small nation like The Netherlands, the Chiefs of Staff advised a naval effort aimed at increasing the numbers of submarines and motor torpedo boats available, in combination with shore-based bombers at well-defended aerodromes with early warning intelligence by radio direction-finding (radar), and a minelaying effort. Large surface ships were, however, considered too costly and less effective because Japanese superiority would not be affected anyway. According to the COS recommendation: "Naval surface forces to be kept to the minimum required for internal security and surprise
attacks by small craft. Dutch battlecruisers or even (heavy) cruisers therefore had no place in Dutch naval defence, according to the Chiefs of Staff.\textsuperscript{581}

The Chiefs of Staff recognized that the ships on the China Station were too few to face the Japanese fleet. Should the British however intervene, then the Chiefs of Staff considered it "to be essential for the Dutch to have similar aircraft to our own, with similar equipment and maintenance arrangements."\textsuperscript{582} In other words, their recommendation was that The Netherlands should, as much as possible, adhere to the Empire Standardisation Scheme as agreed to with the Dominions at the Imperial Defence Conference in 1923. The Dutch, however, had already made up their minds. They considered, with some justification, the products of the British aircraft industry as inferior to American and German planes and they already had Glenn Martin bombers on order from the United States and Domier Flying Boats from Germany, planes which were totally incompatible with British types.\textsuperscript{583}

This, of course, weakened Colijn's position when he spoke to Eden on 21 July 1936 during a holiday in London. He did not therefore take up the subject of a possible British guarantee at all. Some days later Colijn talked to Lord Swinton (Secretary of the Air), at the Air Ministry, and to Sir Samuel Hoare, First Seaford.\textsuperscript{584} He informed them that the Dutch were considering an additional purchase of around 60 flying boats of a British type in addition to the Domier flying boats. Those meetings took place before the Chiefs of Staff convened for their recommendations on Dutch defence, recommendations which, in all probability, were never discussed with Colijn or other Dutch representatives.\textsuperscript{585} In December 1936, Colijn asked Swinton if it would be possible for the British to receive a Dutch Air Force mission to discuss the possibility of licensing certain types of British land planes to be built by Dutch industry. No further documents could be found about that proposal, and the proposed mission undoubtedly never took place.\textsuperscript{586}

In reality, British aircraft design had indeed fallen back. No less an authority than Corelli Barnett states that the "two principal aircraft firms, Blackburn and Fairey, allotted to supplying the Fleet Air Arm, were inefficient even by the standards then generally prevailing in industry."\textsuperscript{587} When they came into service in 1940, the Blackburn Skua dive-bomber and the Fairey Fulmar fighter, were, at that time, both already obsolescent not only by Japanese standards, but also by American standards.

Meanwhile, discussions within the British Cabinet continued about the feasibility of an

\textsuperscript{580} As above, page 5.

\textsuperscript{581} Ph.M. Bosscher, in G. Teitel Ed.: De Val van Nederlands-Indië, Dieren 1982, 118.

\textsuperscript{582} COS 1256-B, 27 July 1936, PRO/CAB 4/24.

\textsuperscript{583} Montgomery to F.O., 8 July 1936, F.O.371/20508[W6319, 6047/621/29]


\textsuperscript{585} Tarling, (Vital Interest) 211.

\textsuperscript{586} Tarling, Ibid., 211

\textsuperscript{587} C. Barnett: Engage the Enemy more closely, 38.
Anglo-Japanese rapprochement. For that purpose, the F.O. prepared a memorandum on the options available to a coherent British policy in the Far East. The memorandum stated that there was "the absolutely essential aim, that of safeguarding of Malaya, and the East Indian colonies, together with communications to Australia and New Zealand." After concluding that Great Britain could not accept any more defence responsibilities because their resources were already overstretched and limited, the memorandum suggested that some way of dividing responsibilities with the Dutch in the naval or aviation spheres along the lines which Colijn had outlined in his previous secret conversations could possibly be arranged. The incident at the Marco Polo Bridge and the ensuing fighting in China, however, shelved any British initiative for a rapprochement with the Japanese indefinitely, therefore again raising the issue of cooperation with the Dutch. The point was, that if Japan were to formally declare war on the Chinese, then the United States had to withhold oil shipments to Japan according to the Neutrality Acts, which Congress had just passed. In that case Japan, which relied for about 80% of its oil imports on the United States, would have to find other oil suppliers such as Borneo, and possibly the Persian Gulf. Colijn was extremely worried that this was going to happen and he talked about it with Secretary Eden in Geneva in September 1937. He stressed the need for some kind of foreign policy coordination towards Japan and China. Eden reported: "He (Colijn) emphasized that he was not asking for any military help from us, but only that we should closely coordinate our policy. If our two Governments and the French Government acted together, whatever praise or blame there might be could be shared." Of course, official Dutch foreign policy would not allow such close co-ordination, but this discussion at least illustrates the fact that Colijn himself was far more pragmatic with respect to co-operation than were his compatriots.

Anyway, the conversations between Colijn and Eden resulted in a communications link being established between the Dutch Naval attaché in London and the Admiralty. There is at least one reference which mentions that advice had been given to the Dutch on "aircraft and aircraft carriers and naval defence measures, together with a strategical setting." The information given, however, was not considered to be of high quality because a few months later, the Dutch Naval attaché complained to his superiors that the Admiralty was not willing to exchange information of a secret or confidential nature with the Dutch.

The Nine Power Conference at Brussels in November 1937 did not lead to economic sanctions towards the Japanese. Eden, however, promised De Graeff, the Dutch representative, that the British would keep in touch with the Dutch concerning Far East Policy, which greatly relieved him. The lack of success resulting from this Conference

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[Ann Trotter, opus cit. chapter 11.]

[Memorandum, 6 May 1937, F.O.371/21024/F2838/597/61]


[See F.O. 371/21025/F5568/597/61.]

[PRO ADM 116/3862, Admiralty to C.-in-C. China Station, October 1937.]


[F.O. to Montgomery, 13 December 1937, no 527, F.O.371/21026/F10516/1326/61]
meant however the realisation in the Netherlands Indies, that it would be unwise to assume an automatic guarantee for the security of the East Indies by England and/or America. The frank discussions in the Netherlands Indies' press about the existence of a secret British guarantee was duly reported by the Consul General in Batavia, who concluded: "So, the opinion is, I fear, growing that if Holland ever finds herself in difficulties in the Far East, British friendship may not be of very practical protective value." In the margin of that report, R.P. Heppel of the FO Far Eastern Desk remarked on 13 January 1938: "These [press] articles reveal a fairly healthy state of mind. The Dutch will be surest of getting effective help from us if they arm to the limit of their resources!"

Back from Brussels, Eden also discussed with John Chaplin of the Far Eastern Department the desirability of involving the C.I.D. in the question of closer cooperation with the Dutch. Chaplin answered that the suggestions made by the C.I.D., based on Colijn's requests in the previous year, had not been communicated to the Dutch. As both British and Dutch interests in the integrity of the East Indies were so closely intertwined, the C.I.D did not believe that Britain would run any additional risk by starting staff talks with the Dutch. The Foreign Office therefore again approached the CID to check whether they agreed with this conclusion. Within the CID, the FO was strongly supported by the Army CIGS, who called the Netherlands Indies the "Achilles Heel" of Britain's defences in the Far East. The Army recognized that the Netherlands Indies were vital to the security of Singapore and consequently to the safety of Australia and New Zealand as well.

Eden, however, did not raise that matter in his discussion of British Far Eastern policy with Count van Limburg Stirum on 31 December, 1937 which conversation was the outcome of his promise to De Graeff. The reason for that was the gradual realisation that without the United States government's active support, Great Britain lacked the credibility to shore up the Dutch position. It were the Chiefs of Staff in particular, who objected to staff talks being held with the Dutch. If the Japanese seized the Dutch possessions, then there was little either the British or the Dutch could have done to prevent them. The position of the COS was therefore, that "we would hesitate to assume a commitment we might not be in a position to fulfill." If there were to be any staff conversations, then they should be held in London where they could be more secret, and not in the Far East. Moreover, the (British) staffs at Singapore were less well informed.

The Foreign Office disagreed with the attitude of the COS. FO Officer Strang commented that he saw no reason for delaying staff conversations with the Dutch. "All that is contemplated, is a technical examination of a defence problem without a commitment." Another FO.

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685 Fitzmaurice to Orde, 4 December 1937, FO 371/21025 [F 426/426/61].


687 Lord Gort, CIGS at the 226th meeting COS, 22 December 1937. CAB 53/8.

688 See PRO F.O. 371/21025[F11776/597/61], and ARA Archives Ministry of Colonies, box 509, file L-1.

689 COS, 1385-B, 7 January 1938, CAB 4/27.

690 FO 371/22172, 18 January 1938.

691 Note on the COS Memorandum referred to above, dated 19 January 1938.
The Chiefs of Staff admit that the Dutch possessions are our "Achilles heel" in the Far East. They admit that given that fact, there is little we could do to prevent the Japanese from seizing the islands. And yet, in spite of the fact that a seizure of Sumatra would render Singapore, costing £20 million or so, useless to protect our searoute to Australia and the Far East, they are not prepared to assist the Dutch to make their defences adequate, or even to talk about it, for fear of a "commitment" to defend Singapore, and so we are logically "committed" to prevent the seizure of such islands as would make that defence impossible ... it is not a new commitment. It is as old as the decision to build Singapore ... We are losing prestige for nothing. We must show some spirit if we wish to maintain the respect (and valuable support) of the small nations and show the gangster powers that we are a strong man armed.**

The same logic had driven American Naval planners to draw the conclusion that Singapore was untenable as a naval base, one of the reasons for which being the weakness of the surrounding Dutch islands. (pages 175 - 177).

At the C.I.D. meeting of 20 January 1938, the conflict between COS and F.O. was discussed. Lord Chatfield on behalf of the COS argued that until the British Fleet arrived at Singapore, both the British and the Dutch possessions in the Far East would remain very vulnerable. He stated: "Once the fleet arrived, although a period of two to three months might elapse before this happened, the Netherlands East Indies would be safe, provided it had not fallen in the interval". Chatfield also noted that the Dutch naval attaché who had just arrived had indicated that the Dutch were more interested in obtaining technical advice than strategic advice. Vansittart thereupon remarked, that that was exactly what the F.O. proposed.1003 Lord Swinton, a personal friend of Dr. Colijn, remarked that he had not received any indication from Colijn wishing to commit the British to Dutch security. Colijn had communicated to him a comprehensive overview of aerodromes in the Netherlands East Indies, both strategic and commercial.1004 Swinton argued that the British Government should meet Dr. Colijn's desire for collaboration in the form of an exchange of technical information. A compromise was then reached by authorizing the service departments to furnish the Dutch with technical information via their attachés in London.1005 There would however be no staff talks.

Accordingly, on 16 February 1938, Ronald of the F.O. informed the Dutch Minister on 16 February 1938, that exchange of technical information between the Dutch and the British services was allowed "from time to time" and only in London, not in Singapore. The Dutch Minister stated, that "his Government were entirely in agreement."1006 Copies of that document were addressed to Cdr D.S. McGrath of the Admiralty, Colonel L.E. Dennys of the War office and Wing Cdr C.G. Wigglesworth of the Air Ministry on 18 February 1938. The lack of coordination between these three service Departments and also the lack of any follow-up from the Dutch side meant that a valuable opportunity for closer, informal,

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1002 Pencil note on the same Memorandum as above, undated and unsigned.

1003 Waalwijk, op.cit. 192

1004 Extract of Minutes of 307th CID Meeting, 20 January 1938, p.2, CAB 2/7. The British were therefore aware of the secret Dutch airfields in Borneo. Colijn's attitude again illustrates his pragmatic approach towards Dutch neutrality.


1006 See FO371/23439 [F 1989/487/61].
cooperation was however wasted.

In May 1938, during a long speech in the Dutch Upper House, Mr. Welter, Colonial Minister, hence declared: "We have no agreements, no contracts, no conventions, no commitments of any kind ... Singapore however is located in the midst of our territory ... Therefore it is necessary to have close contacts between English and Dutch officials by exchange of messages and on police matters." Montgomery had the speech translated and forwarded the document to the Foreign Secretary without any additional comments.

On 9 April 1937, the Dutch and the Japanese concluded the Hart-Ishizawa agreement, which in fact froze the Japanese imports to the 1929 to 1933 level, which were higher than those from 1927 to 1931, which the Dutch had preferred to use as a basis. Contrary to all expectations, the Japanese grudgingly complied with the loss of marketshare, which was implicit in this agreement. As Fitzmaurice in Batavia observed, the Dutch resolve in the field of economics was not matched by them in the defence area.

Officially, the attitude held by both the British and the Dutch Governments were to deny each other any cooperation in defence matters. In reality, however, there were many more contacts and much more cooperation between Dutch and British service personnel in South-East Asia, than official policy would have liked the world to have believed. See on this subject also the sub-chapter on British-Dutch military contacts.

2.6.4 War in Europe, 1939.

The outbreak of hostilities in Europe in September 1939 caused considerable anxiety at the Foreign Office about the fate of the Netherlands East Indies. Contacts were established with their American counterparts, particularly with Stanley Hombeck, the specialist on Far East Affairs at the State Department. The conclusions reached after the deliberations were, however, that even if the Germans invaded Holland, Japan would probably not move militarily into the Netherlands East Indies.

In October 1939 A.H.J. Lovink, director of the Dutch Service for East-Asian Affairs in Batavia which coordinated counterespionage against the Japanese, had a secret meeting with H.N. Steptoe in Batavia. Steptoe was chief of the British Intelligence Service in Shanghai. He informed Lovink that in his opinion, not only was Japan too preoccupied in China to be a military menace to the East Indies, but also that Japan would transport strategic materials on behalf of Germany. The British Navy had been instructed, however,

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1008 Montgomery to Halifax, 21 May 1938, FO 371/22172.
1009 Fitzmaurice to Ronald, 7 March 1939, F.O.371/23546[F3223/687/61]
1010 In British Parliament a question was raised by the Labour MP Lt-Comm. R. Fletcher RN R about cooperation with the Dutch in the Far East. The Government's answer to this question was that there was only the normal interchange of information on technical points. This answer caused a National Socialist member of the Dutch First Chamber, Van Vessum on 10 February 1939 to ask his government, whether such a technical interchange did not conflict with the avowed Dutch neutrality. See FO 371/23547 [F1337/1337/61] and [F1907/1337/61].
1011 See for a discussion within the F.O. about steps to be taken: N.Tarling (Old Lady), 54 - 58.
not to intercept Japanese freighters on their way across the Pacific or the Indian Ocean.\textsuperscript{102} That lenient British attitude toward contraband shipping caused considerable irritation within Dutch government circles and was duly reported by F.T. Lambert, acting Consul-General in Batavia.\textsuperscript{103} In contrast, Dutch freighters on the seven seas were stopped by the Royal Navy and searched for contraband, which gave the Dutch the feeling of being treated as a second-class power compared to Japan. The British request to station Royal Navy (reserve) officers at the Consulate-General in Batavia and five other consulates therefore met considerable resistance within the Dutch Government, although the Dutch finally acquiesced.\textsuperscript{104} They hated Japanese spies but on the other hand they also comfortable with English snooper\textsuperscript{1} (See also page 312).

Early in November 1939 the British Ambassador in Tokyo warned against the Japanese occupying the Netherlands East Indies if the Germans invaded Holland.\textsuperscript{105} Craigie recommended urging the United States to take a more forthcoming attitude with respect to the integrity of the East Indies, for example a few American warships to visit Dutch ports for example. The F.O. disliked that suggestion, however.

Also in November 1939, the COS encouraged by both the Australian government and the F.O. again reviewed the question of the security of the Netherlands East Indies. Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, took part in this discussion. Chatfield explained the decision which had been reached in 1938 stating that there should be no commitment to the Dutch. Churchill supported the CNS. In his opinion, it was not to be supposed that Britain would automatically be involved in a war with Japan if Japan invaded some of Dutch territory, even if Holland and Great Britain were allied against Germany.\textsuperscript{106} It would not only depend on how far the security of Singapore and Australia were affected but also on the attitude taken by the United States. The report written after that meeting showed that even before he became Prime Minister, Churchill's line of reasoning on the security of the Far East was based on a severe underestimation of Japan's capabilities and intentions.

The invasion of Denmark and Norway by the Germans on 9 April 1940 came as a rude shock. Arita, the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, issued a statement expressing his deep concern about the \textit{status quo} in the NEI.\textsuperscript{107} (page 41). Within the F.O., plans were developed to approach the Dutch about a British initiative aimed at getting promises from both Japan and the United States for a \textit{status quo} in S.E. Asia if Holland was attacked by the Germans. Again, however, the British Government decided to leave the Americans out of everything. A complicating factor was, that Britain had also been considering the
possible occupation of Aruba and Curacao if the Netherlands were attacked by the Germans because almost 40% of British oil supplies came from there and ultimately from Venezuela. There was obviously the possibility that the United States could accuse the British of hypocrisy.\footnote{Tarling (Old Lady), page 60, note 25.}

That issue actually interfered with diplomatic efforts on the British side aimed at getting a declaration from Japan and the United States about maintaining a status quo in the Netherlands East Indies. President Roosevelt specifically was very upset about a report from Tokyo stating that Japan was contemplating intervention on the pretext that the British and French intervened in the Netherlands West Indies, in order to prevent the Dutch from inviting similar British and French assistance in the East Indies. The Dutch Governor-General, however, had already declared that the Dutch could handle the situation in the East Indies without outside help and American fears were alleviated when the British promised to withdraw allied troops from the two Caribbean islands if the Dutch were satisfied with security over there. Arita thereupon expressed his satisfaction and declared that Japan had no intention of intervening in the NEI. The Dutch in their turn helped by assuring the Japanese that there would be no decrease in oil supplies or other trade to Japan.

Although the Japanese refrained from military interference, they clearly wanted a greater share of East Indian exports and imports, as was evident from their démarche to the Dutch government, asking for a trade conference to be held at short notice. The British Government countered by authorising staff talks with the Netherlands East Indies Government. However, Fitzmaurice, the British Consul-General in Batavia, thought the Dutch authorities were not very willing to participate in such staff talks. He reported that the Government in Batavia was "clinging to the shibboleth of neutrality" in its wish "to maintain the status quo to please Japan."\footnote{Telegram from Walsh, 4 June 1940, no 50A to F.O., F.O.371/24705[F3252/6/61]}

The plain fact was that the United States were the only nation which could refrain Japan from invading the Netherlands East Indies and after the fall of France and Italy's entry in the war, the British were fighting for their own existence as a nation. The Dutch were fully aware of that situation.

\textbf{2.6.5. Churchill and Dutch integrity, 1940.}

The obvious strategy then was for the British to play for time and to limit damage to British interests in the Far East as much as possible, in the absence of a fleet. The COS Joint Planners therefore advised full Anglo-Dutch-Australian staff talks to prove British resolve, short of giving a definite commitment to guarantee Dutch integrity.\footnote{Draft, JP(40)300, 10 July 1940, in F.O. 371/24722[F3530/3530/61]. See also Paul Haggie, ibid., 177 - 178.} The Japanese were given one major political concession: the closing of the Burma road for three months. The COS, however, discussing the Memorandum of the Joint Planners, dissociated themselves from their recommendations. The First Se lord and Naval Staff were against staff talks with the Dutch because Britain on itself could not give the Dutch any military assistance on their own. The fear was that without an American guarantee to the East Indies, Britain could be drawn into a war with Japan which it was bound to lose. As the other members of the COS maintained a position in favour of closer cooperation with the
Churchill ducked the issue. He thought it should be deferred for the time being, and that the U.S. position should be sounded out, knowing that the United States were not willing to give either Great Britain or the Netherlands East Indies any guarantee in a year in which Roosevelt's re-election was at stake. At a meeting with the Dutch minister on 18 July, R.A. Butler, British Undersecretary of State, therefore stressed that Great Britain would appease Japan. At the next meeting on 27 July the COS remained divided. Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, the First Sealand, maintained that the alliance with the Dutch did not include any obligation to defend their colonies. If Japan were bent on capturing the NEI, "there was little we could do to prevent her", and why provoke Japan into a war? He stated that "on no account we should take any action likely to result in war with Japan as a consequence of Japanese aggression in the Dutch East Indies unless we were sure of active American support. "It would be better to have a non-belligerent Japan in occupation of these islands rather than Japan active hostile."

It was all very defeatist but from that discussion, it is clear that the Royal Navy at least understood that it could not win a two-hemisphere war and in that situation, the first priority was Europe. Not only the Netherlands Indies, but also Australia and New Zealand were therefore left on their own.

The War Cabinet discussed the deadlock on 29 July, 1940. Eden, the Foreign Secretary, Eden, and Lord Caldecote, the Dominions Secretary, were in favour of some kind of understanding with the Dutch. Churchill observed, that "if the need arose, we might have to withdraw our Fleet from the Mediterranean in order to station an adequate Fleet at Singapore". He doubted, however, whether the USA would remain a bystander if Japan attacked the Dutch and he considered that such an attack was not very probable anyway. Pound was quite outspokenly against any guarantee. Attlee opined that it would be a great blow to Britain's prestige if the Dutch East Indies were allowed to go without any effective British countermeasures being taken. On Churchill's advice, the Cabinet decided to invite the COS to draw up contingency plans on the supposition that Britain would assist the Dutch, based on two possibilities: with and without active support from the United States. The Dominions would be consulted. No Cabinet decision was therefore taken as Churchill wanted to play for time but he had again demonstrated that he was only willing to consider giving the Dutch a security guarantee, if Great Britain in its turn received some kind of assurance from the United States.

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1021 COS Minutes of Meeting 23 July 1940, COS (40), 230th meeting.
1022 COS(40)572, 25 July 1940, CAB80/15.
1024 COS(40) 236th meeting, 27 July 1940, Item 3, CAB79/5
1025 WM214(40)7, 29 July 1940, conf. annexe, CAB85/14.
2.6.6. The COS Appreciations.

On 31 July, the COS, as instructed by the Cabinet, made two appreciations. The first one considered the whole theatre. The second concentrated on the Netherlands Indies. That cold-blooded appreciation examined the military options open to the British if the Japanese were to attack the East Indies, considering two hypotheses:

a) The United States would provide financial and economic support only:

b) The United States would offer full active military cooperation.

Firstly, Japan’s economic outlook in case of war was reviewed. It was estimated that they had at least six months’ of supplies of all raw materials essential for military purposes in stock. Japanese dependency upon iron, coal and food importson the other hand would mean that their economy would become generally disorganized - even with the East Indies in her hands - and that might cause them commercial ruin within twelve months.

Secondly the economic consequences to the British position caused by the loss of the East Indies were evaluated. The replacement of the lost oil resources by supplies from the Middle East and the America’s would be "extremely inconvenient but not impossible", also because there were oil stocks at Singapore, in the Pacific Dominions, and at Indian Ocean ports. Rubber and tin could also be replaced from elsewhere. Summarising all this it was concluded that the loss of the East Indies would have no severe impact on Great Britain’s military capability to wage war.

That was a very important conclusion, and it was in sharp contrast to Dutch conceptions about their rich colony being absolutely essential for the Allied war effort. That was a misconception by the Dutch, causing them to be rudely awakened from their cherished illusion later on.

Thirdly the naval options were addressed. The problem was the Mediterranean. In the Eastern Mediterranean there was a force of 4 capital ships, 1 aircraft carrier, 7 cruisers, 23 destroyers and 9 submarines. That force was clearly inadequate to face, with any reasonable chances of success, the concentrated Japanese fleet. Once established at Singapore, it would be able to become a deterrent to Japanese sea-borne operations in that area, but it would be limited in its activities owing to its inability to engage with any reasonable chances of success the Japanese Combined Fleet.

The British battlefleet might, however, be employed in the Indian Ocean, based on Colombo and Trincomalee, where it would prove a strong deterrent to Japanese raiding forces in the Indian Ocean, with its important trade routes to the Middle East and India.

In the Western Mediterranean was a small capital ship squadron was based at Gibraltar. That force was also a strategic reserve, to be used as a hunting force in the event of German surface raiders operating in the Atlantic, as indeed happened when the BIS-
MARCK was chased seven months later. If that force were to be withdrawn to the Far East however, then heavy Italian fleet units would be unleashed on the vital Atlantic trade routes. Only if the Italian fleet were disabled, could the Mediterranean squadrons have been sent to Singapore. The most that could be done, if the Mediterranean was not to be abandoned, was to send a battlecruiser (the RENOWN) and an aircraft carrier (the ARK ROYAL) to the Indian Ocean, to be based at Ceylon and not Singapore!

Land defences in Malaya were far from adequate. (See also the discussion on pages 191 to 195). The lack of anti-aircraft defence was especially worrying. The RAF and RAAF had only 8 squadrons in place, equipped 88 mostly antiquated planes, compared to 13 Dutch squadrons equipped with 144 first line planes. The British would not therefore be of any assistance to the Dutch, militarily speaking. It would not even be possible to prevent the Japanese from obtaining a base on the islands; presumably on Borneo. All the British could do in the absence of a battlefleet at Singapore was to delay Japan's entry into Sumatra.

The COS then discussed the scenario in which the United States offered full military participation. In contrast to the gloomy defence scenario above, the COS painted a rosy picture if the United States intervened. If Japan was assured of U.S. action, it would surely withhold any action against the East Indies. Whether the United States would use Manila or Singapore as a fleet base for part of their fleet or not, the Japanese position would be "Hopeless unless they could succeed in making both Singapore and Manila untenable before the fleet arrived, which would be scarcely practicable." At their ensuing Cabinet meeting, the Cabinet decided to agree to Churchill's view that it would, at that moment in time, be premature to take a decision on the question of assistance to the Dutch in the event of Japanese aggression in the Netherlands East Indies. A telegram, however, had to be sent to the Dominions in the Pacific to inform them about the situation. It stated that no guarantee would be given to the Dutch and that the Navy would stay in the Eastern Mediterranean, unless Japan threatened Australia and/or New Zealand, and in that case "we then should cut our losses in the Mediterranean and proceed to your aid, sacrificing every interest except only the defence and feeding of the island on which all depends." Moreover, Dominion Government's opinion was invited on the question of whether to avoid or enter war if the Japanese invaded the Dutch East Indies. The immediate effect of the telegram was that both the Australian and New Zealand Chiefs of Staff concluded that the 1937 guarantees were essentially still valid, and that lulled them into a feeling of false security.

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100 Memorandum on redistribution of the Fleet in the event of War with Japan. 1 August 1940. ADM 199/1929; and Churchill: The Second World War, Cassell London Vol.2, 574 - 575.

100 W. David McIntyre, op. cit. 169

100 WP(40)308, CAB66/10, see also COS40(605), 7 August 1940, CAB80/16.

100 WM222(40)4, 8 August 1940, conf. annexe CAB85/14. The conclusions of the Cabinet meeting of 8 August are in COS Paper 614, 8 August 1940, CAB 80/16. There are different versions of this famous sentence. Compare Telegram to PM Australia and New Zealand 11 August 1940, CAB 65/14 also with W.S. Churchill: The Second World War, Cassell London, Vol. II, 385 - 387, and Butler's Grand Strategy, II, 334. See also the letter Lord Caldecote to Sir G. Whiskard, 11 August 1940, DAFP Vol.IV, doc. no 66, 89 - 100.

100 W. David McIntyre, op. cit. 171
Halifax also had a meeting afterwards with Michiels van Verduynen, the Netherlands Minister in London, and sounded him out about Dutch resolve to defend their colony, and their willingness to approach the United States government to discuss common security issues with them. At a follow-on meeting a week later, Michiels confirmed that the Dutch would defend their possessions against any violation of their integrity. He was less sure about the United States' government, which had conveyed mixed signals to the Dutch Minister in Washington. Concerning Dutch action if the Japanese only attacked Hongkong, Michiels was of the opinion that the Dutch would remain non-belligerent in that case. Should Singapore be attacked, then the Dutch would "almost inevitably" come in.

The Dominion's response on Churchill's telegram on 11 August was mixed. The Australian government agreed that no binding unilateral obligation should be made to the NEI. (See page 445). New Zealand took a different view: they feared that abandoning the Dutch would antagonize the Americans and they therefore urged the British Government to make a public statement supporting the Dutch. Moreover, staff talks were to begin forthwith.

The Foreign Office supported the idea of staff talks. The Joint Planners however, outlined that these might reveal Britain's inability to help them to the Dutch, making staff talks counterproductive. It was therefore agreed by the Cabinet that staff talks would only start once the defence situation in Malaya improved.

Based on Cabinet decisions, the COS drafted a covering memorandum to the Far East Appreciation, dated 31 July, with a strategic outlook. It stated, that if Japan attacked the East Indies, Britain would go to war against Japan if the Dutch resisted. If, however, the Dutch did not resist, then Britain would not go to war.

Strategically, the COS rather prophetically foresaw that Japan would move into Indochina or Thailand first before moving further south. The COS therefore recommended withdrawing the small British garrisons in North China, and to regard Hongkong as an outpost which should only be lightly defended.

Anxiety was expressed in the memorandum about the possibility that Japan might attempt to seize an advanced base in the Pacific Islands, Suva on the Fiji-Islands being the most probable objective. For the defence of Malaya "it is now necessary to hold the whole of Malaya. This involves an increase in the existing army and air forces."

Concerning Anglo-Dutch cooperation the COS Memorandum concluded that "the whole problem of the Far East would be much simplified if we could be sure of Dutch cooperation and if we could concert plans with the Dutch beforehand .... In view of our inability to offer the Dutch any effective military support with our present limited resources, it is not desirable to undertake staff conversations at present. It is however of the utmost importance that we should concert plans as soon as we are in a position to do so."

1033 Halifax to Bland, FO 371/24711 [F3704/253/61]
1034 N.Tarling discusses the various Dominion responses (in: Old Lady, 71)
1035 Tarling, Ibid., 73.
1036 Covering memorandum to Far East Appreciation, COS(40), 592(Revise), 15 August 1940, PRO CAB 80/15.
1037 Memorandum as above, page 6.
The COS specifically recommended that:

1. Australia should be asked to send a division to Malaya to prop up its land-based defence.

2. As soon as possible 2 fighter squadrons and 2 bomber squadrons should be despatched to the Far East, at the latest by the end of 1940. Provisions should be made to increase air forces in Malaya, British Borneo and the Indian Ocean.

3. The New Zealand Government should be invited to provide a Brigade to reinforce Suva.

4. "As soon as we have been able to improve our position in Malaya, staff conversations should be commenced with the Dutch in the Far East ... The Governments of Australia and New Zealand should be invited to send service representatives to take part in these conversations when the time comes." That recommendation was the genesis of the Singapore Staff Conversations, the first of which was to take place a few months later. (See subchapter 8).

The fact that the British were then willing to have the Dutch involved in the defence of Singapore is evident when one compares the navies of Great-Britain, the USA and the Netherlands in S.E. Asia as per August 1940.

**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ship type</th>
<th>Great-Britain</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>Holland</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Cruisers:</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Modern:</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Old:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Cruisers:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern:</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destroyers:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Modern:</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old:</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submarines:</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* China-, Australia- and New Zealand stations.

From the above table it is clear, that the Koninklijke Marine in the East Indies was only fractionally smaller than the US Asiatic Fleet in The Philippines, and much more sizeable and modern than the combined British forces at the three Stations. As has already been illustrated with the Dutch Air Force and because of the lack of adequate British and American naval and air forces in S.E. Asia, the Dutch Navy and Air Force were by default the most powerful in that area (except for the Japanese) at about the middle of 1940. The British and Americans, however, had their main fleets in other theatres while the Dutch fleet existed only to defend their East Indies.

It has been pointed out before that the contents of the August 15 Appreciation fell into

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Memorandum as above, page 8.
German hands on the raider KOMET, when she stopped the British liner AUTOMEDON in the Indian Ocean on 11 November 1940. Rear-Admiral Paul Wenneker, the German naval attaché in Tokyo handed that document over to Vice-Admiral Nobutake Kondo, the Japanese Vice-Chief of Naval Staff, on 12 December 1940. (See also page 189). On that occasion, Captain Bernhard Rogge, commander of the KOMET, received a high Japanese order and a Samurai-sword of honour.

2.6.7. The Dutch security issue.

Both the signing of the Tripartite Pact between Germany, Italy and Japan on September 26, 1940 and the realisation that Germany was losing the Battle of Britain changed the picture again. Cordell Hull, American Secretary of State, suggested to the British Ambassador having staff talks on technical matters involving Americans, British, Dutch and Australians. That gave Britain the required backing to re-open the Burma Road. The COS then also argued in favour of such staff talks at a technical level. They hoped it would stiffen the Dutch attitude towards the Japanese, and it would increase the possibility of the United States providing military support against Japanese aggression. Alas, Cordell Hull was recalled by his master, Roosevelt, who did not want to do anything that might risk his re-election. Hull thereupon backtracked, stressing that any contacts with the Dutch should be about technical matters only, and should not involve the United States. The Dutch were not at all happy about even low-level technical staff talks being held in Singapore, as that would arouse Japanese interest. The Dutch even suggested as an alternative, that a British officer in plain clothes should go over to Batavia.

The Dutch Government in exile was, however, in contrast to the Governor-General in Batavia - even more upset by British procrastination with regard to some kind of guarantee of Dutch territorial integrity being given. Michiels van Verduynen, the Dutch Minister in London, conveyed Dutch feelings in no uncertain terms to the British Undersecretary, R.A. Butler in a meeting on November 19, 1940. Butler assured him that the East Indies were "of vital concern to Great Britain and America". Michiels thereupon told him that without the assurance of a British guarantee, staff talks would be a waste of time. He urged Butler to discuss that matter with the Foreign Secretary and to come back with the British position on that Dutch observation. On 25 November 1940 E. van Kleffens, Dutch Foreign Minister, met Lord Halifax, who told him that recent bad experiences with guarantees (Poland, March 1939) had not increased the enthusiasm of His Majesty's Government to extend new guarantees. An attack by Japan on the Netherlands East Indies however was for England "a matter of most direct concern."

A similar evasive message had been conveyed to the C-in-C of the Dutch Navy, Vice-Admiral Furstner, during a meeting with Dudley Pound, First Sealord, on 20 November 1940. The meeting took place after the successful attack on Taranto by the British

1039 Telegram, Lord Lothian to F.O. 1 October 1940, no 2146, F.O. 371/24709 [F4534/193/61].

1040 DBPN, Series C, Volume I, 10 Mei 1940 - 31 October 1940, 517 - 518.

1041 Butler to Sec FO, 19 November 1940, F.O. 371/24718 [F5252/2739/61].


Naval Air arm on Taranto, which had disabled the Italian battle fleet. Pound however was very reluctant in promising any British assistance in the Far East should Japan attack.

The Dutch Foreign Minister thereupon broached the subject to A. Eden in a meeting on 25 June, 1941. Eden told him that the British Government, after consultations with both the Ambassador in Tokyo and the U.S. Government, would not extend any guarantees at all. Van Kleffens asked him if the British Government would sign the recommendations made at the Fourth and Fifth Singapore staff conferences (See page 244ff), and was startled by Eden's reply, when he said that he was ignorant of those recommendations. On 25 July 1941, during a meeting on common embargo measures against Japan, the Dutch Director of Economic Affairs told his English counterpart, that if Britain signed off the Singapore accords, it would measurably improve Dutch willingness to join an American/British oil embargo. That point of view was repeated by Van Kleffens when he met Eden on 28 July 1941.

On August 1, 1941 Eden returned to that issue in a meeting with Michiels Van Verduynen. The British Government guaranteed that The Netherlands would retain their colonial possessions after the war but could not guarantee those possessions against a Japanese attack. The Dutch Minister expressed his deep disappointment about the British position, as the Dutch had joined the Singapore Staff Conferences after being urged to do so by the British Services and Lord Halifax.

On 6 August 1941, Michiels van Verduynen informed S.M. Bruce, Australian High Commissioner, about the disappointing meeting with Eden on August 1. According to the Minister, Bruce blew his top about the English foot-dragging, using such strong language that the Minister thought it was better not to put it down on paper.

Because the COS were themselves deeply divided on the issue of the guarantee, no more gratifying answer was forthcoming. On Churchill's instruction, Anthony Eden had a discussion with the Dutch Minister on 5 September 1941, in which he informed the Dutch Government that His Majesty's Government would not ratify the recommendations issued by the Fourth and Fifth Singapore Staff Conferences of 21 to 27 April 1941, but would consider them to be a basis for "future plans". On the subject of a British guarantee, he

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1044 Report of meeting between van Kleffens and Eden, 25 June 1941. Archive London Legation, secret Archives MinBuZa, DZ/GA, box C8, inv. nr 1415.


1046 DBPN, ibid., 135, 180.

1047 Eden reiterated the British position: "We have already assumed the duty of safeguarding and restoring the possessions and rights of the Netherlands Government to the best of our ability during the war and after the peace. It follows therefore that an attack upon the Netherlands East Indies would lead us to do the utmost in our power. We must however remain sole judge of what actions or military measures are practicable and likely to achieve our common purpose. Should the United States be disposed to take supporting action many things would become possible which we cannot undertake now" In Letter of Michiels van Verduynen to van Kleffens, 1 August 1941, no 257/6507, Archive London Legation, Secret Archives MinBuZa, box C8, inv. nr. 1415, and DBPN, C, III, 149, 202.

1048 Report Michiels van Verduynen to MinBuZa van Kleffens, 6 August 1941, Archive London Legation, Secret Archives MinBuZa,DZ/G.A., box C8, inventory no 1415.
stated that "HM Government must, however, remain the sole judge of what action or military measures on their part are practicable and likely to achieve the common purpose." - which was the same sentence Eden used on August 1, 1941.1048

As Lowe1050 concluded: "The controversy over aiding the East Indies marked the beginning of a tedious and repetitive argument which continued to the eve of Pearl Harbor." The fact that Churchill did not believe that valuable military forces should or could be diverted to Malaya, because he thought the Japanese menace was a remote one, certainly did not help either. In that respect, a fundamental difference of opinion existed between Churchill and the CNS, Sir Dudley Pound, on one side and the other Chiefs of Staff on the other side, which was never properly settled. Paul Haggie1051 concludes that the attitude of Churchill and Pound "shows a curious failure to distinguish between liabilities and obligations. The defence of the Netherlands East Indies was always a British liability in the sense, that she could not afford, in the last analysis, to fail to support the Dutch. The assumption of a formal obligation would in no sense have increased this liability; indeed it might have lessened it by improving defence co-ordination and thereby making an attack on the islands less attractive to the Japanese". That same logic was obvious to the New Zealand Prime Minister, who discussed it with Churchill later in 1941 and reported it to M.F. Vigeveno, the Dutch Consul in Wellington.1052 Churchill, however, had visions of the existence of a Verdun-like "fortress" at Singapore, in line with contemporary press coverage on the situation in the Far East. As Haggie succinctly stated, the best defence of Singapore in the absence of a fleet had always been its distance from any territory controlled by Japan. The Japanese occupation of Southern Indo-China in July 1941, however, transformed Singapore from being a secure fleet base into becoming an exposed outpost of Empire almost overnight.1053

Another aspect was that in the British Government unequivocal support for Churchill and Pound was totally lacking. L.S. Amery, Secretary for India, held Pound in low esteem and even wrote to Churchill in one of the minutes: "However weak we are in the Far East we shall gain nothing by letting the Japanese first mop Dutch East Indies up to the doors of Singapore, and then cut our throats at leisure. But how can we morally take the line of not helping Allies who have sacrificed their own home country ... in order to stand with us?"1054

After Robert Menzies was replaced by John Curtin in October 1941, Anglo-Australian relations became more acrimonious. The Australian Government was not enamoured by the prospect of Japan taking over the Dutch East Indies while Great Britain just stood by. Therefore, even before the change of Government the Australians sent Sir Eagle Page to London to argue amongst other things for some kind of a security guarantee for the Dutch

1050 Lowe, Origins, 167 and 180 and pages 248 - 250.
1051 Paul Haggie, op. cit. 187
1052 Letter M.F. Vigeveno to T. Elnk Schuurman, Consul-General in Sydney, 14 October 1941, no 275/CG 239, in Archives MinBuZa, G.A., Political Reports C.G. Sydney, box 13, file 8.
1053 P. Haggie, ibid., 172, 180.
East Indies. Page met the Dutch Governor-General in Batavia on 26 September 1941 and told him about his mission, which also included an attempt to obtain a firm promise to send part of the British battlefleet to Singapore. On the latter issue, he asked the G.G. to maintain diplomatic pressure on the British Government.\footnote{1005}

On 12 November 1941, Page discussed such a guarantee with Churchill and the COS. The Chief of Air Staff again reiterated that a force of 200 aircraft should be adequate as a defensive force in Malaya, and referred to "the absence of extreme danger" in the Far East.\footnote{1008} Churchill repeated his familiar promise that if Australia were to be threatened with invasion, then Britain would act promptly. He saw no possibility of giving the Dutch a guarantee, if Great Britain were not to get the same kind of guarantee from the United States. Unknown to Page, Churchill tried to hide a serious difference of opinion between the Foreign Office on the one side and the Prime Minister and the COS on the other side. The Foreign Office consistently contended that the security of Singapore could not be separated from the security of the Netherlands East Indies. The COS, in contrast, stubbornly maintained that Britain was not in any position to accept new military commitments. Admiral Sir Dudley Pound was the most stubborn in this respect and he was fully supported by Churchill.\footnote{1007} The obstruction by the COS so exasperated Ashley Clarke of the F.O., that he ironically noted: "The reluctance which is felt by the Chiefs of Staff to make a frank agreement with the Dutch seems to me like saying that when an invasion comes we will defend Hampshire and of course Devonshire, but we are short of antitank guns and will therefore not commit ourselves to defend Dorsetshire unless we get some backing by the President of the United States."\footnote{1009} The Foreign Office at least understood the intricate mutual interdependence between British and Dutch interests in the Far East.\footnote{1009}

The Australian Government remained steadfastly committed to a British guarantee being made to the Netherlands East Indies. S.M. Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner, and Sir Earle Page warned Air Marshal Sir Charles Portal, the C.A.S., on 18 November 1941, that failure to help the Dutch if attacked "might break up the Empire".\footnote{1000} So it remained a tug of War between Churchill and the COS on one side, and Sir Anthony Eden, the Australians and the New Zealanders on the other side, with Churchill, who was not very pro-Dutch, making the difference. In Churchill's Mansion House speech of 8 November 1941, the NEI were not even once mentioned. That caused great unrest within the Dutch Cabinet.\footnote{1001}

\footnote{1005} Telegram G.G. to Minister of Colonies (MvK), DZ 525 GA/1256 in MinBuZa Archives of Legation in London, inv. nr. 1415, and DBPN, C, III, 289.

\footnote{1008} War Cabinet conclusions, confidential annex, 12 November 1941, PRO CAB 65/24, COS 112(41)1.

\footnote{1007} Lowe, op. cit, 249

\footnote{1009} Minute by Ashley Clarke, 7 November 1941, PRO F.O.371/27847[F11754/4366/61]

\footnote{1000} The Dutch administration in the Indies was aware of the role of the British Admiralty due to information received from Duff Cooper. See for example the report of Consul-General Singapore H.M. Fein to G.G., dated 4 November 1941. Archive Legation London, Secret Archives MinBuZa, Political reports from Singapore, box 19, inv. nr. 1.

\footnote{1006} Note by C.A.S. on a Conversation with Sir Earle Page and S.M. Bruce on 18 November, 1941. PRO PREM 3/1566/6.

\footnote{1001} DBPN, C, III, 411.
The breakthrough in that interminable discussion came late. It was indeed Roosevelt who showed unexpected resolve towards the Japanese after the American ultimatum had been issued to them (page 50). At a meeting with Lord Halifax on December 1, when pressed on the issue of a "unified response" in the event of a Japanese attack on British and/or Dutch territory, he indicated that in that case "we should obviously all be in together". The British Government concluded that this was in effect an American guarantee of some kind, and at a new meeting with Halifax on 4 December, Roosevelt confirmed that he was willing to back British military moves into Thailand to forestall a possible Japanese invasion. Great Britain had obtained what she had desired for so long, an unambiguous promise of American support if Japan attacked. It was on the basis of that support, that Great Britain was able to extend a guarantee to the Dutch in the final days before Pearl Harbor.

On 5 December 1941, Eden wrote to the Dutch Minister in London, that "They [the U.K. Government] are prepared to enter at once into a mutual understanding with the Netherlands Government whereby each party will undertake to cooperate immediately with the other, to the fullest extent of its available resources, in the event of the other party being forced to take military action to repel an attack upon any of its territories in the Far East." That was at last the long-sought after guarantee from Great Britain regarding the Dutch possessions in the Far East.

It is very interesting to observe the gradual change in the position of the British Government on the issue of a guarantee to the Dutch. The Tientsin crisis was the last crisis in which the British Government did not involve the American Government. After his ascendancy to the premiership in May 1940, Churchill refused any political move in the Far East without U.S. support, which could result in confrontation with the Japanese Government. A guarantee to the Dutch or the Thai was such a move. In taking that position, however, Churchill reneged on British power to influence Far Eastern politics, in effect abandoning the Far East. The transfer of power from Great Britain to the United States, which became manifest at the conclusion of the Second World War in Europe, therefore was preceded by the same transfer of power to the United States in the Far East some years before. It has to be remarked that that transfer of the mantle of power to the succeeding superpower was quite a peaceful one.

2.7. British-Dutch military contacts in S.E.Asia

Officially, the Dutch Government remained steadfastly neutral during the interwar years, avoiding any move that might have aroused the irritation of the Japanese. Many contacts, however, took place informally between representatives of the NEI Government and also specifically with Great Britain's representatives. Although no formal defence arrangements or even guarantees existed between the two powers (as was wrongly assumed by many Dutch inhabitants in the East Indies), the British, however, were perceived as to be the protectors of the Dutch colonial position and its very existence. The aim of this subchapter is to explore both the formal and the informal communication channels which existed between the two powers up to Pearl Harbor.

1062 Washington to F.O., 4 December 1941, PRO F.O. 371/27913[F13001/86/23]

1063 War Cabinet Meeting of 4 December 1941, W.M.(41) 124th Concl.minute 4, PRO CAB 65/24

1064 This important letter dated 5 December 1941, no FO 13245/230/G, which changed the course of Dutch History is to be found in the Archive of the London Legation, Secret Archives DZ/GA, Inventory Number 1415.
To the annoyance of the Dutch authorities, the British and Japanese press frequently published articles suggesting that there were secret agreements between Britain and The Netherlands. In the Sunday Times on 14 November 1937, for example, a small article appeared under the heading "Far East Defence". In it, the claim was made, that "since the outbreak of hostilities in China certain arrangements for cooperation in the defence of their Eastern possessions have been reached between Great Britain and Holland. The arrangements are believed to be the result of talks held in the Far East between British and Dutch Naval authorities."

A question was consequently put to the Secretary of State by a British Member of Parliament on the nature of these conversations. Eden answered: "I have no statement to make on this subject". The MP, LtCdr Reginald Fletcher RNR, again asked: "Have any proposals for such conversation been made?" Eden answered: "As I have said, I have no statement to make." This retort only raised more suspicions.

In April 1939 it was again Colijn, who approached Sir George Bland, the British Minister in The Hague, with a rather unconventional request. He wanted to buy three British battleships right away, and he could pay for them in hard cash! The ships would be destined for the East Indies' defence. The request caused some consternation at the F.O. It was decided to consult the Admiralty, which on June 26 responded with the crafty statement that the London Naval treaty of 1936 expressly forbade the sale of warships to The Netherlands' Government. Bland dutifully informed Colijn.

It remains a mystery, why Colijn approached Bland for such a purchase, knowing full well that the British Navy was not in a position to do without even a single ship. Did he want to signal to the British Government that The Netherlands were finally serious about their commitment to defend their Far Eastern possessions? It was about that time, anyway, that proposals were being discussed within the Dutch Government to build three modern battlecruisers for the East Indies. Colijn may have realised, that those plans would have taken too long and that time was now running out.

Early in 1940 the Department of Colonies at The Hague decided to start a publicity offensive to improve the image of the colonial army, the KNIL. Obviously, too many articles had appeared in the foreign press, suggesting that the Netherlands East Indies were barely defended at all. A letter was sent to all Dutch legations and consulates worldwide, with a note describing the KNIL as a modern western army with plenty of firepower and modern armament. That letter was later to haunt efforts made to secure modern armament for the KNIL after Holland was occupied by the Germans. The Dutch Minister in London pencilled in the margin of that letter: "Never heard off! Nobody thinks of this Army", thereby accurately depicting the lack of interest in or knowledge by the British about the KNIL. The Dutch naval attaché in London even took offence about the letter, writing to the

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106 Archives MinBuZa, London legation, inv.no 1194.
106 Bland to Halifax, telex 30, 27 April 1939, FO 371/23538.
107 Admiralty to F.O., 26 June 1939, FO 371/23538 [M/04476/39].
108 In September 1939, however, an appreciation by the Dutch Defence Ministry still assumed that there was sufficient time to build the battlecruisers, as the most probable aggressor (Japan) was still very much involved in an exhausting war in China. ARA Archives MinvKol, 6e afd., box 562, M 37.
C-in-C Dutch Navy that "the English Press hardly ever pays any attention to the East Indies Army, as it is clear to even the most dumb Englishman that the Dutch East Indies need a fleet for its defence." His comment also illustrates the lingering bitterness in Dutch naval circles caused by the abrasive debate on ships versus (army) air planes in the early thirties, a discussion which was won by the KNIL air force. (page 383).

A fairly unknown chapter in the history of those informal contacts is about what went on in the counterespionage services in the Far East. The most important counterespionage service in the Netherlands Indies was the DOA (Dienst Oost-Aziatische Zaken, best translated as "Office of East Asian Affairs") under the leadership of dr A.H.J. Lovink. That service kept track of subversive Japanese activities in the Netherlands East Indies and simultaneously increased in importance while tensions in the Far East were rising. In January and February 1939, Lovink visited his counterparts in Singapore and the British Consul-General in Batavia, Henry Fitzmaurice, reported to the F.O. that "these conversations have served a very valuable purpose. They have certainly contributed to strengthen the closeness of the useful cooperation already mentioned in such matters." That message proves that highly secret exchanges of information on Japanese spy networks existed between the two counter-intelligence services. Lovink also visited India for the same purpose.

In this context must also be mentioned the dispatch on 14 January 1941 of Lieut.-col. J.A. Verkuyl, chief of the Decoding Service at the KNIL General Staff, to the British Decryption Unit at Fort Canning, Singapore, to coordinate the codebreaking activities on the Japanese naval and diplomatic codes. The Dutch Unit, "Room 14", had achieved some notable successes in that direction.

2.7.1. Early Army contacts.

After the (secret) meetings Dutch Prime Minister Dr. H. Colijn had with British Officials in in London in July 1936, the number of secret high-level contacts between the Dutch and British colonial governments increased. One of the most significant ones was initiated by the British Governor of the Straits Settlements who invited the Dutch Navy and Army commanders to send representatives to the opening of the civil airport at Singapore. The invitation was accepted and the Dutch were present with 3 flying boats belonging to the Koninklijke Marine and 3 Glenn-Martin bombers belonging to the KNIL-ML at the festivities held at Singapore from 11 to 14 June 1937.

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1076 Letter Naval Attaché de Booy to Chief Naval Staff no 55, 22 January 1940. Archive London Legation 1937 -1945, Secret Archives MinBuZa, access nr Aa.22, inv. nr. 996.

1077 Fitzmaurice to Ronald, 7 March 1939, FO 371/23546 [F 3223/687/61].

1078 Letter A. Meres to MinBuZa, 14 June 1941, no S(XIII-H1)-1759/143 in Political Reports from Simla no 1, Secret Archives MinBuZa, box 19.


That, however, amounted to more than an official visit. Captain F.G.L. Weijerman of the KNIL General Staff was on board of one of the visiting Glenn Martins. He conducted secret talks in Singapore with three officers of the British Far Eastern Intelligence Service at Fort Canning. His hastily-written report, dated 23 June 1937, was presented to the Governor-General with an accompanying letter from the C-in-C of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army KNIL, Lieut.-Gen. M. Boerstra.¹⁰⁷

Weijerman's interlocutors were Major F.H. Vinden (Army), Major W. Wooley (RAF) and Lieut.-Cdr Quill (RN). All three, but especially Wooley, insisted that the British and Dutch Governments shared a secret understanding concerning mutual assistance in the event of a Japanese attack. Wooley told him: "of course you know - you are in close contact with your general - and he must know about this, so you too." Weijerman was very surprised but concealed his feelings. Wooley expected the Japanese to attack the Dutch East Indies first, in order to secure bridgeheads for an attack on Singapore. It therefore was important for the British to know the location and facilities of Dutch airfields in Borneo and Sumatra. In all probability, the British would already have obtained that information as H. Collijn had given it to Lord Swinton during his secret visit to London in December 1935. (See page 210.) Wooley, in his turn, disclosed the existence of four military airfields at British Borneo at Kuching, Miri, Jesselton and Brunei.

Weijerman also had a secret meeting with Colonel A.E. Percival, the Malayan Chief of Staff, from whom he obtained information about Malayan airfields. Quill, the Navy Intelligence officer, gave him an extended tour of the Singapore base, which, however, did not impress him very much. Weijerman noted that the base was still not finished and also noticed the lack of any gun emplacements on the hills north of the Old Straits anchorage. He also noticed the positioning of the Monitor HMS TERROR with her 2 15" guns at the mouth of the eastern entrance to the Old Straits. He was informed about the existence of a Cryptographic Analysis Department at Fort Canning, which was trying to break Japanese Codes. Haslach however, in his book on Dutch counterintelligence, makes no mention of any cooperation between the efficient Dutch code-breakers and the group at Fort Canning.¹⁰⁷

With regard to the British command structure, Weijerman note, that all three Service Commanders reported to the Straits Governor, a civilian without military background. He also revealed the presence at Singapore of Lieut.-Colonel L.H. van Oyen, KNIL-ML. Weijerman cryptically stated in his report, that van Oyen had briefed Boerstra orally on the results of his meetings with British RAF-officers. Anyway Wooley had asked Weijerman directly, whether his C-in-C, Air Vice Marshall Tedder, would be welcome in Bandoeng for informal high-level discussions about more direct co-operation between the two Air Forces.

It was that request, which Boerstra passed on to the Governor-General. In the accompanying letter, he concluded that the British military authorities at Singapore were very much interested in cooperation with the Dutch more closely, and he stated: "Under the present

¹⁰⁷ Letter of Boerstra to G.G., dated 12 July 1937, with attached the Report by Capt. Weijerman of his talks with British Officers at Singapore. ARA Archive Legation London 1930 - 1939, accession code 2.05.44, inv. nr 844.

circumstances I am very much interested in closer contacts with the English military authorities parallel to the existing official and semi-official contacts. But I would like to make it clear that those contacts have to be restricted to general information and the exchange of military information (within the bounds of what each party considers acceptable) and that even the semblance of striving towards reaching an understanding must be avoided. This having been said, however, he proposed to the G.G. to have Air Vice-Marshall Arthur Tedder invited to KNIL Headquarters at Bandoeng for an informal visit.

Tedder did indeed visit Java in June 1938, where he talked with both the C-in-C's of the Koninklijke Marine and the KNIL, and was allowed to see whatever he wanted.\footnote{L. de Jong, op. cit. Vol. 11-a, 2nd part, 626, note 1.}

No reports could be traced either in Dutch or in British Archives about Tedder's visit to Java. As will be made clear, though, below, there were both informal and secret contacts between officers of each of the services, both British and Dutch. Most Dutch officers spoke English fluently and especially in S.E. Asia, there was the universal feeling that some day in the future the two countries would fight alongside each other against their common enemy, Japan. Official policies, however, had to be respected, and Dutch policy was still one of absolute neutrality.

Also less known are the contacts made between KNIL and the New Zealand Army. The only reference to be found in that direction is a curious report by the Dutch Minister in Athens, who reported to the Minister of Foreign Affairs that a visit had been paid by General Sir John Duigan, Chief of Staff of the New Zealand Army, and General Heywood, head of the British Military Mission in Greece, in December 1940. Duncan said he expected a Japanese attack on the East Indies, and urged the British and Dutch to hold staff talks as soon as possible. In his view, the Singapore staff discussions in October 1940 were helpful, but General Ter Poorten, the Dutch representative, had arrived during the discussions very late and nothing concrete had come out of these talks. On his way to the Middle East, Duncan had visited Dutch Army authorities in Java and he planned to renew those contacts when he stayed in Java on about 15 December 1940 on his way back to New Zealand.\footnote{Report Minister Athens to MinBuZa 4 December 1940, no 1838/334, Secret Archives MinBuZa, DZ/GA, Inv. nr. 442 DZ/Al 18.} No documents, however, could be traced in either Dutch or British archives about Duncan's visits.

2.7.2. Dutch Army contacts with the British-Indian Army.

India, the "Jewel of the Imperial Crown", needed defending from forces both inside and outside the country. In that respect, there were similarities, but also differences, with regard to the defence of the Netherlands East Indies.\footnote{John Gaytor: "Sons of John Company - The Indian and Pakistan Armies, 1903 - 1991." Spellmont, London 1992.}

While the KNIL, the Royal Netherlands East India Army, was concentrating on both the suppression of indigenous insurrections and the consolidation of the empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the British Indian Army in the same period was confronted with having to take care of imperial Russian designs on Persia, Afghanistan, the Northwest Frontier and Central Asia. That was the famous "grand jeu" of imperial
politics. Due to the risk of war with a European power, the British Indian Army possessed all the characteristics of a modern Army, comparable to those in Western Europe at the time.

Just like the KNIL, the British made extensive use of indigenous troops from the more warlike tribes in the sub-continent, resulting in 70 to 80% of total manpower being indigenous. At certain strategic locations battalions which were pure British were detached from their Home Regiments to serve in India. For the British and Indians alike, service was on the basis of volunteers during peacetime. In the thirties, after the India Government Act had been passed, the Indianisation of the British Indian Army officer corps started in earnest. That Army, with several hundred of thousands of men, even in the early thirties, were considered to be a well-equipped and officered army. Both Japan and the United States therefore had a "resident officer" at New Delhi, who was attached to their Consulates-General and acted as a military attaché.1081

After having watched an impressive parade at New Delhi, Dr. Ph.C. Visser, the Dutch Consul-General, suggested to the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs that it might be very interesting for the KNIL to have some officers present during the Indian Army manoeuvres in the spring of 1936.1082 Minister de Graeff thereupon instructed the C.G. to find out if the British would agree to a KNIL-observer. The affirmative answer took more than a year in coming.1083

Lieut.-Gen. Sir Robert Cassels, Commander in Chief of the Indian Army, thereupon extended an informal invitation to Gen.-Major M. Boerstra, the C-in-C KNIL. Cassels was predisposed to go into considerably detailed information with his peer about both armies.1084 The Governor-General, however, did not agree with Boerstra's voyage to New-Delhi; in his place it was suggested that Lieut.-Col. C.O. van Kesteren KNIL Infantry, adjutant to Her Majesty, Queen Wilhelmina, should go.1085 Van Kesteren did indeed informally (not in uniform) attend the manoeuvres around Delhi, Lucknow and Jhansi with 2 cavalry brigades with tanks between 10 and 24 January 1937. Van Kesteren was allowed to see everything he wanted to see, and was even invited to tour the forts at the Northwestern Frontier and at Singapore. On 25 January, he visited C.E. van Aken, the Dutch Consul in Calcutta on his way back to Bandoeng. According to Van Aken: "It appears that Lieut-Colonel Van Kesteren had a very frank conversation with officials of the British Indian Army, whom he told me could be of great value with regard to the decisions which have to be taken by the Dutch East Indies Government with respect to the choice to be made between cruisers and/or bombers.

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1081 Letter Consul-General Simla to G.G., 11 september 1941, Political Reports Simla, Secret Archives MinBuZa, DZ/AI 31a, inv. no 354. The U.S. Senior military observer was Col. W.P. Draper, who possessed a small staff of one officer and a number of civilians.


1083 Letter De Graeff to Visser, 5 september 1935 no 4287/85; letter Visser to De Graeff 3 June 1936, as above.

1084 Letter Col. C.A.L. Howard, GHQ Indian Army, to Consul-General 26 November 1936 no 39168/M.T. As above.

1085 Telegram G.G. to Visser, 9 December 1936. As above.
and submarines.\footnote{Letter van Aken to Visser, 29 January 1937, no (212)-618. As above.}

Consul-General Visser happened to be in Batavia when Van Kesteren arrived there from Calcutta and met him there. According to Van Kesteren, the British staff officers would have preferred to have had 75 bombers in stead of one cruiser, if the budget was limited.\footnote{In other naval sources the ratio was set at 43 bombers for one battleship! See Het Marineblad, 52 (1937), 151.} He also received a copy of a letter from the Personal Assistant to Sir Robert Cassels, stating "I assure you that we would welcome a permanent liaison which could cement the cordial relations between our respective forces which you have so ably initiated."\footnote{Letter Visser to Minister Foreign Affairs, 31 January 1937. As above.} Van Kesteren delivered a written report to Boerstra about his visit but no copy of it could be found in the relevant archives.

In a meeting with the G.G. and Boerstra, Visser emphasized the importance of setting up informal links with the British Indian Army on a permanent basis. Boerstra agreed but the Governor-General was afraid to antagonize Japan. According to Visser: "His Excellency posed the question, whether such assignments [of officers to the British Indian Army] would not suggest to another Power in the Far East the existence of military cooperation between British India and the Netherlands East Indies."\footnote{Letter Visser to Minister Foreign Affairs, 1 March 1937 no (74)-548/37 as above.} Visser pointed out that those contacts should be informal as only then would the British disclose far more information than to official representatives. The discussion illustrates what the then new Governor-General, Tjarda van Starkenborgh Stachouwer, thought should happen. He avoided any political, diplomatic or military moves in public, suggesting that the Dutch were cooperating with other western powers against Japan.

The result of the meeting with Visser and Boerstra, however, was that an agreement was made, in which the Governor-General agreed to a high-ranking officer of the British Indian Army being invited to attend the autumn manoeuvres of the KNIL in Java in September 1937, thus giving Boerstra a free hand in arranging visits by KNIL-officers to Britain and Malaya, but only on the condition that all visits must be kept both secret and informal.\footnote{Excerpt of Ordinance no 26 of the Governor-General, 16 April 1937. As above.}

In a letter addressed to the Governor-General and dated 21 July 1937 \textit{Lieut-Gen. M. Boerstra referred to letters from the G.G. (dated 7 April 1937), from the Minister of Foreign Affairs (dated 16 April 1937) and from the Minister for the Colonies (dated 18 May 1937) in which all three agreed to start a "more or less regular exchange of visits between KNIL on the one hand and the British Army in India and the Straits on the other." In his letter, Boerstra also referred to the visit of the KNIL Lieut.-Colonel C.O. van Kesteren to the British Indian Army in December 1936 and January 1937. He informed the G.G. that after the visit from a British staff officer from the Indian Army in September and October 1937, it would be the}
turn of the Dutch to send a staff officer to India in 1938, and to invite a British officer again in 1939. In that a way, regular contacts would be guaranteed.

The Governor-General obviously agreed, because afterwards there were contacts between the KNIL and Indian Army Headquarters. Brigadier A.G.O. Mayne, director of Military Operations and Intelligence of the British-Indian Army, was appointed to attend the KNIL First Division manoeuvres around Tjandjoer (now Cianjur). Originally the C-in-C of the Indian Army, Maj.-Gen. C.J.E. Auchinleck, would have attended in person, but, because of the troubles in Assam, he could not make it. The KNIL manoeuvres took place in Western Java from 26 September to 2 October 1937 and in Central Java from 5 to 10 October 1937. Due to the trouble on the Northwestern frontier, Mayne also cancelled his visit at the last moment and no replacement was appointed. The Gazette of India, dated 14 June 1938, gives the official account of the large-scale campaign in Waziristan from September to December 1937. The British Indian Army employed 34 battalions of infantry, 16 batteries of field- and mountain artillery, 5 squadrons of light tanks and even RAF-bombers to suppress the fanatical Moslem warriors of the faik of Ipi in Afghanistan.

A new invitation from Boerstra to the Indian Army HQ was sent via A. Merens, the new Consul-General in New Delhi on 6 July 1938. The KNIL army manoeuvres were to take place from 13 to 18 October 1938 around Surabaya, including the use of aircraft. The British Staff selected an outstanding officer, Lieut.-Col. W.J. Slim of the 7th Gurkha Rifles. The future Field Marshal Slim was later to become the conqueror of Burma in 1945 and afterwards became Governor General of Australia. Slim travelled to Simla to be briefed by the Consul-General but was recalled there by British Army Commander Cassels. The official reason was, that Slim was irreplaceable. The real reason however, according to Merens, was that Britain did not wish to have any trouble with Japan at that time because of the Munich crisis. The British suggested having an exchange of information arranged between the respective Consulates about the two armies. Berenschot, Boerstra's successor, thereupon appointed captain F.G.L. Weijerman of the KNIL G.S. to take care of that exchange. Consul-General Merens was informed by the British G.G. in early 1939, that it had indeed been an order directly from the British War Office in London, which had thwarted Slim's visit to the KNIL manoeuvres. The British had indicated, however, that Brigadier G.N. Molesworth of the British Indian General Staff would be in Singapore in April 1939 and would welcome an invitation to pay an informal

1005 Letter C-o-S British Indian Army to C.G. A. Merens, 31 August 1938. As above.
1006 Letter A. Merens to G.G., 26 September 1938. As above.
1007 Letter Capt. Weijerman to Merens, 28 November 1938. As above.
1008 Letter Secretary G.G. to A. Merens, 1 February 1939. As above.
visit to Batavia and Bandoeng.\textsuperscript{1099}

Between 31 March and 4 April 1939, General Molesworth did indeed visit Batavia and Bandoeng. Molesworth was, at that time, director of Military Operations and Intelligence, and travelled in civilian dress in Java at the G.G.'s explicit request. He was received by Boerstra in Bandoeng, and he talked with Lovink, chief of the DOA, the Dutch counter-spyionage unit on 4 April, and with Admiral Sir Percy Noble, C-in-C China Station who was then on an official visit to Batavia. Lovink later reported that he had had very extensive and long discussions with Molesworth about Japanese penetration into the East Indies.\textsuperscript{1100} The official Report by Molesworth does not enter into the contents of the discussions with the Dutch hosts but it confirms that open discussions were held with a number of senior KNIL officers.\textsuperscript{1101}

During his stay, Molesworth had invited Lieut.-Gen. Berenschot to visit British India. Berenschot decided to send his Chief of Staff to attend the Indian Army manoeuvres at Allahabad in November 1941.\textsuperscript{1102} On 12 November however, General Ter Poorten had to inform the Consul-General that, due to increasing tension in the Far East, he had been forced to cancel his planned visit to New Delhi.

It can be concluded from the above that the informal contacts between the two armies were nevertheless important. At the beginning the British Indian Army was far more accommodating than was the KNIL, but when the European situation worsened, the reverse was true. No officer of the KNIL was however permanently stationed as a "military observer", like the United States and Japan had arranged at New Delhi. Never having had an observer stationed at New Delhi must be considered to be one of the "missed chances" of pre-war Dutch diplomacy.

2.7.3. Contacts between KNIL and Malaya Command.

The first secret contacts made between Malaya Command and the KNIL were established in 1934. In June of that year, British G.O.C. Malaya Command, Major-Gen. E.O. Lewin visited Java, where he received confidential information about Dutch defence preparations.\textsuperscript{1103} The Dutch also discussed the possibility of closer communication links between the two headquarters being established. British diplomacy however was reluctant to accept any more responsibility for the defence of the NEI at that time.\textsuperscript{1104}

For the Dutch, too, however, limits had to be respected and the British may have reacted

\textsuperscript{1099} Letter Brigadier G.N. Molesworth to A. Merens, 11 January 1939, D/ONo.9/DMO. He again apologizes for not being able to send an officer to attend the manoeuvres of 1938, "as a result of the international crisis".

\textsuperscript{1100} Personal letter A.H.J. Lovink to Consul-General A. Merens, 8 June 1939, as above, inv. 216.

\textsuperscript{1101} Report of Brig. G.N. Molesworth, FO 371/23439 [F 3961/2742/61].

\textsuperscript{1102} Letter H. Ter Poorten, C-o-S KNIL to Consul-General A. Merens, Simla, 9 October 1941. Archives Consulate-General Simla, Secret Archives MinBuZa inv.nr.111, Code IX-d.


\textsuperscript{1104} N. Tarling, Vital Interests, 199 - 206.
towards the Dutch invitations too enthusiastically. On 3 July 1937, Fitzmaurice, the British Consul-General at Batavia, asked the Dutch Government whether it was allowed to invite 2 officers of Malaya Command to attend the KNIL manoeuvres in Western Java. The officers concerned were Colonel A.E. Percival and Major F.H. Vinden. Boerstra commented to the G.G., that all that British interest was somewhat overdone, as Brigadier Mayne from India would already have been present, but that he would allow the two officers to watch the manoeuvres as long as they were not in uniform and avoided all contacts with the press. In his view, three British officers from two different commands would have raised too much publicity, and would have jeopardized Dutch neutrality.\(^{108}\)

The Dutch Navy was even more opposed to closer official contacts. In a letter to the G.G. Vice-Admiral Ferwerda, the Dutch C-in-C of the Koninklijke Marine stated: "In my opinion, it is undesirable to open regular contacts between our military authorities and those of other countries."\(^{108}\) He feared that precedents might be set, on the basis of which Japan too, might want to request closer contacts too.

In addition, closer contacts were also stirring in the air. On 16 August 1937, the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, urged on by the British Minister in The Hague, asked his colleague Minister of Colonies to allow the "Air Adviser" of the Burmese Government, who was also the air attaché to the British Legation in Bangkok, to establish "a more or less regular meeting schedule with authorities of the air force in the Dutch East Indies."\(^{107}\) The Governor-General gave those contacts his permission, as long as they were unofficial and informal, "in order to avoid giving the impression, that military agreements exist between The Netherlands and the British Empire."\(^{109}\) After Tedder's visit to Java, his successor, Air Vice Marshall J.T. Babington visited the KNIL-ML in February 1940. Holland was still not at war at that time. He was accompanied during his visit by Group Captain Manning of the RAF.\(^{109}\) The two officers were given an extensive tour of Dutch Army Air Force facilities.

The question about whether or not to invite British officers to the KNIL manoeuvres was again discussed in 1938. Boerstra thought that those officers should not have a general's rank, and that they should attend the manoeuvres in civilian dress, just like the two staff officers of Malaya Command had done (who evidently attended the previous manoeuvres).\(^{110}\) He proposed to invite a British staff officer from the British Indian Army to attend the manoeuvres Northwest of Surabaya planned for 13 to 18 October 1938. The initiative for that invitation clearly came from the Dutch. As was discussed on page 229, the officer selected happened to be Lieut.-Colonel W.J. Slim.

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109 Letter Consul-General Fein in Singapore to G.G., 27 March 1940, file G-19, box 580, Archives Dept. of Colonies ARA.

The Malaya Command officers were evidently able to keep their mouths shut when visitors from London started asking them inquisitive questions. Early in 1939, Singapore was visited by Lord Strabolgi, member of the House of Lords. Back in London, he reported to the Dutch Minister, that to his amazement he had found that no conversations or any exchange of intelligence were taking place between British, Dutch and French officers from the three Services. He was of the opinion that that situation should be changed forthwith as there were no doubts about Japanese intentions, which would endanger all three countries concerned.  

As has been shown, British political leaders were all too aware themselves of their overstretched resources, and they were therefore very reluctant to give the Dutch any guarantees. On the eve of the European War, that resulted in a political and military “no-man’s land” existing between the two countries with regard to their joint defence of South-East Asia in the face of a common enemy. Lord Strabolgi’s remarks therefore were basically correct.

Contacts between the Dutch authorities and Malaya Command were officially not always very friendly, as is illustrated by the complaints from Dutch authorities about British violations of their territory. British planes flying unauthorized over Dutch territory were always a source of friction. One example was when a British plane flew over the Island of Sambu in the Riuw archipelago opposite Singapore on 1 July 1938. That resulted in a formal complaint being made to the British on 21 July 1938. Other incidents, all involving British planes, occurred on 17 February, 25 April, 24 June and 10 July 1939. Each incident resulted in a formal complaint being made by the Dutch minister in London to the British Government.

Early in February 1941, the new C-in-C Malaya Command, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, visited the Governor-General in Batavia on his way to Australia. He was quite impressed by the G.G. The visit had political repercussions, as both the G.G. and the Dutch Government rejected a proposal by Sir Robert to publish an American-British-Dutch Statement of condemnation if the Japanese invaded Southern Indochina or Thailand. On 14 February 1941, the Dutch Minister in London informed the Foreign Office that “the Netherlands Government ... feel at the same time, that the public character [i.e. of the Statement] might give food of unruly elements there [i.e. in Japan] for the claim that the encirclement of Japan has become a fact and for the demand, possibly with the support of ambitious naval circles and backed by German encouragement, for prompt action.”

That line of reasoning characterised what the diplomatic Dutch community thought about Japanese leaders at that time. They were rather paternalistic and condescending towards the Japanese, mixed with fear. Based on political Reports from the Minister in Tokyo, the basic premise was that the Japanese Government consisted of responsible people but that

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1111 Letter Minister in London to Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, 3 March 1939, no 740/249. Archives MinBuZa, Legation at London, inv. nr 1194.


1114 Memorandum Michiels van Verduyten to F.O., 14 February 1941. Archive London Legation, Secret Archives MinBuZa, DZ/GA box C8, inv.no 1415.
they were threatened by nationalist extremists and militarists. Those groups had to be treated carefully, in order not to provoke them into carrying out a coup d'état. The fact that their henchmen had already taken over Japanese Government, due to the Meiji constitution (See Chapter 6) was not then recognized as such. It is interesting to note, however, that most British diplomats in Berlin reported about Herr Hitler and his paladins in the same vein of fear and respect.

2.7.4. Naval Contacts.

Before the outbreak of war, relations between the British and the Dutch navies were very cordial, often highlighted by warships visiting each other's ports. HMS SUFFOLK visited Tg Priok in February 1934, the aircraft carrier HMS EAGLE and 2 destroyers berthed there from 23 to 29 November 1934, HMS KENT called from 9 to 16 March 1936, HMS DORSETSHIRE from 30 to 31 January 1937 and 4-8 March 1938, and HMS MEDWAY arrived with 2 submarines in March 1939. Formal receptions and informal meetings cemented a bond between the officers concerned, resulting in their mutual trust and informal cooperation being a solid base when the war started.

Even before the war, there was considerable cooperation between British and Dutch officials in a number of different domains, not only concerning defence matters but also on information exchanges about Japanese espionage, communist underground activities, smuggling, and so on. These informal cooperative efforts are further dealt with in the subchapter on Dutch war preparations. Dutch top commanders and their staff proved to be very open with regard to their defence plans when meeting informally. A case in point is the visit of Vice-Adm. Sir Percy Noble, C-in-C of China Station paid to Batavia on board of his flagship HMS KENT. He was amazed by the openness of the very senior Dutch officers with whom he had conversations over there. Fitzmaurice reported to the F.O. about that visit: "Admiral Noble was able, while here, to have valuable discussions with the naval authorities, while I also arranged for him to meet and have informal talks with the C-in-C of the KNIL, Lieut. Gen. M. Boerstra, and with mr Lovink (Chief of the Dutch counterespionage). These talks were much valued by both sides". Noble wrote a report on the visit, which contained much secret information on Dutch defence preparations. (Chapter 4, page 498, the so-called Sandakan Report).

At about the same time, the heavy cruiser HMS SUFFOLK visited Surabaya from 8 to 13 April 1939. There too, the British sailors were entertained in a most friendly atmosphere and the senior officers had informal discussions with their Dutch counterparts at the naval base and with senior officers of the KNIL.

To complete the picture, it should be noted that the Australian destroyer HMAS SWAN visited Batavia harbour on 24 and 25 June 1939. On board was Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin, the Commanding Officer, Royal Australian Navy, who hosted a visit from Captain J.J.A. van Staveren, Chief of Staff of the KM. They had a long and confidential conversation. Next day, Colvin was received by the Governor-General at Tjipanatas. They discussed

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1118 See page 63, note 271 in Chapter 4 on Australia. Consul-Gen. H. Fitzmaurice reported the successful visit on 10 April 1939 in FO 371/23549 [F 4495/2644/61].

1119 Consul H.F.C. Walsh to Fitzmaurice, 14 April 1939, FO 371/23349 [F 4681/2644/61]
arrangements for the planned visit of the G.G. to Australia in March 1940. The SWAN subsequently visited Surabaya from 7 to 11 July 1939 and afterwards Dilly in Portuguese Timor from 17 to 19 July 1939.

By coincidence, at about the same time as Noble's visit, Brigadier G.N. Molesworth, Director of Military Operations and Intelligence of the British Indian Army, visited Java in deep secrecy. He had talked to senior officers of the KNIL and met with the same openness and willingness to discuss common defence problems. Of course, those contacts were no real substitute for a sound and official alliance by which to contain the Japanese but they were better than nothing. The Dutch also had to maintain their outward neutrality. Moreover, the Dutch evidently overestimated Great Britain's power and ability to keep Japan in check.

Urged on by the Dutch Governor-General in the Netherlands East Indies, the Dutch Koninklijke Marine officially had to keep its distance from the Royal Navy even after May 1940, to the dismay of many flag officers in both navies. The situation was organisationally complex, because the Dutch Navy squadron in the East Indies was operationally and logistically under control of the G.G., but reported functionally to the Dutch Navy Minister in London, J.Th. Furstner. Furstner did not agree with the G.G.'s policy of strictly enforced neutrality in the Far East at all. To his view, the Dutch C-in-C East Indies had to report to the British Admiralty as an equal of the C-in-C's East India and China Stations. It gave Vice-Admiral Helfrich, the Dutch Naval Commander in the East Indies, the moral support he needed to seek closer cooperation with his counterpart at China Station than was intended by the Governor-General himself.

In June 1940 the C-in-C China Station approached the Netherlands East Indies Government about the possibility of arranging an agreement to close certain shipping lanes to Singapore in the (Dutch) Riouw Archipelago astride Singapore harbour by laying mines. The British Navy was willing to use their own mines for that purpose, as it was

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1117 FO 371/23439 [F 7770/2644/61].

1118 Tarling (Vital Interest), 217.

1119 See for example the Dutch appreciation of the political, military and strategical situation in the Far East: "De politiek-strategische verhoudingen in het Verre Oosten" Archives AHK, sectie III, GG 2, stuk no 259 (1936), Chapter V. CAD The Hague.

1120 In a telegram from Governor-General to Minister of Colonies, 15 July 1940. Quoted in Manning/Kerstan, DBPN, C, I, 176, 181. In this telegram, the G.G. did not want to be involved in a war against Japan, if Japan attacked Hongkong, or the British settlement in Shanghai. He was willing, however, to forfeit Dutch neutrality if Japan attacked Singapore.


1122 See Bosscher, op.cit. II, 95 - 96.

aware of the lack of a sufficient number of seamine on the Dutch side. The Governor-General disagreed with the proposal and got backing from the Dutch Government in exile for his legalistic standpoint, which was, that although England and Holland were allies in the war against Germany, it did not automatically mean that The Netherlands would be drawn into any possible conflicts the British might have with Japan in the Far East. He was still, however, interested in obtaining mines from the British Navy and urged secret talks between both Navies in order to obtain those mines.135

At about the same time (June 1940), the F.O. approached the Dutch minister in London asking him to allow a squadron of Australian Hudson bombers to fly from Darwin, Australia to Singapore over Dutch territory, using the Surabaya airfield for a refuelling stop.136 Anticipating Dutch sensiveness, the F.O. informed the minister, that the British Ambassador in Tokyo had been informed just in case the flight attracted Japanese attention. The Dutch response to that case was both quick and positive. On June 7, the minister was able to inform Sir Horace Seymour of the F.O., that the Dutch Government did not object, and that details of the flight could be worked out with the East Indies administration.

On 3 July 1940, Seymour again asked for permission to fly one squadron of Hudson bombers and one squadron of Wirraway fighters from Australia to Singapore.137 Approval was given on 9 July 1940. The Dutch Government obviously thought that any reinforcement of Singapore was worth the eventual ire of Japan and therefore acquiesed in the British requests without too much foot-dragging.

In contrast to the above, the G.G. refused a request by Rear-Admiral Drew at Singapore to divulge the dislocation of Dutch submarines operating around Singapore in order to avoid firing upon them accidentally.138 That action and having other similar British requests rebuffed resulted in a less friendly attitude in Singapore towards the Dutch administration. H.M.J. Fein, the Dutch Consul-General in Singapore, reported to that effect.139

On 18 October 1940, the British Government in London invited the Dutch Government "to nominate an officer or officers to exchange information with the Service Departments of HM Government in London, and to agree to a similar exchange at Singapore during the later stages of

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136 Letter Minister of Foreign Affairs Van Kieffers to Dutch Minister at London, 22 August 1940 no 1173 GA/223, with G.G.'s views on the question of mining the Singapore approaches. Archives MinBuZa, Secret Archives, inv.no 1411.


138 Letter Sir Horace Seymour to Michiels van Verdijnen, 3 July 1940, no F 3346/3346/69. As above.


139 Report Fein to G.G., 6 February 1940, ARA Archives Min. of Colonies, accession nr 2.10.36.051, inv. nr. 576, file L-7.
a conference with the British Services which is to be held there at an early date.1130 Furstner was able to convince the Dutch Cabinet, that it was imperative that discussions with the British should be started. He himself attended the first meeting to discuss this information exchange held at the Admiralty on 30 October 1940, which was after the First Singapore Staff Conference had taken place to which the Dutch had also been invited but had not been present (See below).1131 The Dutch were given a questionnaire about their plans and preparations with regard to Japan attacking the East Indies. The questionnaire was completed and returned to the Admiralty on 21 November 1940.1132

Meanwhile, Lt-Cdr J.C. Westall, a staff officer of C-in-C China Station, had visited Dutch Naval HQ at Batavia on 8 November 1940. In advance, the Dutch C-in-C Naval Forces East-Indies, Vice-Adm. C.E.L. Helfrich, formally notified Furstner that by agreement with Vice-Adm. G. Layton, both Navies were fully aware of each other’s strengths and dislocations, their fuel storage, location of minefields and naval communications codes.1133 It is unclear how those agreements were reached; in all probability it was on an informal basis in June 1940. In his memoirs, Helfrich laments about the lack of formal contacts between the two Navies1134, but informally things were obviously being fixed1135 and officially approved after 8 November 1940. The Dutch also agreed to participate in the next (Second) Singapore Staff Conference.(See below).

Politically however, the Dutch still kept their distance. In September 1940, Lord Halifax approached the Dutch Government in exile with the question of whether British airplanes might be allowed to make use of Dutch military airfields in Sumatra in order to chase German raiders in the Indian Ocean area. After many discussions between the Government and the East Indies Administration, the latter’s point of view won the day and was carefully worded in a memorandum given to the British Minister accredited with the Dutch Government on 20 November 1940. That Memorandum gives a clear statement of Dutch political strategy with respect to Japan and is therefore quoted in full:1136

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1130 Bosscher, Volume II, 75.

1131 This meeting was attended by Furstner, Dutch Naval attaché De Booy, Rear-Admiral R.M. Bellairs RN and Lt-Col. E.I.C. Jacob, attached to the Secretariat of the British War Cabinet. Bosscher, Vol. II, 75.

1132 This questionnaire can be found at PRO ADM 199/1232. Bosscher (op. cit.) mentions a wrong date for the handing over of the questionnaire to Furstner. This was not on 21 October (See his note no 143 in Volume II, op. cit.), but at the meeting on 31 October 1940.

1133 Bosscher, op. cit. Vol. II, note 143, page 458. There is also an interesting telegram from the G.G., dated 22 October 1940, letter NNN, to Minister of Colonies, in which he confirms this exchange of information with the British, but only for the case if a German raider should appear. See letter Minister of Foreign Affairs to Minister in London, 25 October 1940 no 1535 GA/409 in Archive London legation, Secret Archives MinBuZa, inv. nr. 1547.


1135 According to Bosscher, the Chief of the Naval Communications Service Cdr C. Ter Poorten KM visited Singapore in September 1940 to hold discussions with his counterpart at China Station. See Bosscher, op. cit., Volume II, p. 463, note 210.

“The Netherlands Government, although viewing the general situation in the Far East wiss less concern than last summer, nevertheless consider that the military situation in these regions continues to call for caution, in order that aggressive elements in Japan, now kept in check, may not be furnished with a chance of gaining the upper hand. So long as there is no ground for these elements to assert that the status quo in The Netherlands Indies has been impaired, their influence would not appear for the present to be dangerous. Conversely, it would seem rash to furnish them with any good pretext, if this can be avoided, for alleging an infringement of the status quo of the Netherlands Indies, the maintenance of which the Japanese Government has repeatedly declared to be a matter of vital concern to Japan.”

The British request was therefore refused, but the Dutch offered to extend air reconnaissance over the Indian Ocean from Sumatra, if the United Kingdom could make 12 twin-engined coastal reconnaissance planes available for use by the Dutch Airforce.\textsuperscript{1137}

The refusal was the continuation of a decades-old foreign policy towards Japan which had been based on the (false) assumption that military warmongers were not, as yet, in control of the Japanese government, though they might be able to gain that power if they were given some good pretext. It must be admitted that General Pabst, Dutch Minister at Tokyo, was most responsible for establishing that myth, judging by the contents of his political reports. Even as late as in February 1941, Pabst was convinced that both the Japanese Government and the Japanese business community were opposed to a war with the United States.\textsuperscript{1138}

2.7.5. The search for weapons.

One of the main problems facing the Dutch East Indies Government was to find weapons for the rapidly expanding KNIL forces after the loss of the motherland to Germany. To the dismay of those in charge of rearmament, Great Britain proved less than enthusiastic to provide weapons for an uncertain ally in S.E. Asia, while the British home forces needed every piece of equipment they could lay their hands on, especially after Dunkirk. That became a source of irritation between the two Governments in 1940, specifically because the Dutch learnt that Britain had furnished first-line aircraft to potential allies. By June 1939 20 Hurricanes had been delivered to Belgium, 17 to Yugoslavia, 12 to Romania and 15 to Turkey. Greece had received 24 Spitfires and Turkey 60 Spitfires and Blenheim bombers to boot.\textsuperscript{1139} In comparison, on 1 September 1939 the total number of Hurricanes operational within the RAF in Great Britain was 497.\textsuperscript{1140}

The KNIL authorities had placed a number of orders with various countries. Most of them were being executed in supposedly neutral countries such as Sweden (Bofors), Switzerland (Oerlikon, Solothurn), and Hungary, but large orders had also been placed in Germany and France. The only order placed in Great Britain (on 8 March 1939) was for 73 Carden Lloyd light tanks, manufactured by Vickers Armstrong. On May 10, 1940 28 of

\textsuperscript{1137} Letter MinBuZa to British Minister, 3 January 1941. DBPN, series C, Vol. II, doc. 140.


\textsuperscript{1139} Report “Supply of Arms to Foreign Powers” Air Ministry 20 June 1939, PRO AIR 9-118.

\textsuperscript{1140} Airplane, no 86, p. 2386.
these tanks had been delivered to the East Indies and 16 were ready for shipment.\textsuperscript{1141} Even before the Dunkirk evacuation took place, however, the British Government had decided to expropriate the remaining 57 tanks for their own use.\textsuperscript{1142} Urged on by Welter, Van Kleffens asked Dutch Minister Michiels van Verduyven to approach the British Government. The Minister however flatly refused, declaring that at that stage of the war, in which the survival of Great Britain herself was at stake, it would have been ridiculous to approach the British Government about those tanks, just because Welter considered them to be of higher importance to the Netherlands East Indies, where war at that time had not even broken out\textsuperscript{1143}

The British indeed stood with their backs to the wall. The Dutch Ministers in exile in London were obviously not very sympathetic to the British plight, insisting on the contract signed with Vickers Armstrong being executed. Van Kleffens should not have passed Welter's request to his Minister at the Court of St.James linea recta. In that affair Minister Michiels van Verduyven showed more strength of character than did his Minister of Foreign Affairs, who acted indeed in a very transparent way.

Meanwhile, the British had set up a British Purchasing Commission (BPC) in the United States to coordinate all orders from the three British Services, and that effectively added American goodwill to their struggle against Nazism. The BPC also efficiently blocked any attempts made by the various Dutch purchasing commissions to secure some of the American production for the rearmament of the Netherlands East Indies. That of course caused much resentment in Dutch Government circles. Moreover, the U.S. Government was not forthcoming either. On 3 January 1941, the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs personally discussed those irritations with Sir Neville Bland, English envoy. In a prepared note, the Dutch Government observed that, "having left nothing undone to increase the material of all kinds available for the defence of the Netherlands Indies with the least possible delay, orders placed on behalf of the Netherlands Government in the United States have been cancelled".\textsuperscript{1144} After pointing out the importance of having the NEI well-armed, in the interests of the English, French and American possessions in the Far East as well, the note stated that "the Netherlands Government feel that they have a right to ask that they should have a reasonable share in armament now being made in the United States ... The Netherlands' Government therefore would ask the Government of His Britannic Majesty in the United Kingdom to give the necessary instructions in the sense that full support be given to the steps taken by the Netherlands' Government to obtain the collaboration of the U.S. Government for bringing the armament of the Netherlands Indies, as speedily as possible, up to the level of efficiency required in the present circumstances."

Alas, that diplomatic initiative did not succeed as, on 25 March 1941, Michiels van Verduyven reported that the Foreign Office had informed him of an American shipment of 100 Tomahawk P-40 interceptor planes to China. The F.O. suggested contacting the Americans directly to ask them why they considered China to be of more importance than

\textsuperscript{1141} Letter Minister for Colonies to MinBuZa, 1 July 1940, in which Welter implores Van Kleffens, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to intervene with the British Government to make the remaining 57 tanks available for the East Indies. London Archive MinBuZa, F.2(4), DZ/GA 1111.

\textsuperscript{1142} Letter Major J.D. Carlisle of the War Office to General Van Oorschot, 14 June 1940, no 2749, as above.

\textsuperscript{1143} Letter Michiels van Verduyven to Van Kleffens, 4 July 1940, no 2110/567, as above.

\textsuperscript{1144} London Archive MinBuZa, Secret Archives, F2(9-14) DZ/GA, inv.nr 1115 (box 72)
the Netherlands East Indies when delivering those first-line aircraft.\textsuperscript{1146} Obviously the F.O. tried to put the blame on the Americans rather than on the attitude taken by the British Purchasing Commission.

After the efforts to secure weapons from Britain had failed, the East Indian Government tried a different approach. The Governor-General asked Baron Bentinck, the Dutch Minister in Cairo, to sound out the British about obtaining some of the war equipment the British Army of the Nile had conquered on the Italians.\textsuperscript{1147} Obviously, that request was also passed on to the British Government, as the Dutch Minister in London informed the Dutch Foreign Minister that in principle the British Government were willing to sell part of the Italian war booty to the East Indies.\textsuperscript{1147} The Greeks, however, were also interested, and taking inventory in Egypt was bound to take some months anyway. Early in February, the British Government decided on a priority schedule for distribution of the war booty. First priority was of course to the English home army, second to the Greeks, and third priority to the Dutch East Indies.\textsuperscript{1148} The communication caused an internal squabble between Welter, Minister of Colonies and Van Kleffens, Minister of Foreign Affairs. Welter was disappointed by the low priority given to the East Indies and asked Van Kleffens to discuss the subject with the British Government. Van Kleffens refused, pointing out that Greece was already at war and the Netherlands East Indies were still not.\textsuperscript{1147} He remembered Michiel's earlier refusal of course, but that had been one of the causes for the development of a bitter conflict between the two ministers.

Although the Dutch had requested to be supplied with tanks, mortars and heavy artillery from the Italian war booty, the only material actually supplied to Java were Fiat machine-guns and Italian rifles plus ammunition.\textsuperscript{1150} The material reached Java too late to be of any use against the Japanese. Moreover, there are indications that Indian stevedores appropriated machine-guns for their own purposes when weapons were transferred in Bombay harbour.\textsuperscript{1151}

In November 1941 there was another confrontation with the BPC. The KNIL had ordered 162 B-25 Mitchell medium bombers from the United States, and wanted an accelerated delivery because of increased tension in the Far East. The U.S. Army Air Force and the KNIL-ML had been the only organisations to have ordered those planes. On 1 November 1941, the Foreign Office informed the Dutch Government that the British Government were also interested in the bombers and that they would try to get part of the American

\textsuperscript{1146} Letter Michiels van Verduymen to MinBuZa, 25 March 1941, no 895/245. As above.

\textsuperscript{1147} Telegram G.G. to Baron Bentinck, 18 December 1940, no C6, London Archive MinBuZa, Inv.nr F.2(1), DZ/GA 1110.

\textsuperscript{1147} Letter Michiels van Verduymen to Van Kleffens, 17 January 1941. As above.

\textsuperscript{1148} Letter Van Kleffens to Minister of Colonies Welter, 10 February 1941. As above.

\textsuperscript{1149} Letter Van Kleffens to Welter, 18 February 1941, no 300 GA. As above.

\textsuperscript{1151} Letter Baron Bentinck to MinBuZa, 21 February 1941, no 310/M.4. As above.

\textsuperscript{1151} The KLIPFONTEIN from Bombay brought 5820 Italian rifles but the boxes of 30 Breda machineguns proved to be stuffed full of British Indian Army registration forms! Letter KNIL Headquarters to Consul-General A. Merens. Simla, 29 January 1942 no 89/04.08.11/III-M. Archive Consulate-General Simla, Secret Archives MinBuZa, Code XV, inv. nr. 257.
production reserved for themselves which would result in even later deliveries for the KNIL. Again the battle for priorities was won by the British to the considerable chagrin of the Dutch authorities.\footnote{Letter Van Kieffens to Walter, 6 November 1941, no 6072 G.A. Archive MinBuZa London, Secret Archives, accession nr F2(9-14) DZ/GA, inv.nr.1115,(box 72).}

Such episodes illustrate the vulnerability of British-Dutch relations both in Europe and in the Far East, even as allies. Great Britain called the shots, and the proud Dutch had to swallow the humiliation of being only a very junior partner as seen through British eyes.

\subsection*{2.7.6. Conclusions.}

After 1935 specifically the KNIL actively sought and extended both informal and secret contacts with the British Indian Army and with Malaya Command. There were indeed useful exchanges of information about airfield locations, weapons and tactics. Both Armies were aware of the importance of these contacts.

The Koninklijke Marine had a different relationship with the Netherlands East Indies administration. It had no regional, but a worldwide mission. It is therefore not surprising that the leadership of the KM was instrumental in changing the policy of neutrality as espoused by the Dutch Governor-General. They were supported in particular by the Dutch Minister in Washington and the Consuls-General in Sydney and Singapore, but even before that change in policy occurred, secret contacts between the British and Dutch Navies had been established by their Far Eastern commanders Layton and Helfrich, who even struck up a personal friendship. This informal alliance was a natural one, and was later on codified during the Singapore Staff Conferences.

\section*{2.8. The Singapore Staff Conferences.}

\subsection*{2.8.1. Introduction.}

A number of important and secret staff conferences took place at this Far Eastern naval base in the period from 1939 to 1941. Of those, six sets of staff conferences involved Great Britain and her Dominions, the Dutch and the Americans. At the technical and operational levels, a number of practical agreements were made. At the political level however, no agreement could be reached about what was to be understood as being a \textit{casus belli} with Japan but recommendations about where to draw the line were made to the respective governments.

The first real staff conference in Singapore, by the way, was a strictly British and French affair which took place from 22 to 27 June 1939, before the war in Europe had even begun!\footnote{Report on the Anglo-French Conference held at Singapore, 22 - 27 June 1939, ADM 93/1939, ADM 1/10128. A Summary appeared in Woodburn Kirby, op. cit., Vol. I, 20.} That conference recommended that a scheme to reinforce Singapore with naval vessels from the East-India station should be implemented immediately in order to free allied naval forces from convoy duties in the South China Sea. Other recommendations were to re-arm all three services of both powers in the Far East at an accelerated rate.
It was recommended in particular to increase the number of airplanes, in particular because of the danger of Japanese attacks from bases in Thailand and British Borneo.\footnote{114} France, moreover, offered the British armed forces the use of its airfields and ports in Indochina in the event of Japanese aggression.\footnote{115}

After the announcement of the Tripartite Pact in September 1940, Cordell Hull, the American Secretary of State, had indicated to the British Minister in Washington that staff talks with the Dutch concerning a firm approach towards Japan were going to be necessary. When the United States, however, were officially invited to participate in secret staff talks about the defence of S.E. Asia, the invitation was turned down for political reasons. President Roosevelt was campaigning for a third term, and did not want any fuel poured on the isolationist fire. Preparations for the staff conference went on schedule, nevertheless, and the objective of the conference was not only to be the provision of a tactical appreciation of the situation in the event of war with Japan, but also to assess the defence requirements of India and Burma and to draw up a list of discussion points for further staff talks with The Netherlands and the United States if any future staff talks between those powers were to be authorized.

2.8.2. The First Singapore Staff Conference.

The first (or B-A for British-Australian/New Zealand) Singapore staff Conference took place from 22 to 31 October 1940 and was presided over by the C-in-C China Station, Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, and attended by the G.O.C. Malaya, General Sir Lionel Bond and the A.O.C. Far East, Air Vice-Marshal J.T. Babington. Representatives from Australia, New Zealand, India, Burma and Malaya were also present, as was an American observer.\footnote{116} The Dutch had been invited, but declined (Page 222ff). The purpose of the conference was to discuss the British COS Far East Appreciation dated 31 July 1940.

The Appreciation, as recorded in the conference report\footnote{117}, revealed the meagre defence resources already in position and the urgency of strengthening them. Probable points of attack for the Japanese were Hongkong, British Borneo, Malaya and/or Burma through Thailand, and the Netherlands East Indies including (Portuguese) Timor. It was not considered possible that the Japanese would attack all the areas mentioned above simultaneously. The reason was a British belief that Japan was stuck in a quagmire in


\footnote{116} Australia was represented by Captain J. Burnett RAN, Deputy Chief of Naval Staff RAN, Air Commodore W.D. Bostock, Deputy CAS, and Major-General John Northcott, Deputy Chief Australian Army Staff. Representing New Zealand was the CGS Major-General Sir John Duigan and the CAS Group-Captain Saunders. Also present were the GOC Burma, the Director of Operations, Indian Army and the COS East-India Station. At the end of the conference Cdr A.C. Thomas, naval attaché at the US Embassy in Bangkok, arrived as an American observer.

\footnote{117} Report of the Singapore Defence Conference, 1940, PRO CAB 80/24.
China, requiring lots of troops. An attack against Australia and/or New Zealand was considered highly unlikely. The existing air forces needed to be used to the best advantage to prevent or at least to deter the Japanese from establishing naval and air bases within striking distance of points of vital interest in Malaya, Burma, the Dutch East Indies, Australia and New Zealand. By using advanced operational bases throughout the area, it was hoped to concentrate aircraft at any point threatened utilising the collective air resources in the Far East and Australia, therefore maximizing the strategic mobility of each aircraft.

It was estimated that the minimum number of first-line aircraft needing to be available in Burma and Malaya was 582, apart from air forces stationed in the Dutch East Indies, Australia and New Zealand. The Dutch Air Force was considered sizeable as far as modern bombers and reconnaissance planes were concerned, but still had too few fighters. The numbers of modern aircraft in Australia however was considered to be "dangerously small" and the aircraft in New Zealand "of obsolete type". The gap between the number of aircraft available and the recommended numbers was dramatic, as is shown by the table (between parentheses the number of modern aircraft):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area:</th>
<th>Present strength:</th>
<th>Recommended:</th>
<th>Deficiency:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malaya and Burma</td>
<td>88 (48)</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>82 (42)</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India and East Africa</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch East Indies</td>
<td>159(159)</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be deduced from the above table, the Dutch Army Air Force was considered to be the largest and most up-to-date air force in the whole of the S.E. Asian region! The attendees therefore strongly recommended making renewed efforts to get the Dutch involved in subsequent staff talks.

Considerable anxiety was expressed about a double-pronged Japanese attack possibly being made by landforces entering into Burma from Thailand and the Chinese province of Yunnan. The chief deficiencies on the Allied side were the fact that there were 12 Infantry Battalions for the defence of Malaya, and only 7 Battalions for the defence of Burma. It should also be borne in mind that, except for light infantry weapons, the whole subcontinent of British-India was denuded of weapons. There were no first line aircraft, nor was there a single modern tank or armoured car, and the anti-aircraft defence of the subconti-

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1159 See, for example, the Report of the Assistant Military Attaché at Tokyo, Major G.T. Wards, dated 11 March 1939. In its conclusion Wards stated that "Even should China capitulate, Japan cannot hope to be for some time to come anything but a very weak first class power" (page 14). The Report is in the Wards Collection, Department of Documents, Imperial War Museum.
nent consisted of 18 light and 12 heavy A.A. guns!\textsuperscript{158}

In sea communications, the first priority was the adequate protection of convoys using the Indian Ocean routes between Australia, India and the Middle East. A few capital ships and at least seven heavy cruisers were needed for convoy protection. With respect to the Americans, it was foreseen that their main contribution would be that of concentrating a battlefleet in the Western Pacific, astride the Japanese communication lines to the nanyo.

The conference was reported in a curious telegram sent by the Dutch Governor-General to the Minister of Colonies, in which he stated that the conference between British and American Staff officers at Singapore was successful and that "the cooperation between the British and U.S. Navy in case of a conflict in the Far East involving both Powers has been completely prepared."\textsuperscript{159} Alas, as is shown below, that was not the case at all.

\textbf{2.8.3. The Second Singapore Staff Conference.}

The First Conference or B-A Conference was followed at short notice by British-Dutch conversations in Singapore from 26 to 28 November 1940. That was called the Second Singapore Staff Conference or B-D (British - Dutch) Conference. Captain William Purnell USN, the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet, attended that Conference as an observer.\textsuperscript{160} Mutual air reinforcement arrangements and reconnaissance responsibilities were discussed and agreed upon. The British also agreed to cover the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea north of the equator, whereas the RAAF would guard the Timor and Arafura Seas. At the same time the Dutch would patrol the passages south of the equator including the important part of the Pacific between New Guinea and Mindanao, and would also improve the coastal defences of the Sabang harbour and airfield at the entrance to the Strait of Malacca. The question was raised as to what would constitute a \textit{casus belli}, and proposed as such was a crossing of the line 6\textdegree{} N between Northern Malaya and North Borneo by the Japanese.\textsuperscript{161}

As a result of this conference, the Dutch appointed Captain L.G.L. van der Kun KM as liaison officer of the \textit{Koninklijke Marine} at the Staff of C-in-C China Station, who had arrived in Singapore around 20 January 1941. Lieut.-Cdr W. Burrows RN became the British liaison officer at KM HQ in Batavia. British and Dutch officers again met each other on 30 January in Batavia and Bandoeng, 7 February in Surabaya, and again on 15 February 1941 in Batavia,\textsuperscript{162} in order to tie up some loose ends left after the previous Singapore Staff Conference.

The British confirmed their willingness to start building up ammunitions, bombs, aviation

\textsuperscript{159} Telegram G.G. to Minister for Colonies, 22 November 1940, London Archive MinBuZa, DZ/A.I. 6 (box 34)
\textsuperscript{160} Leutze, Bargaining for Supremacy, 172
\textsuperscript{161} The Dutch Reports on this conference by the Chief-of-Staff KNIL, Maj.-Gen. H. ter Poorten, Captain D.C. Buurman van Vreeden of the KNIL GS and the Navy Chief of Staff Capt. J.J.A. van Staveren RN, can be found at AMH, inv.no Bc 162-A to C and SMG file 2/33 and 3/2.
\textsuperscript{162} See Bosscher, op. cit. Vol. II, page 75, notes 146 and 147.
fuel and materials to support Dutch air force operations taking place from appropriate airfields in Singapore and Malaya. It was expected, that the Dutch would support the same provisions for RAF-squadrons to be based on pre-selected Dutch airfields.\textsuperscript{1164}

The report of the B-A Conference was discussed by the British Joint Planning Staff who reported on it in a report dated 1 January 1941.\textsuperscript{1165} The JPS agreed with the deficiencies as as spelled out for the Army, but the committee disagreed with the Air Force numbers, which it thought were very pessimistic, concluding "that they have in particular tended to over-estimate the minimum air forces needed for reasonable security." The joint planners gravely underestimated Japanese prowess, as becomes clear when in the appendix dealing with airforces the following observation is made by the JPS: "The Japanese have never fought against a first-class Power in the air and we have no reason to believe that their operations would be any more effective than those of the Italians." It was pointed out that in Egypt in 1940 the Italians had 220 bombers and 240 fighters yet were beaten by a British force of 92 bombers and 44 fighters. Moreover the planners stated that "grave risks are involved in venturing a seaborne expedition [against Singapore] within range of modern airforces, and it further appears to us entirely unnecessary to attempt to counter a spasmodic attack by carrier-borne aircraft at anything like terms of parity."

Alas, developments within a year were to expose the hollowness of the JPS's arguments. For the time being, they fixed the number of first-line aircraft needed at being 336, optimistically adding that Dutch aid might become available.\textsuperscript{1166} It remains a mystery why accurate information on the quality and quantity of Japan's air strength was not available. The lackluster performance of Japanese forces in the Chinese Theatre of War must have gravely misled British observers in the Far East.

Prime Minister Menzies of Australia was so alarmed by the deficiencies in Malayan defence, as revealed by the First Staff Conference in Singapore, that his government authorized him to visit London from February to April 1941 to discuss matters with Churchill and the COS. In chapter 4 on Australia that visit and its results are covered in detail. The COS meanwhile had adopted the arguments of the JPS, as is obvious from how they explained the airforce situation to Menzies as follows:

"For the close defence of Malaya and Burma alone we have at present 118 aircraft, not including the two fighter squadrons (32 aircraft) now forming. The NEI now possess 162 aircraft (with reasonable reserves) of types at least equal in performance to those of the Japanese. Thus the Dutch and ourselves already possess for defence a total of 280 aircraft, and this figure does not include any of the 170 fighters which are now arriving in Malaya from the U.S.A., and takes no account of Dutch orders for 245 aircraft from the U.S.A., deliveries of which were due to begin last month. The majority of the 450 shore-based aircraft which the Japanese can marshal against us are of obsolete types, and, as we have said, we have no reason to believe that Japanese standards are

\textsuperscript{1164} Letter Sir Neville Bland to Dutch Government, 21 January 1941, Archive of the London Legation, secret Archives MinBuza DZ/GA, box C8, inv. nr. 1415.

\textsuperscript{1165} Commentary on Far East Tactical Appreciation and Report of the Singapore Defence Conference" by the Joint Planning Committee, Paper JP(41)1, 1 January 1941, appended to minutes of meeting 13 of COS, 8 January 1941, PRO CAB 79/8.

\textsuperscript{1166} See also Lowe, op. cit. 184
even comparable with those of the Italians".1167

That was the world of make-believe in which the COS arrived at theirs policy decisions.

Overall, the quality and intellectual depth of British strategic naval planning just before and after the outbreak of World War II was not very impressive. Corelli Barnett, for example, noted that "the Navy's topmost leadership on the eve of the 2nd World War failed to measure up to the standards of Nelson and Barham or Beatty in broad strategic wisdom, sharpness of intellect or sheer personality".1168 Admiral Backhouse as CNS started that decline by not using the Naval Staff properly but Barnett reserves his wrath specifically for Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, who was "a hardworking plodder of limited intellectual range and interest ... devoid of charisma"1169, in short: a bureaucrat. In the one and a half pages of quotes by former colleagues and subordinates in his book, Pound emerges as a tragic figure, unfit to command the Royal Navy in their time of trial.

2.8.4. The Third Singapore Staff Conference.

A separate meeting between Dutch and British naval officers took place in Batavia on 30 January 1941,1170 followed by a meeting in Surabaya on 7 February 1941 in order to prepare the agenda for the 3rd Singapore Staff Conference.1171

At the A-D-A (Anglo-Dutch-American) or Third Singapore Staff Conference from 22 to 25 February 1941, agreements were made between the British Commonwealth and Dutch representatives in the presence of a team of American observers.1172 It was agreed that, in all probability, the Japanese would not attack Australia and/or New Zealand straight away but would first concentrate on Singapore. An attack on the Netherlands East Indies without Singapore being at least neutralised was deemed too dangerous. Singapore therefore was the cornerstone of regional defence. The Dutch agreed to release three bomber squadrons, one fighter squadron and six submarines for Malaya's defence. Australia, in their turn, agreed to take over the responsibility of the Moluccas and particularly of Timor and Ambon. Two bomber squadrons and two battalions were to reinforce those two islands. Again, the discussion returned to the question of what was to be considered a Japanese casus belli. That was then defined as being incursions into Thailand west of 100° East or south of 10° North; large shipping movements towards the Kra isthmus, a fleet crossing the 6° latitude North, or attacks being made on Timor, New Caledonia or The Philippines. It was clear that the respective governments were the only

1167 COS Committee "Visit of the Australian Prime Minister. Reply by COS to memorandum by the Prime Minister of Australia" 11 April 1941. PRO CAB 80/27 and PRO CAB/4, COS(41),230.

1168 C. Barnett: Engage the Enemy more closely, 50.

1169 C. Barnett, op. cit., 51.

1170 Report in SMG 3/8


1172 This Conference was attended by Sir Robert Brooke-Popham (chairman) and his staff, the local service commanders (Layton, Bond and Babington), Major-General ter Poorten (CoS of the KNIL) and Captain van Staveren (CoS KM), Rear-Admiral Grace, Maj.-Gen. Northcott and Air Commodore Bostock from Australia, and as American Observers, the Captains Purnell USN and Archer Allen USN, Cdr A.C. Thomas USN and Lieut.-Col. F.G. Brink US Army.
authorities able to approve these arrangements by ratification. Afterwards, it turned out that the Dutch Government in London were the only body even willing to ratify the agreements made at the A-D-A Conference.

The Third Conference resulted in a number of concrete actions. Directly after the conference, an international Communications Conference was organised at Singapore on 27 and 28 February 1941, at which agreements were reached on call signs and ciphers to be used in radio communications. Moreover, in the middle of March, the Dutch destroyers PIET HEIN and BANCKERT and the submarine K XVII started combined exercises with British Fleet Units near Singapore to practise asdic, which was a completely unprecedented event.

As a result of that conference, local Dutch and British officers on the westcoast of Borneo (opposite Singapore) met regularly to discuss coordinated actions to protect that region from Japanese incursions. Those "Kuching conferences" took place between April and September 1941.

2.8.5. The Fourth and Fifth Singapore Staff Conferences.

Formally, the Fourth and Fifth Singapore Staff Conferences were entirely separate events due to the different nations present at each. The Fourth Conference was held from 21 to 27 April 1941 with representatives from the Navy, Army and Air Forces of Great Britain, the United States, Australia, New-Zealand, India and the Netherlands East Indies. The Fifth Conference had the same attendees as the Fourth, with the exception of the Americans, and took place on April 27. The same American participants who were present as observers at the Fourth Conference also attended the Fifth Conference. Sometimes the confusing abbreviations ADB-Conference (American-Dutch-British; for the Fourth Conference) and ADA-Conference (Anglo-Dutch-Australian; for the Fifth Conference) are found in literature. The Fifth Staff Conference, however, was in fact a continuation of the

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1173 Bosscher, op. cit., Volume II, 82.

1174 SMG File 8/3.

[The participants were:]

Australia: Admiral Sir Ragnar M. Colvin RAN, C-in-C Australia Station, Captain J.B. Foley RAN, Cdr R.F. Nichols RN, Group Captain F.N. Bladin RAAF, Colonel H.G. Rourke, Cdr V.E. Kennedy RAN (liaison officer in Batavia with the KM).


India: Maj.-Gen. G.N. Molesworth, Chief of Staff Indian Army, Commodore A.G.B. Wilson RN, Chief of Staff East-India Station.


United States: Captain W.R. Purnell USN, Chief of Staff US Asiatic Fleet, Colonel A.C. McBride USA, Captain Archer M.R. Allen USN (naval liaison officer at Singapore) and Lt-Col. F.G. Brink, USA (army liaison officer at Singapore).

Third Staff Conference, again with U.S. observers being present.

The delegates to the Fourth and Fifth Staff Conferences received a set of Admiralty telegrams as a briefing giving the British Naval Staff appreciation of the situation in the Far East. They make interesting reading because that Appreciation indicated current British naval thinking, which strongly emphasized the protection of convoys to and from Singapore. The delegates were also fully aware of the results of the secret British - American staff talks in Washington from January to March 1941, including the "Germany First" strategy.

The Fifth Conference dealt exclusively with Japanese options for war. Hongkong was considered to be the most probable Japanese goal, followed by The Philippines. It was thought unlikely, that Japan would be able to act against Hongkong, British Borneo and Malaya simultaneously. With respect to the Japanese Navy, it was expected that it would start a guerre de course against allied lines of communication in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean immediately after the outbreak of war, just as the Germans had done. In addition to the protection of the lines of communication was the question of the security of Singapore itself, but Hongkong was written off. Although China was not represented, her vital importance in the struggle against the common enemy was recognized. It was recommended that aid to China via the Burma Road should be increased as should also guerilla activities against the Japanese in China. Subversive activities in Japan itself should be started. It was also agreed, that in the event of war, the allies would in principle pool their naval and air resources under the C-in-C China Station and the C-in-C Far East respectively; the Army components however would remain within their own command structures.

Paragraph 51 of the Final report stated: "The method adopted to implement the policy set out in paragraph 16 above (dealing with a Japanese attack on the NEI) is to establish protected air bases along the line Burma - Malaya - Borneo - New Guinea - Solomons - New Hebrides - Tonga. This line of bases is supported by a second line from Sumatra through the NEI and the coast of Australia to New Zealand. At present the number of aircraft and land forces available are below what is considered to be the safe minimum required, but to some extent the power to concentrate air forces quickly makes up for the lack of numbers. The move of land forces, in the circumstances, is much more difficult."

Much thought was given to the protection of the lines of communications at sea. That resulted in detailed plans being made for the allocation of cruisers and destroyers to be spread out across the Indian Ocean, the Tasman Sea and the Southern Pacific. It was assumed that after the outbreak of war, Force H would steam from Gibraltar to Trincomalee to reinforce the Indian Ocean. At that time Force H consisted of the battlecruiser HMS RENOWN, the carrier HMS ARK ROYAL and 5 destroyers.

The conclusions drawn by the Fourth Conference, when the Americans participated fully were, in effect, not much different from those at the Fifth Conference (which in fact was a

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117 Ref. SMG File 3/11.

118 Telegram British Ambassador in Washington to Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, 12 April 1941, no 16352 in SMG, file 3/11.

119 These somewhat amazing recommendations are to be found in paragraph 18 of the Final Report. The last recommendation certainly illustrates a lack of appreciation of the closed, tribalistic Japanese culture.
continuation of the Third Staff Conference). Apart from the objective of defending Singapore, "an important subsidiary interest is the security of Luzon in the Philippine Islands."\(^{1180}\) It was considered even more improbable that the Japanese would launch simultaneous assaults against Hongkong, Malaya and Luzon. Again the danger of Japanese commerce raiders was highlighted with the possibility of close cooperation being agreed on between Japanese and German commerce raiders, which illustrates the importance of the German role model in British perceptions of intents and capabilities of the Imperial Japanese Navy.

The conference also outlined Japanese "acts of war" which were to be considered by all associated powers to be declarations of war. However, they were not binding agreements, but only military recommendations for those politically responsible for where to draw the line.

The thorny issue of the command structure between the British and American naval commanders was solved when it was agreed that, once the C-in-C of the US Asiatic Fleet had given an explicit order to do so, surface ships of the Asiatic Fleet with attached aviation units should proceed to Singapore to operate under the strategic direction of the C-in-C China Station.\(^{1181}\) As had been agreed at the Third Singapore Conference, the Dutch were to contribute a cruiser, two destroyers and two submarines to the British Eastern Fleet under Layton. Another important result of that staff conference was the agreement by which US Liaison Officers were stationed at Batavia and Dutch officers at Manila.\(^{1182}\)

At both conferences, a fundamental disagreement emerged between the three major powers involved with regard to naval strategy. The Dutch argued that all available allied cruisers and most destroyers should be concentrated in a battle squadron to attack Japanese landing convoys wherever they appeared. The British reaction was the statement: "It is no use when you have no battleships."\(^{1183}\) The British stressed convoy protection against Japanese raiders instead. The Americans held similar views, as they did not want to risk the ships of the US Asiatic Fleet and contemplated a withdrawal towards Australia. The British strategic viewpoint, which accentuated having convoys protected from offensive strikes, prevailed in the recommendations made by both Conferences. Marder has rightly pointed out, that despite the British insistence on the importance of Singapore, British and Commonwealth ship distribution proved otherwise, with in the first half of 1941 only three of their 48 warships being available at the three Stations based at Singapore!\(^{1184}\) That distribution highlights British predisposition with convoy protection, giving the American Chiefs of Staff the perfect excuse to reject the recommendations made by the Fourth Singapore Staff Conference on 3 July 1941. In the view of the JCS, Britain had to do more.

\(^{1180}\) Final Report, paragraph 4, page 7.

\(^{1181}\) Final Report, paragraph 45.

\(^{1182}\) Appointed to the staff of the US Asiatic Fleet in Manila was Cdr H.D. Lindner KM, and to the KM Staff in Batavia was Cdr Slawson USN. Other allied officers in Batavia were Cdr J.B. Heath RN, and Cdr V.E. Kennedy RAN.

\(^{1183}\) Bosscher, op. cit. Volume II, 79.

\(^{1184}\) A.J. Marder, op. cit., 209.
in order to be credible. It was that rejection by the United States which prodded the Admiralty into studying the possibility of sending a battleship squadron to the Far East.

The G.G. commented to Welter, Minister of Colonies, on the political aspects of the recommendations issuing from the Fourth and Fifth Singapore Staff Conferences. He was not sure whether the Americans would agree, in which he was proved to be right (See above). He professed, however, to having enough trust in Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand even without any explicit British guarantees being given. He therefore wanted to promote military and naval exercises with the British and Australians. Welter did not agree to that, and wrote in the margin of the telegram, that in his view it would have been a wrong policy, because it would inform Japan that the United States were not involved in the agreement to cooperate, and Japan would probably not be impressed by the combined might of Australian, British and Dutch defence forces.

After the Fifth Singapore Staff Conference, a number of specialised meetings took place between representatives of the allied nation's services in order to finetune the agreements reached. On 10 June 1941, British and Dutch officers again met at Singapore to discuss common communication protocols. That resulted in an Anglo-Dutch-American Combined Services Communications & Meteorological conference at Batavia from 17 to 19 June 1941. At the same time, Helfrich visited Vice-Adm. Sir Geoffrey Layton, his peer, in Singapore, who befriended him.

The issue of establishing a reconnaissance line between Burma and the Fiji Islands was resolved by meetings between Maj.-Gen. Ter Poorten and Group Captain Darvall RAF in Bandoeng on 12 July 1941.

Meanwhile, Layton had assembled an Allied Planning Committee at his staff headquarters in Singapore, consisting of his Deputy Chief of Staff, Captain J.A. Collins RAN, and the Dutch and American liaison officers at his HQ, the Captains Van der Kun and Allen. Based on the recommendations made by the Fourth Singapore Conference, they developed the "Plenaps" (Plans for the Employment of Naval and Air Forces of the Associated Powers in the Eastern Theatre in the event of war with Japan). The first Plenaps draft was distributed on 16 July 1941 and the second on 10 October, 1941. Agreement was reached by the Dutch service chiefs and Admiral Hart of the US Asiatic Fleet, so that the final Plenaps version was distributed on 12 November 1941. In contrast to the recommendations made by the 4th Conference, the Asiatic Fleet remained outside the strategic direction of the C-in-C China Station and in addition some small alterations of the previous recommen-

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118 See Cowman, op. cit., 89.


1188 Files Hd-13, Hd-14, CAD The Hague and A.A. Victoria, MP 1185/8 file 2037/783.


1182 Ref. SMG, File 2/33.

1181 PLENAPS Copy no 33 of 12 November 1941 in File Hd-18, CAD.
dations were implemented. The Plenaps as agreed by the associated powers were instrumental in the strategic direction of the war against Japan in the first few months after Pearl Harbor.

The Fourth and Fifth Singapore Staff Conferences resulted in very close cooperation being maintained between the naval and air forces of the associated powers. Planes from each power visited airfields in allied territories assigned for future deployments; the British and Dutch Navies exercised together and Dutch officers went on courses in Malaya and Australia. The tendency to hide the presence of allied officers from Japanese eyes became less prominent. When Helfrich and Ter Poorten visited Singapore on 18 June 1941, the G.G. expressly forbade them to go in uniform, to Helfrich's considerable dismay. After the oil embargo of July 25, 1941 this restriction was lifted.

The atmosphere in Batavia after release of the Plenaps became more belligerent. In a telegram to the Dutch Government, the G.G. stated that he would attack any Japanese convoy crossing the line from Davao to Waigeo in the east of the archipelago. The Navy Minister, Furstner, thereupon informed the Admiralty, that a Japanese convoy had assembled at Palau, and that, according to the Plenaps recommendation, it would be attacked by Dutch naval forces if it crossed the Davao to Waigeo line. In fact the NEI's administration's political attitude had been completely reversed within a year! From anxious neutrality at the end of 1940, it evolved into a declaration of war against Japan, made by the Governor General directly after Pearl Harbor and even before the American declaration of war despite the fact that the NEI had not actually been physically attacked by Japan at that time. Nobody in 1940 would have thought that such a reversal of an age-old policy would have been possible.

2.9. Analysis and Conclusions

After a protracted period of building, the Singapore base was finished but it was a base without a fleet. For air and land defences it was dependent on ferrying planes from other theatres of war, and on getting garrison forces which had to come from India as the Pacific Dominions were unwilling to provide any army units to protect Singapore until almost the end of 1940. There weren't any guarantees either that the United States would be of any assistance. As McIntyre has pointedly observed, the Dutch were the only power willing to commit themselves to Singapore's defence, despite the fact that Great Britain had refused them any reciprocity.

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1183 See Bosscher, op. cit., Vol. II, pages 114 - 115. A number of Dutch Naval officers were introduced to the secrets of Asdic in operational situations. Because the British had no submarines, Dutch submarines were used for practice runs with Asdic on board the British destroyer HMS TENEDOS.
1184 Telegram G.G. 20 November 1941, Archive London Legation, Archives MinBuZa, inv. nr 1415.
1185 Note of Admiral Furstner to Admiralty, 21 November 1941, as above.
1186 W. David McIntyre, op. cit., 189.
2.9.1. The empty base.

What would be the minimum British force amount to in order to defend Singapore effectively? In hindsight, Neidpath\(^1\) has argued that that would have been about 550 first-line modern aircraft (as estimated at the First Singapore Staff Conference) plus an Army of about 8 divisions. However, that was based on the assumption that great numbers of the Imperial Japanese Air Forces would be needed to neutralize American bases in The Philippines, resulting in Japanese air presence being increased after a few weeks. To counter that, another 500 modern aircraft, primarily Spitfires and Hurricanes, had to be flown via India to reinforce Malaya. Only then would there have been a sufficient margin not only to retain air superiority but also to give air cover to Force Z's 2 capital ships which in themselves would stand Admiral Kondo's Fleet of 2 battleships and assorted smaller warships escorting the Japanese landing convoys, but not of course the full weight of the Japanese Combined Fleet.

Between the outbreak of war in Europe and Pearl Harbor, the British forces in Malaya increased in size from 9 regular battalions (equivalent to one division) and 6 squadrons possessing 90 aging aircraft to 31 battalions and 16 squadrons with 158 aircraft. That was a substantial increase, but it still fell short of the estimates for the number of forces required especially in aircraft. Still lacking were about 4 divisions of infantry, 2 armoured regiments with about 200 tanks and 500 modern aircraft, primarily Spitfires and Hurricanes. If British production figures are taken as given, then where could these reinforcements have come from?

The two theatres in question were the Middle East and the Russian Front. From May to November 1941, about 1700 planes were delivered to the Middle East, and 676 to Russia.\(^2\) In addition, 448 tanks were sent to Russia. There were 25 armoured regiments with approximately 2200 tanks in the Middle East. Rerouting 500 airplanes and 200 tanks from one of those theatres would therefore have been possible. Neidpath however argues that releasing 4 infantry divisions out of the 16 present in the Middle East would have been dangerous. In that case, the reconquest of Cyrenaica would have been impossible, a feat which Churchill deemed necessary in the light of the expected collapse of the Soviet-Union at the end of 1941. Neidpath maintains that only if the Axis had been driven from North Africa or at least from Libya before Russia collapsed, then Britain's Middle Eastern base could have survived. The question is whether that Middle Eastern base was indeed of such crucial importance to winning the war. Neidpath maintains that it was so and that Churchill's strategic choice to strip Malayan defence in order to be able to reinforce the Middle East and prop up Russian resistance by delivering a number of tanks and airplanes was therefore justified.

2.9.2. Strategic Choices.

It can be questioned, however, whether the control of the eastern Mediterranean was strategically of the importance as has been assumed by Neidpath, and in which Churchill believed. The Suez Canal was closed to shipping for a great part of the war anyway, and the Mediterranean as a whole virtually so. Troops and supplies had to be sent from Great Britain round the Cape of Good Hope making the Cape Route the British Empire's real

\(^{1}\) James Neidpath, op. cit. 199 - 206

\(^{2}\) James Neidpath, op.cit. 202
"Lifeline". The oil fields of the Persian Gulf were really vital to the war in North-East Africa and South-East Asia but they could have been defended from Palestine or Syria. Lord Alan Brooke, in one of his Appreciations, gave the defence of Abadan a higher priority than that of Egypt. In 1940 the Australian Chiefs of Staff pointed out that the defence of Singapore remained the dominant factor in Australian security and that it was "of greater importance than the Middle East". Churchill himself considered that the Indian Ocean supply routes were very vulnerable to Japanese raiders, and that protecting them was the clinching argument which made him decide to send the REPULSE and PRINCE OF WALES to Singapore as we have seen above. For Australia, the lines of communication with England via the Cape were not much longer than via the Suez Canal anyway. There are statements made by British War Office planners saying that they considered that the Middle Eastern Theatre was important, but not vital. David Day has found evidence of concurrent thinking within the British Naval Staff as well.

On the other side of the Ocean, there were grave doubts too. General Chaney of the United States Army, adjudged worldwide defence priorities to be firstly Great Britain, secondly Singapore, thirdly the Atlantic Ocean routes and fourthly the Middle East. Other Americans were so unruffled by the prospect of losing the Middle East that on several occasions in 1941, they urged the British to abandon the area lest they sank too much of their military power there, as indeed actually happened. President Roosevelt himself, although not advocating the abandonment of the Middle East, suggested to Churchill that the loss of that theatre could be overcome as long as the Allies retained command of the Atlantic. In October 1940, he told Robert Casey, the Australian Minister in Washington, that "he had asked the British Ambassador to say to Churchill that he hoped and prayed that no part of the British Fleet would get caught and "bottled up" in the Mediterranean, and suggested for his consideration that substantial units (he said "up to eight capital ships with some cruisers and a few destroyers") of the British Navy should reinforce Singapore before long."

Churchill himself faced bitter opposition from at least one of the three Service Chiefs of Staff. Field Marshal Sir John Dill, Army Chief of Staff, noted in a report to Churchill dated 6 May 1941, that "the loss of Egypt ... would not end the war" and "Egypt is not even second in order of priority, for it has been an accepted principle in our strategy that in the last resort the

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1198 This point is also made in the interesting article by Alan J. Levine: 'Was World War II a near-run thing?' in the Journal of Strategic Studies, Volume 6, no 1, March 1985, page 58 a.f.

1200 Australian Archives, CRS A 981, item Far East 168, Report by Chiefs of Staff, 23 August 1940.

1201 Brian Bond: Chief of Staff London 1974, 22.

1202 David Day: The Great Betrayal, 145. See also Gordon, op. cit., 80 - 81.


security of Singapore comes before that of Egypt. It was to cost him his job as Churchill moved him into a position at the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington where he died in 1943 and was interred as one of the few non-Americans at the Arlington National Cemetery.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that it would have required a more prescient statesman than Churchill to have fortified a base like Singapore without Japan acutely attacking, in the face of the real and hardhitting German attacks against Egypt. Churchill chose to concentrate forces at the actual hot war in the Middle East and also to prop up Russia, rather than to invest in a still hypothetical war against Japan. It would have been an enormous dilemma for whoever was in the driver's seat, and Churchill was apparently not that farsighted.

The British strategic dilemma was, however, not unique in World War II. There were other countries, fighting on one or more fronts, and yet still keeping sizable forces at the ready at potential hot spots. The Japanese kept a large number of divisions on guard in Manchuria throughout the war, as did their potential enemy the Soviet Union in Siberia, notwithstanding their struggle to the death against Nazi Germany. Similarly, the Germans were fighting in Russia, the Balkans and the Mediterranean, yet they kept two well-equipped Armies in the West facing Britain, until the Normandy invasion. Despite Mahan's clear principles of keeping forces concentrated, the Americans had divided their battlefleet between the Pacific and the Atlantic. Churchill, however, withheld practically all reinforcements from other theatres of war from going to Singapore almost up to Pearl Harbor, compensating for the huge credibility gap with bluff, which was so disastrously called by the Japanese.

Ultimately, one has to agree with the conclusion drawn by French, stating: "The fall of Singapore was a major embarrassment and it dealt British imperial prestige a blow from which it never really recovered. But, both Singapore and Australia were expendable in the eyes of a government which placed national above imperial survival."

2.9.3. Why did Singapore fall?

Why did Singapore fall? An important question to Dutch readers, as with Singapore the Dutch Empire in the East Indies also went down after a presence of 344 years. Could the catastrophe have been avoided? To answer that question, the opinions held by a number of authors are analysed below.

By far the most authoritative writer on the Singapore disaster is Major-General S. Woodburn Kirby, the author of the U.K. Official History series on the War in the Far East. After completing that series, he wrote the book "Singapore: the chain of disaster" in which he was able to express his opinion more freely than in the Official History. In it, he identifies three main causes for the disaster, namely the complacent Malayan civil administration, bad generalship during the Malayan campaign, and as a basic cause the lack of balanced

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128 Alex Danchev, op. cit., 27. For this conflict, see also W.S. Churchill: The Second World War, Volume 3, 373 - 377.


air, naval and land forces, primarily caused by Churchill's shifting priorities.\textsuperscript{12.39}

Very interesting are the observations on Army and RAF by Sir Robert Brooke-Popham in his despatch to the COS about his period of tenure as C-in-C Far East from 17 October \textsuperscript{12.40} 1940 till 27 December 1941. To quote from the comments of the COS: "Sir Robert found considerable jealousy between the Army and the RAF; and there was a tendency for one of the Services to work out a plan of its own, and then consult the others, instead of every plan being prepared as for a Combined Operation .... He noticed a similar state of affairs in both the Philippines and the Netherlands East Indies."\textsuperscript{12.41} There was also some ignorance of modern war conditions in both the Army and the Air Force, not to mention considerable delay in getting information out of England on the lessons learnt during recent operations in Europe and the Middle East.

As regards Intelligence, Sir Robert considered that the most serious error which had been made was the lack of information on the intentions of the Japanese Government. It was not until at the end of November that his HQ believed that Japan might actually be on the verge of war, and, under the circumstances, that was a distinct surprise! The reason for that mistake was the secret but erroneous information received stating that Japan was concentrating large forces along the Manchurian border against the Soviet Union. The British Intelligence service estimated that an eventual southward advance would therefore be postponed until at least the late spring of 1942. According to Sir Robert, the enemy's power to attack at several places simultaneously was also underestimated. The efficiency of the Japanese Army and Air Forces was particularly underestimated in the following matters: their disregard of weather conditions, their mobility due to the lack of mechanisation and artillery, the initiative of the individual Japanese soldier, the rapidity with which they repaired airfields and bridges, and the surprise performance of the Zero fighter.\textsuperscript{12.213}

Interesting is the analysis of Louis Allen.\textsuperscript{12.214} He emphasizes the influence which the loss of civilian control in Malaya had on the military as being one of the main reasons for the disastrous defeat, and describes the conflicts between the (Civil) Secretary of defence, C.A. Vlieland, and the GOC Malaya Command, Sir Robert Brooke Popham, in detail. Worth reading is the prescient Appreciation of Japanese aims and plans, written by Vlieland in July 1940 and reproduced in Allen's book.\textsuperscript{12.215}

In one of the first books to have appeared on the subject, Sir James Grigg contributed the

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\textsuperscript{12.40} Comments of COS on the Despatch of Air Vice Marshall Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, July 8, 1942. War History Case 7012 in ADM 199/12.

\textsuperscript{12.41} As above, paragraph 4, page 2.

\textsuperscript{12.213} S. Woodburn Kirby, Singapore, op. cit., 88, 118 - 119.

\textsuperscript{12.214} As above, paragraph 35, page 7.


\textsuperscript{12.215} Ibid., 288 - 293.
disaster to Beatty's scheme for fixed defences by heavy guns instead of Sir Hugh Trenchard's torpedo bomber scheme. Churchill in his Memoirs was of the opinion, that the army lost the battle for Singapore by attrition in the Malayan jungles. Captain Russell Grenfell attributed the disaster purely to naval causes as the British had lost command of the sea. Ivar Simpson attributed it to the lack of landward defences, internal friction between the Services, inadequate jungle training and unnecessary conflicts between military and civil administrations. Sir Henry Pownall, Wavell's Chief-of-Staff during the Malayan campaign, thought that the lack of modern weaponry and the "moral decay" of the British were both good reasons.

The famous author of books on management, C. Northcote Parkinson, primarily blamed prewar politics. In his view, the political noise magnified the importance of Singapore out of all proportion. Thereupon, according to him: "Churchill failed to recognize that Singapore was famous not as a fortress, but as a political issue".

James Neidpath concludes that Singapore was lost because the land forces in Malaya were not only inadequately trained and equipped but also lacked fixed defences, for which he puts the blame squarely on Churchill. In his opinion Malaya could have been held, if all, or even some of the reinforcements shipped to the Middle East and to Russia had been diverted to Malaya. He defends Churchill's decision on not reinforcing Malaya, however, because the Middle East and Russia were theatres where active fighting was already going on. The result was therefore the loss of Singapore due to the lack of adequate British air and naval forces in the Far East. Those forces were strategically mobile, and could be switched to areas of active fighting, which was the reason why they were soaked up in the Middle East and Russia.

Looking back in time, Neidpath considers the British capital ship building holiday up to 1937 as being one of the decisive factors. Japan modernised her battleships and battlecruisers in the early thirties, which she was permitted to do under the Washington Treaty. Britain did nothing to modernise her capital ships until after 1937. The rapid rise of the German Fleet to 4 modern battleships and 2 pocket battleships in 1941 moreover resulted in strategic paralysis by tying down 3 times their number of British capital ships.

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1218 Captain Russell Grenfell: Main Fleet to Singapore London, 1951, 145

1219 Ivar Simpson: Singapore: too little, too late. Some aspects of the Malayan disaster in 1942 London, 1970, 133. Simpson was commanding officer of the British Royal Engineers at Singapore and therefore well-informed about the fortifications.


1222 James Neidpath, op. cit. 214

1223 James Neidpath, op. cit. 218 - 219.
because of the high risk of a German break-out into the vital Atlantic sealanes. Because of the high risk of a German break-out into the vital Atlantic sealanes. Some of those capital ships had been destined for the Far East. It is his argument that it was not so much the relative strength of the German and Japanese Fleets, but rather the enormous distance between the two enemy fleets which put British naval strategy in a quandary.

Ian Hamill reinforces that line of thought. The strategic illusion (which was also the title of his thesis) was described by Admiral Richmond in 1946 as "the illusion that a two-hemisphere Empire can be defended by a one-hemisphere Navy." In other words, if a British Eastern Fleet had been built in time then the Singapore tragedy would not have happened.

No any British author has ever highlighted the lack of firm leadership at the operational level, due to the intended replacement of Vice-Admiral G. Layton by Admiral Sir Tom Phillips, and the concurrent relief of Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham by Lieut.-Gen. Sir Henry Pownall. The announcement of those replacements caused them both to suffer from hurt feelings. In fact, when Admiral Phillips perished at sea, Layton had to pick up his old command again. Sir Robert's replacement was also delayed for 3 critical weeks just after Pearl Harbor.

In an undated letter with comments on the final Plenaps version, addressed to the Dutch G.G., Admiral Helfrich noted the replacement of Layton by Phillips "with disappointment". He stated that "the excellent cooperation such as that emerged from the personal and numerous contacts between the military leaders in the Far East and the interpretation of the military agreements, rules and arrangements which have been made, will suffer by this replacement.

In hindsight, we are now aware that any British Fleet sent to the Far East would have been seriously threatened with doom, not at the hands of the Japanese battlefleet but by the deadly Japanese naval air force, with their land-based torpedo-bombers and with carrier-based torpedo and dive bombers. Great Britain had the aircraft carriers but in 1941 - 1942 they lacked the quality of carrier-based aircraft and the correct doctrines to use them effectively in battle - as had the Japanese. The only modern British aircraft were interceptors: the Spitfire and the Hurricane, which could theoretically stand up to that Japanese technological surprise, the Zero fighter. Those two types of planes were the only two able to do so in contrast to the American P-40 Tomahawk and the Grumman F4F Wildcat (which the British called the Martlet), or even the twin-engined Lightning. In the whole of South-East Asia, however, there was only one unarmed Hurricane in Australia used for demonstration purposes! It can be argued that if around 500 Spitfires and Hurricanes had been available above Malaya then the British would have retained air superiority, as the Zero's were flying at the end of their range in the early days of the


1235 James Neidpath, op. cit. 219

1236 Ian Hamill, op. cit., 492.


1238 The Bell Airacobra interceptor which proved to be superior to the Zero only came from the production line early in 1942. So did the Chance Vought Corsair interceptor, which would dominate the skies over the Pacific later on.
campaign. In order to have adjusted to tropical circumstances, that air force should have been in place six months before Pearl Harbor. In itself this could have been achieved in the period from October 1940 to May 1941 by sending some of the air reinforcements meant for the Middle East to the Far East instead. Given adequate air cover, the PRINCE OF WALES and the REPULSE could have acted as a protective shield against Japanese landings. The Japanese, however, had enough capital ships to send to the South after neutralising the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, thus being able to slug it out with those two ships early in 1942.

There were many blunders, especially by some at high places, but there was no cowardice anywhere, as Noel Barber has eloquently written about in his very readable docudrama about Singapore's fall and how its inhabitants went through it.\textsuperscript{122}

In their book "Military Misfortunes", Cohen and Gooch have developed a systematic way to analysing military disasters.\textsuperscript{123} Their method consists of analysing the disaster on a number of command levels, and to determine from that matrix the interaction of factors which led to the disaster in the first place. Singapore was primarily a failure to anticipate enemy action. Applying that method to Singapore, the following matrix of failure can be developed: (See Table 6 on the following page)

From that matrix can be deduced that the major failure was a political failure: Churchill shifted priorities in reinforcing theatres resulting in Malaya ending at the bottom of the list. That was partly caused by faulty intelligence supplied to him by all three Services. Despite their faulty intelligence, however, the COS established reasonable reinforcement goals for Malaya, which were overridden by higher (political) authority, i.e. Churchill. The COS erred, however, by not setting up a unified command structure in time. That happened after Pearl Harbor with ABDA-Command, but that was too late. The lack of interservice coordination was one of the primary causes for the loss of the PRINCE OF WALES and the REPULSE, but was also instrumental in the lack of coordination with civilian authorities.

The Commander in Chief of the Eastern Fleet had no proper intelligence about Japanese whereabouts, and due to the prevalent underestimation of Japanese capabilities notwithstanding Pearl Harbor decided to weigh anchor without adequate air protection. Both Army and RAF Commands failed to recognise the importance of airfields falling into the hands of the Japanese, and no measures were taken to put lost airfields out of use for a long period of time. That resulted in a local Japanese air superiority, which was fatal. The Army had not prepared untumable field defences along the trunk roads into Southern Johore. A major error was that the coastal ships available at Penang were not destroyed before that harbour fell to the Japanese. Bad fighter tactics resulted in an even quicker dissipation of the British interceptor force, and the lack of jungle training and road-boud movement of land-forces resulted in the Japanese being able to make outflanking attacks around road-blocks succesfully.

\textsuperscript{122} Noel Barber: Sinister Twilight: The fall and rise again of Singapore. Collins, London 1968.

Table 6

Task/Assessment matrix for Singapore

Critical Task:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Command Level</th>
<th>Intelligence Assessment</th>
<th>Resource Allocation</th>
<th>Command &amp; Coordination &amp; Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Leaders</td>
<td>wrong assessment of enemy intentions</td>
<td>major failure in priority setting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Level:</td>
<td>wrong assessment of enemy intentions and capabilities</td>
<td>Failure to set up clear command structure at operational level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational Level:</td>
<td>Failure: recognition of importance of coastal shipping</td>
<td>wrong timing of Operation MATADOR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaya China Station</td>
<td>Failure: Destruction of Northern Airfields</td>
<td>Lack of Field Defenses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, the failure matrix illustrates the many and varied causes of the collapse of Singapore, and the interdependency of a number of these causes.

2.9.4. Dutch Neutrality as a Failure Factor.

When Singapore fell, the fate of the Netherlands East Indies was almost sealed. A question which must still be answered, after reading this chapter, is whether Dutch foreign policy of neutrality was a critical failure factor in the loss of Singapore.

In my opinion, that was not the case. One of the Dutch failure factors was the lack of any adequate defence infrastructure in the East Indies, backed up by modern weapons and a larger fleet than the Dutch Navy actually possessed. This failure factor is treated in detail in chapter 3 on The Netherlands East Indies. The specific Dutch interpretation of neutrality, which resulted in aloofness and a scandalous weakness in defence is, however, also an important failure factor, though not a critical one.
From this chapter, it is clear that despite official policies of aloofness, the military and naval commanders in the Netherlands East Indies had found ways to contact their British counterparts even before the war started in Europe, and they had also established informal and secret communication links which had to be kept secret in order not to be disloyal to the official foreign policy. Those secret links somewhat compensated for the lack of official cooperation during the first year of the war in Europe.

As was shown in this chapter, the British in S.E. Asia showed a distinct interest in achieving closer cooperation with the Dutch in the NEI. The Netherlands East Indies administration, however, were not very interested in such close cooperation. Paradoxically, the situation in London was just the reverse. The British government refused to consider giving any guarantees of Dutch integrity in S.E. Asia, and were not very helpful at providing the Dutch with the modern arms necessary to defend themselves successfully. The Dutch Government in exile in London upheld a wavering policy towards their British ally; on the one hand, the strict neutrality the Governor-General expounded was supported but on the other hand pressure was put on the British Government to obtain a British guarantee. Due to internal pressure both at the top of the Royal Netherlands Navy and in the diplomatic corps (especially the envoy in Washington, London, but also the Consul-General in Sydney and Singapore) Dutch policy gradually changed to one of far closer partnership with the prospective allies in S.E. Asia. The Dutch attitude both to oil deliveries to Japan and to their prospective British ally caused irreparable harm when obtaining American weapons and planes until about May 1941. American distrust was fundamentally the more damaging issue to the defence potential in the Dutch East Indies. Therein lies the importance of British-Dutch political and military relationships, as they developed in the period from May 1940 to December 1941, and as are described in this chapter.

The Dutch Defence Foundations of 1927 explicitly referred to "outside help" if the Netherlands East Indies were ever attacked by an unfriendly power. That outside aid was understood to be provided by Great-Britain. As has been shown in this chapter, that was a very dangerous assumption even in the twenties, and more so in the thirties. Even in 1937, it was stated in an authoritative periodical that "today as never before the Dutch feel that they can look forward with assurance to British support in the event that their hold onto the Indies comes into direct jeopardy."[26] That trust in Great Britain was a fatal delusion.

In 1940, however, it became painfully obvious that Great Britain were militarily far too weak to offer the Dutch any assistance in the Far East. It even became a British goal to get the Dutch involved in the defence of Singapore. Theoretically, because of the inherent mobility of ships and airplanes, reinforcements could be rushed in from other theatres of war, as indeed happened too late early in 1942. The British military and naval position's inherent weakness in the Far East therefore fatally compromised one of the foundations of Netherlands East Indian defence - long before the fateful day of Pearl Harbor.

2.9.5. Summary.

This chapter started by a discussion of British foreign policy with regard to Japan. It has been shown that that policy was an undecided one lacking any clear objectives. The chasm between British foreign policy objectives in the Far East and the military means to back up that policy widened increasingly, resulting in a loss of credibility.

British foreign policy failed to substitute the loss of Japan as an Ally for an alliance with the United States and it needlessly increased the potential number of enemies by its handling of the Abyssinian crisis. Then British defence policies were discussed, which were hampered by lack of coordination at the top (i.e. the COS), the Dominion's unwillingness to increase their share of Empire Defence, the loss of industrial knowledge and research and the influence the Treasury had on the defence budgets. Nevertheless, from 1935 onwards, the British were re-arming.

Naval strategy had to take the defence of Australia and New Zealand into account. In order to be able to send a fleet to the east when required, a well-equipped fleet base over there was needed. Singapore provided that base. Again, that strategy lost credibility when, once completed, the base remained empty: it was a base without a fleet! That lost any deterrence value Singapore might otherwise have possessed in Japanese eyes. On two occasions however, in 1937 and in 1939, the main fleet was almost sent to Singapore. In November 1941, the British Eastern Fleet finally started to assemble when two of its capital ships arrived at Singapore as a vanguard.

The defence of the base itself saw a gradual shift away from coastal artillery in fixed positions toward aircraft, which however required airfields along the eastern coast of Malaya. The defence of Singapore was consequently gradually extended to the defence of the whole of the Malayan peninsula. That required more Army units and more planes. Churchill had, however, placed the defence requirements of Malaya at the bottom of the priority list, as it was not yet a theatre of war at that time.

The first half of this chapter was mainly concerned with British foreign and naval policies, the second half of the chapter consideration is given to the Dutch part of the equation. The security of the Netherlands Indies was indeed vital to the defence of Singapore but neither the British nor the Dutch contemplated any kind of formal defence agreements. After 1939, the British became more interested in getting Dutch cooperation because of the increasing importance of Dutch defence forces. For the first year of the war in Europe, the Dutch still thought they could maintain their own neutrality policy with respect not only to Britain, but also to the United States and Japan. Being pressured by the Americans who held the trump card of being able to provide the Dutch with modern armaments, the Dutch gradually turned to more cooperation with both Great Britain and the United States. By then the British Government, particularly Churchill, kept the Dutch at arm's length, until the U.S.A. came along with a guarantee by the British themselves. Only then did Churchill give the green light to a British guarantee towards the NEI, because he knew it was backed up by the United States.

Notwithstanding official Dutch discouragement, the Dutch and British commanders at developed a number of informal and secret arrangements at a local level. After only about a year, however, those arrangements were approved in a series of important conferences called the Singapore Staff conferences. They provided the basis for the campaign in the first few months of the war with Japan.

Although the defence situation improved considerably in the last year of peace, Japan inflicted terrible losses on the Allies, resulting in the whole of S.E. Asia changing hands. At the end of this chapter an analysis is presented showing how that could have happened. Part of the blame has to go to the British war leader Sir Winston Churchill, who consistently underrated the Japanese and put Malaya at the bottom of the priority list with regard to reinforcements. There were many more reasons, however, why Singapore fell, which are
also covered.

To the Dutch, the loss of Singapore was an unprecedented catastrophe as their whole defence planning was based on the assumption that Singapore would remain in British hands. Its fall therefore caused considerable demoralisation within the Dutch defence infrastructure. This infrastructure is covered in the next chapter.